

**2024-2025**  
**Disability Studies**  
**Interdepartmental Degree Program**  
***Annual Report***





# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Faculty Administrative Committee.....2

Lecturers.....2

Administrative Team.....2

Our Events.....3

Disability Studies Graduation.....4

Student Highlights.....4

Faculty Highlights.....5

Curriculum.....6

Research & Creative Activities Across Campus.....7

Sports and Society Lab.....8

Disability and Ecology Performance Exchange.....9

Heumann Community Partnerships Lab.....9

By the Numbers.....10

Challenges for Next Year.....10



## Faculty Administrative Committee



**Victoria Marks (Chair)**

*World Arts and Cultures/Dance*



**Salih Can Açiksöz**

*Anthropology*



**Juliann T. Anesi**

*Gender Studies*



**Bruce Baker**

*Psychology*



**Lauren Clark**

*Nursing*



**Linda Demer**

*Medicine, Bioengineering*



**Helen Deutsch**

*English*



**Raymond Knapp**

*Musicology*



**Lauren Lee McCarthy**

*Design | Media Arts*

## Lecturers

**Fred Ariel Hernandez**

**Ben Lewis**

**Caitlin Solone**

**Nadine Tanio**

## Administrative Team

*Undergraduate Education Initiatives*

**Leigh Harris**

*Assistant Vice Provost*

**Nicole Chavez**

*Administrative Assistant*

**Lonnell Edwards**

*Undergraduate Student Advisor*

**Alice Lee**

*Administrative Assistant*

**Pia Palomo**

*Assistant Director for Curricular Initiatives*

**Charlotte Vo**

*Manager*

**Brooke Wilkinson**

*Director for Academic Initiatives*

## Our Events

### Regents' Lecturer Alice Sheppard

Winter 2025

Regents' Lecturer Alice Sheppard discussed the history of disability and arts education, highlighting disability arts organization Kinetic Light's transformative work centering disabled audiences. She emphasized access as creative and political, and showcased inclusive performance methods innovated at Kinetic Light. The lecture, co-sponsored with World Arts and Cultures/ Dance, concluded with a call for structural change and community accountability to advance equity and inclusion for disabled artists.



### Conference at Loyola Marymount University (LMU)

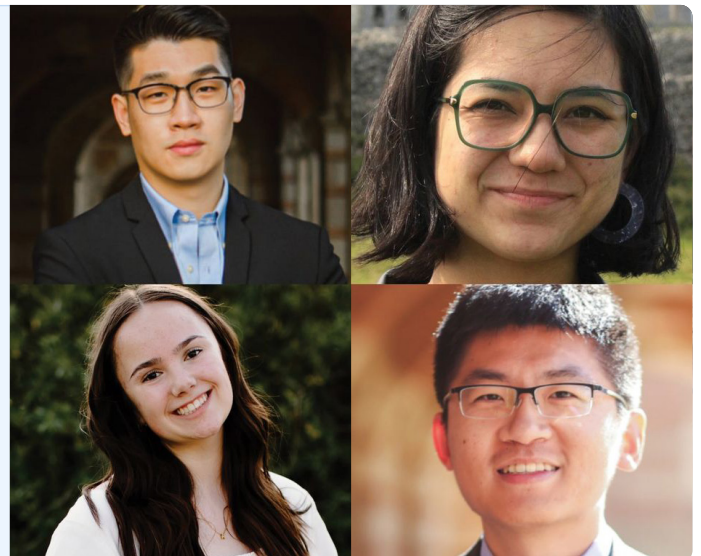
Winter 2025

Loyola Marymount University hosted *A Neighborly Conversation: Disability Studies in West Los Angeles*, featuring undergraduate, graduate, and faculty research from LMU and UCLA. The keynote was given by UCLA Professor Juliann Anesi on disability activism in Oceania. Lonnell Edwards, academic advisor, led a DS undergraduate panel focused on the internship requirement and its impact on student research. UCLA DS Alumni, Quinn O'Connor '22 led a workshop on the arts and disabled inclusion and Vinita Saxena '23 presented research on transgender and nonbinary autistic adults. Pia Palomo, Brooke Wilkinson, and Lonnell presented *Disability Studies at UCLA: Past, Present, and Future*. Closing remarks were given by the Honorable Tony Coelho. The event fostered community as participants connected, exchanged ideas, and reflected on shared commitments to accessibility and inclusion.

### DS Alumni Panel

Spring 2025

On April 9th, 2025, DS undergraduates participated in a virtual alumni panel featuring Quinn O'Connor '22, Josh Yen-Ho Chou '22 and Zhe Zhang '18, who reflected on how disability studies shaped their academic and professional paths. The event was organized by the 2024-25 DS Student Ambassador, Annemarie Lawrence. Invited alumni work in the fields of theater, education, and clinical psychology. The panelists discussed applying disability studies principles in graduate programs and navigating professional spaces that are not always inclusive.







## 2025 DS Graduation

Disability Studies celebrated the Class of 2025 in a heartfelt ceremony featuring remarks by Chair Vic Marks, Dean Adriana Galván, and alumnus Quinn O'Connor. Graduates reflected on their journeys and shared future plans with the audience. A reception followed to commemorate a joyful milestone for graduates and for the growing Disability Studies community.



*Presentation of DS Grads during the ceremony and solo shots of three grads sharing remarks.*

## Student Highlights

### Undergraduate Research Week

On May 20, 2025, 18 DS students presented research at UCLA's twelfth annual Undergraduate Research Week. Among them, graduating senior Elizabeth Cotillo explored disparities in California's special education services in her project Unequal Access. Her research earned multiple honors, including Best Abstract at the Psi Chi Research Conference and publication in both the UC Center Sacramento eScholarship platform and the UCLA Undergraduate Journal of Psychology.



*Faculty member Dr. Fred Ariel Hernandez with DS students participating in Undergraduate Research Week.*

### Scholarship Winners



*From left to right: Lucy Blackmar, Lani Jacobson, Professor Knapp, and David Alpaugh.*

- **Lani Jacobson & Aryan Pandey** awarded prizes for the Jessie Alpaugh Senior Prize
- **Ashley Johnson & Aaron Nguyen** awarded honorable mention for the Jessie Alpaugh Senior Prize
- **Riley Masterson** awarded the Shapiro Family Scholarship
- **Tara Lam** awarded honorable mention for the Shapiro Family Scholarship



# Faculty Highlights

## Jenny Lu joins DS Faculty



After a national search, we're thrilled to welcome Jenny Lu to UCLA in July 2026 as the first core faculty member in the Disability Studies IDP, jointly appointed with the Institute for Society and Genetics. Her pioneering work on tactile communication deepens our understanding of disability and embodiment and expands the boundaries of the life sciences.

We are thankful for the faculty and staff who supported the year-long national search:

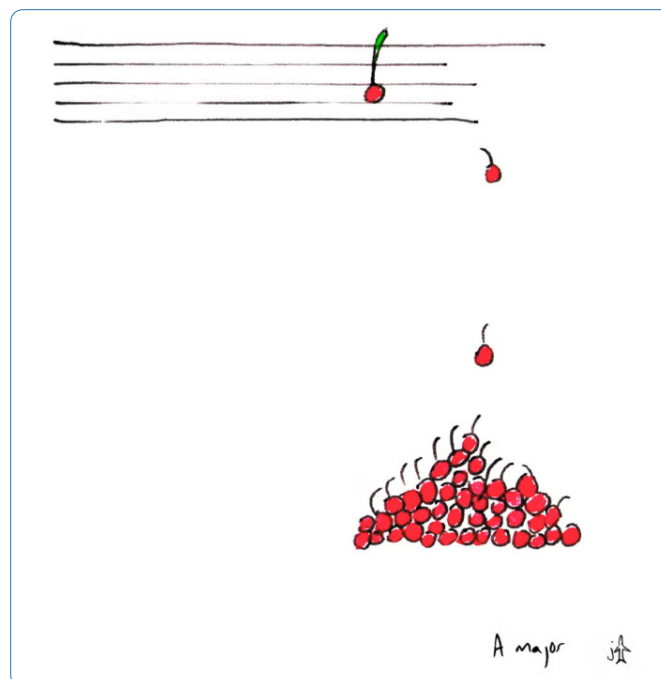
- Faculty selection committee: S. Can Açıksöz, Venkat Bharat, Vic Marks, Christina Palmer.
- Helen Deutsch
- Aaron Panofsky
- Faculty Members for the Institute for Society and Genetics (ISG) and the UCLA Disability Studies IDP.
- Staff of UEI and ISG, with special thanks to Brooke Wilkinson and Seven McKinney
- Associate Dean Steven Schweitzer
- Dean Adriana Galván
- Dean Tracy Johnson
- Executive Vice Chancellor and Provost Darnell Hunt

## 138th Faculty Lecture with Ray Knapp

UCLA's 138th Faculty Lecture "How Music(ology) Saves Lives" was given by Professor Ray Knapp on April 11, 2025. Each year two Academic Senate members with records of exceptional achievement in research and/or creative activities are nominated and selected to share their scholarship. Recipients of this award are exemplars of UCLA's commitment to research excellence.

## Music and Trauma

Ray Knapp, Distinguished Professor and Director of the UCLA Center for Musical Humanities held a public conversation called *Music and Trauma: A Conversation in the Midst of Fire* on February 7, 2025. The event is a preview of the Center's conference *Theorizing Trauma and Disability in the Arts* in October 2025.



## University of Hawai'i at Mānoa Speaker Series with Juliann Anesi

Professor Juliann Anesi, while on sabbatical for the 2024-25 AY at the University of Hawai'i at Mānoa (UHM), organized and led the UHM Disability Studies Initiative Speaker Series. Speakers and topics included Native and colonial stories about disabilities and mental health, "The Making of the American Calorie and Settler Wellness" by Athia N. Choudhury, Ph.D., and "These Evil Products": The Consideration of Reproductive Sterilization for those Deemed Disabled in Hawai'i with Dr. Rebecca Stotzer.

# Curriculum

## CURRICULUM OVERSIGHT

The Disability Studies IDP advanced its curricular work this year through intentional collaboration and planning. Highlights include:

- A UEI-hosted community of practice that convened DS 101W lecturers to share teaching approaches and co-create course learning outcomes
- Curriculum Committee efforts to align major and minor requirements with College FEC approvals
- Upcoming work includes: reviewing DS syllabi for coherence, evaluating a 101W enrollment assessment report, and finalizing 101W learning outcomes

## EXPANDING THE CURRICULUM ACROSS CAMPUS AND LOS ANGELES

The DS IDP continues to expand its network and curriculum. A new DS course proposal by the UCLA Tarjan Center and Dr. Maya Ayoub, Child Neurology Clinical Instructor, UCLA Mattel Children's Hospital, was selected for a \$5000 Community-Engaged Course Development grant. The Department of Linguistics, which houses American Sign Language (ASL), approved a new DS and ASL multi-listed course, developed by Ben Lewis.

### DIS STD 137XP

#### *Community Engaged Learning around Autism & Neurodiversity: Identity, Belonging, & Advocacy*

Dr. Maya Ayoub, along with Dr. Yasamine Bolourian (Tarjan Center) and community advocate Russell Lehman, piloted a community-engaged course focused on autism and neurodiversity in Winter 2025. The new course is scheduled for Winter 2026.



*Russell Lehman speaks at a podium.*

[UCLA Newsroom](#) and [USA Today](#) feature Russell Lehman, community teacher for new Disability Studies course.

### DIS STD M187D

#### *Special Topics on Disability Studies & Deaf Studies*

As part of an on-going commitment to supporting efforts to develop a program in Deaf Studies, Ben Lewis, ASL and Disability Studies Lecturer, developed a new multi-listed variable topics course focused on the intersection of disability studies and deaf studies. The first offering of the course in Spring 2025 was titled *The Deaf World: Culture, Identity, and Experience*.

### DIS STD M172/M172XP

#### *Care Work: Disability Justice and Health Care*

Since the inception of the course in Winter 2022, Professor Lauren Clark has collaborated with Momentum, a disability organization that empowers children and adults with disabilities. This engagement has strengthened ties with UCLA and the DS IDP. In 2024, UCLA hosted the Momentum Refresh vehicle, the first mobile resource in the USA that provides an inclusive and accessible quality restroom. In 2025, with endorsement from Momentum, Dr. Clark began exploring funding opportunities for the Schools of Dentistry and Nursing to support interprofessional clinical education for graduate nursing and dental students with a specific focus on disability competent care of patients with intellectual and developmental disabilities.



*A Momentum learning leader volunteer.*

[UCLA Nursing Magazine](#) features Clark's community-engaged course as an opportunity for students to learn and grow around the community's chosen priorities.

## FIAT LUX SEMINARS

Disability Studies IDP affiliated-faculty and Chair Vic Marks offered Fiat Lux seminars that connected to the Sports and Society Lab and Alice Sheppard's Regents' Lecturer residency.

### GENDER 19, Winter 2025

#### *Motor Sports and Society*

Professor Sharon Traweek collaborated with Dr. Hernandez and Steven Meckna, Motor Sports Historian, to teach a course that explored the changing intersectional issues in motor sports relative to other sports and STEM fields.



Brazilian driver Aurelia Nobels, who competes in the F1 Academy series.

[UCLA Newsroom](#) features Gender & Motorsports Fiat Lux.

### DIS STD 19, Spring 2025

#### *From Console to Community: E-sport, Disability, and Active Play*

Taught by Celina Shirazipour, Assistant Professor-in-Residence in collaboration with Dr. Hernandez. Students learned about intersectional issues in E-sport, from its rise as a competitive industry to pressing questions of access, disability, and rehabilitation.

### DANCE 19, Spring 2025

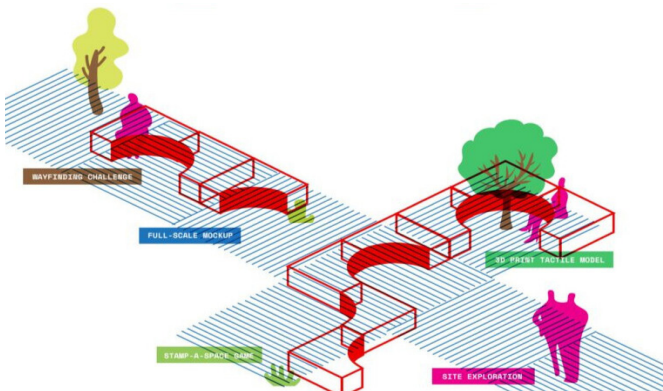
#### *Movement Movements: Disability Artistry Dance and Performance*

Co-led by Professor Marks and disabled artist, performer, choreographer, and activist Alice Sheppard. Students learned about the important work of disability artistry and ties between the political movement of ideas and movement of disabled dancers on the street and stage.

## Research & Creative Activities Across Campus

### BEWell Parklet Accessibility Audit Workshop

The SEMEL HCI BEWell Pod, UCLA Transportation, and cityLAB-UCLA teamed up to transform an underutilized sidewalk of Medical Plaza 100 into a new parklet. A workshop held on May 28, 2025 by Alexa Vaughn, DS Graduate Student Instructor and PhD Student, explored how the space works across different abilities and identified ways to improve access and inclusion. Read Alexa's [\*Accessibility Auditing: Four Case Studies\*](#) published in the Critical Planning Journal.



### 1st Annual Seminar on Trans-National Strategies in Erasing Black Ableism

Leroy Moore, PhD Student and DS Graduate Student Instructor, Krip-Hop Nation, Poor Magazine, and Faith Without Borders held the 1st annual seminar on Trans-National Strategies in Erasing Black Ableism in October 2024. The event was in commemoration of National Disabilities Employment Month.

### Disability Law Symposium: Accommodations in Legal Education

On April 18, 2025, UCLA Law held a symposium focused on students navigating the accommodation process and challenges faced by higher education administrators and testing organizations. Event also included academics, practitioners, and policymakers on the history and transformational power of state and federal disability civil rights laws.



## Sports and Society Lab

Over the past year, the Sports and Society Lab broadened its participation in global and local dialogues surrounding movement, access, and disability. Notable highlights include:



*Nono Sasai at "All Style Battle 2023 'Best of the Best'", Baguio City, Philippines.*

### Deaflympics with Donalda Ammons

On October 8th, 2024, the Sports and Society Lab commemorated the 100-year anniversary of the Deaflympics, an international multi-sport event by hosting a lecture given by Dr. Donalda Ammons, who served as President of the International Committee of Sports for the Deaf (ICSD) from 2003-2009.



*Donalda Ammons gives a lecture to commemorate the 100-year anniversary of Deaflympics.*

### Visiting Researcher Nono Sasai

This past year the DS IDP hosted Nono Sasai, a master's student from the University of Tsukuba, Japan. During her residency, Nono presented her research at conferences such as the North American Society for the Sociology of Sport. She immersed herself in the local break dancing community and completed an internship with No Easy Props.

### UCLA's Olympic & Paralympic Prep Committee

In January 2025, Dr. Hernandez and Pia Palomo were invited to represent the DS IDP on the Campus Programming & Activities Sub-Committee for UCLA's 2028 Olympic and Paralympic Village Planning. Their participation ensures that disability-centered perspectives help shape Olympic and Paralympic-related projects and UCLA's role in LA28.

## Disability and Ecology Performance Exchange



*D.E.P.E. artist/scholar Tebandeke Joseph dances with a tree at UCLA.*

### D.E.P.E. Short Film

Watch [the short film](#) about the 2024 Disability Ecology Performance Exchange, a convening of invited disabled artists, writers, and scholars conceived by Vic Marks. Films are captioned for voice and song and [audio described](#).

## Heumann Community Partnerships Lab

### Lauren Clark & Keris Jän Myrick

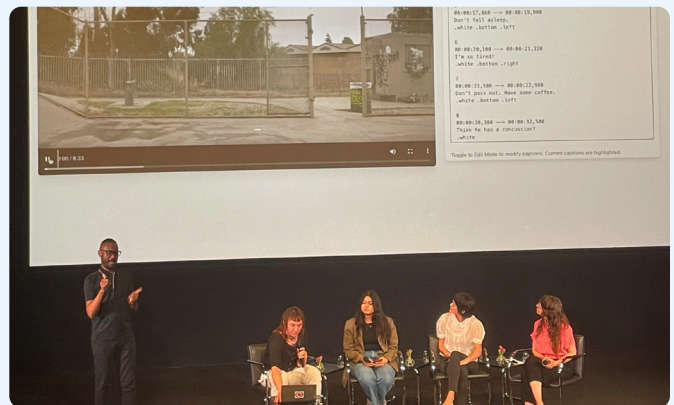
The inaugural Heumann Lab partnership between Professor Clark and Myrick culminated in November 2024. In October 2024, they co-created a [podcast exploring the “Chasms of Care.”](#) As part of their effort to connect with UCLA students, they held a screening of *unseen* and held a moving dialogue on immigration, disability, and mental health with the film’s director and UCLA alum Set Hernandez along with Pedro, the film’s protagonist. Myrick described the yearlong collaboration as transformational, saying, “The principles [of Disability Justice] are no longer just words—they’re alive in me.”



*Keris Myrick, Lauren Clark, Set Hernandez and Pedro discuss the film unseen.*

### Lauren Lee McCarthy & Alison O’Daniel

As the second Heumann Lab partnership, Professor McCarthy and d/Deaf visual artist O’Daniel worked on the development of Opening Captions, a portable captioning tool. They showcased the software along with a screening of O’Daniel’s film, *Tuba Thieves*, at the Hammer Museum in April 2025. The captioning software, created in collaboration with UCLA’s Social Software group in Winter 2025, simplifies open captioning by reducing production time down to seconds. It empowers filmmakers to embed captions early in the creative process, supporting inclusive storytelling for d/Deaf, Hard of Hearing, and hearing audiences alike.



*Stalgia Grigg, Tania Cortez, Lauren Lee McCarthy, and Alison O’Daniel demonstrate the Opening Captions tool.*

### Salih Can Açıksöz

The third and final Heumann Community Partnership for the 2025-26 AY will be led by Professor S. Can Açıksöz. His intended focus is on the intersection of disability and incarceration.



## By the Numbers



**13** majors graduated  
&  
**37** minors graduated



**1,144** seats filled in DS classes  
(including Fiat Lux seminars)

*Seats by quarter: 309 in Fall, 309 in Winter, 386 in Spring, 140 in Summer*



**9** incoming first-years + **2** incoming transfers

**378** seats filled for the Writing II requirement

*Seats by quarter: 120 in Fall, 119 in Spring, 139 in Summer*

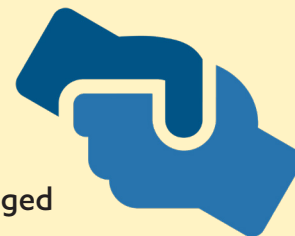


**27** DS classes offered  
(Not including tutorials)

*Classes by quarter: 6 in Fall, 7 in Winter, 7 in Spring, 7 in Summer*

**31**

community partners engaged

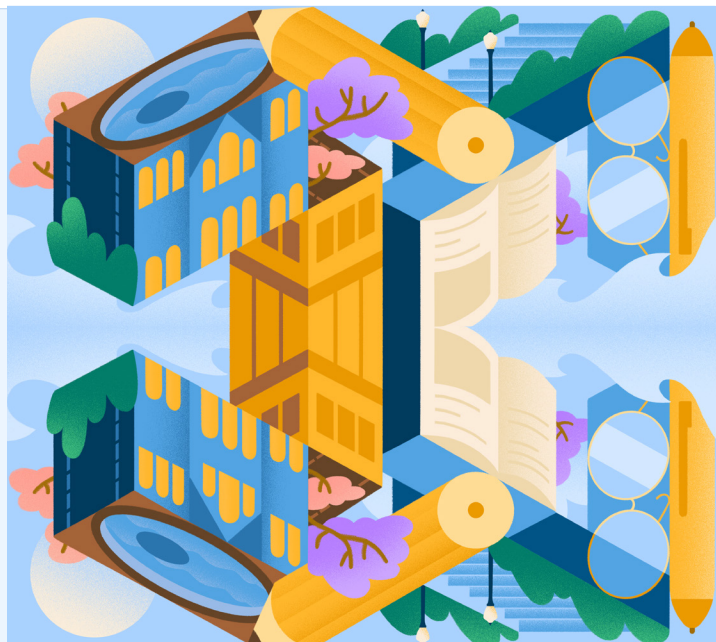


## Challenges for Next Year

As UCLA navigates university-wide financial challenges, the Disability Studies IDP will feel the ripple effects in several key areas:

- **Faculty hiring:** A planned second national search for a core faculty member has been postponed
- **Course access:** Seat availability in DS courses will be reduced, with potential impacts on major and minor enrollment

These shifts will undoubtedly shape the program's trajectory, yet our commitment to interdisciplinary inquiry and student engagement remains steadfast.



**UCLA** Undergraduate Education  
**Disability Studies**

**UCLA** Undergraduate Education  
**Initiatives**

## **Stay Connected!**

**UCLA Disability Studies Website**  
*[disabilitystudies.ucla.edu](http://disabilitystudies.ucla.edu)*

**Disability Studies Inclusion Labs Website**  
*[dslabs.ucla.edu](http://dslabs.ucla.edu)*