Fall 2025 Volume 40

UCLA Women & Philanthropy

Celebrating and inspiring women throughout the UCLA community as major donors, leaders and decision-makers

UCLA's Museum Directors Use Art to Create Change

UCLA's Museum Directors: Silvia Forni (left) and Zoë Ryan (right)

When speaking to Zoë Ryan, director of the Hammer Museum at UCLA, and Silvia Forni, Shirley & Ralph Shapiro Director of the Fowler Museum at UCLA, two common goals emerge: build community through their respective museums and, another that tugs at the heart — change the world.

The women's determination is palpable. "Art is a way for us to see the world differently and inspire change," Ryan says. "It's an incredible platform through which we can share perspectives, encourage dialogue, and promote an understanding of how to come together in community with one another, which we need now more than ever."

Forni echoes this. "We're in an exciting moment where, through museums, we can repair certain injustices and reengage communities by leveling out the power inequality of the past." Ryan agrees. "We're committed to building a more just world."

They believe they're in the exact right place to enact this change. "LA is a heartening landscape in which to be a female cultural leader," Forni says. They should know, as their predecessors were strong women leaders, from whom they've happily picked up batons.

Both the Hammer and Fowler have big things planned. Eight months into her tenure, Ryan reports the creation of a new position: chief of learning engagement and research. The chief will oversee a project targeted to fourth through 12th grades in Title 1 Los Angeles schools. "We're offering teachers an intensive and immersive year-long professional development in how to integrate art in the classroom."

The Fowler is shining a light on UCLA's myriad resources. "We have this incredible community of university scholars, thinkers and artists who are excited to do projects together and offer their time, thoughts and ideas," Forni affirms, pointing to an upcoming exhibition between the Fowler and Cotsen Institute of Archaeology as an example. "We provide opportunities for testing ideas, proving research, and showing the public how the thought process and creativity that is part of UCLA can impact the world."

The directors also see another avenue for creating change through museum funding: philanthropy. "Philanthropists in LA are very civic," Ryan adds. "When they give to the Hammer, they're also giving to UCLA and, at the same time, are thinking about how to contribute to and support Los Angeles' wider ecosystem." What they also find inspiring? Ryan's response, "The next generation of philanthropists who are looking to make meaningful change."

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Making Her Mark Across UCLA

When Joanne "Jo" Van Cleef Knopoff graduated from UCLA in '53, she didn't wave goodbye to the university. Instead, she became integral in its growth and success.

For more than five decades, her philanthropy has been far-reaching across campus departments. And, of course, she became a beloved Women & Philanthropy member, where she's served on the Board since 2002.

The Fowler Museum has also experienced Jo's influence. In 2001, she joined the Fowler Fellows, a program supporting the museum's exhibitions, publications and educational programs. Not merely a Fellow "in name only," she's a presence, attending events and organizing group exhibition tours, including nine visits for Gold Shield Alumnae, which resulted in expanding the Fowler's membership and donors.

Jo has been a member of Gold Shield Alumnae since 1960. In the '80s, she helped create the Gold Shield Faculty Prize, which recognizes mid-level faculty with distinguished records.

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President's Message

And just like that, I enter my second year as Women & Philanthropy's president. The first year has been filled with both wonder and difficulties. Recently, UCLA has experienced challenges to its core values of higher education and public research. Chancellor Julio Frenk has said, " ... cuts to funding threaten our ability to pursue life-saving and life-changing research, undermine our capacity to fulfill our academic mission, and disrupt work and careers. Our university's mission — to educate the next generation, produce new knowledge and serve society — only becomes more urgent today."

UCLA serves society in so many ways, from the sciences to the arts. As you'll read in our cover story, the university's museums are ushering in incredibly accomplished new directors: Zoë Ryan at the Hammer Museum at UCLA and Silvia Forni as the Shirley & Ralph Shapiro Director of the Fowler Museum at UCLA. I encourage readers to introduce themselves to these dynamic women.

Spotlighted in the newsletter is Women & Philanthropy Board Member Jo Knopoff, whose dedication to expansive philanthropy over the past 56 years has helped shape UCLA into the thriving university it is today. This Bruin, '53, has supported 15 different UCLA schools and served on myriad boards, including Gold Shield Alumnae of UCLA. Jo is also a long-standing supporter of the Fowler through their Fowler Fellows membership.

Exciting, too, is an article about the 20th anniversary celebration of the UCLA Broad Stem Cell Research Center. BSCRC's expansive multidisciplinary collaborations have led to extraordinary advances in everything from cancer vaccines to replacing damaged tissue and organs. Women & Philanthropy would like to acknowledge BSCRC for its remarkable achievements. At UCLA, discoveries like these are saving lives and shaping the future — Research Powers Progress.

On Nov. 18, our virtual Fall Community Event, "Understanding the Impact of Today's Immigration Enforcement," will take place. More information and the RSVP link can be found on the newsletter's back panel.

I'd like to end with the words of our chancellor, "your dedication to our mission and values remains critical. Together, we will overcome all obstacles and shape a future for our university that is rooted in both purpose and promise."

— Judith Angel, President, Women & Philanthropy

UCLA's Museum Directors ...

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With big goals ahead of them, Forni conveys, "This year has been really complicated in so many ways for our city and the world in general. Museums offer a space of joy and creativity, and that's beautiful." Ryan responds, "As important as instilling a love and appreciation for the arts, building community is also essential. People's support helps us do that."

"Museum programs and exhibitions are a direct way to develop critical thinking skills, build empathy and trust, and help us see the world in a new way," Zoë Ryan shares.

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Making Her Mark ...

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Jo chaired the award process for the second recipient. Most recently, she served as Gold Shield's Arts Adventures Chair, which saw her organizing 96 events over two decades.

Jo is a recipient of accolades herself, among them the 1984 University Service Award. This was due in part to her work with Design for Sharing (DFS). She was the first president of DFS, which offers free, K–12 arts education programs in UCLA's Center for the Art of Performance (CAP). She was also president of Gold Shield Alumnae and of the UCLA Faculty Women's Club and served for several terms on the Alumni Association Board of Directors. Additionally, Jo was bestowed the Faculty Women's Club Outstanding Member Award in 2016 for her years of service.

Endowments are something Jo and her late husband, UCLA professor Leon, have always championed. In 2001, they established a career development chair, now the Leon & Joanne V.C. Knopoff Chair in Geophysics and Physics. This was followed in 2018 by founding the Joanne V.C. & Leon Knopoff Gold Shield Alumni Scholarship Fund for UCLA undergrads. Just this year, Jo waded into new philanthropic territory when she expressed an interest in establishing an endowment in the Ethnomusicology department. Such a move would extend Jo's legacy and impact across an even broader swath of UCLA.

20 Years of Reshaping Human Health: UCLA Broad Stem Cell Research Center

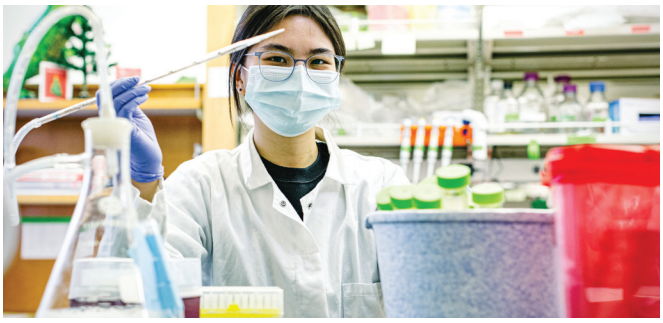
A lot can happen in two decades, as evidenced by the progress made at the Eli and Edythe Broad Center of Regenerative Medicine and Stem Cell Research at UCLA (BSCRC).

Since its founding in 2005, BSCRC has helped revolutionize healthcare by developing cutting-edge technologies and propelling advancements in all areas of healthcare. Such achievements were cause for celebration as the Center lauded its 20th anniversary this year.

Recognizing this milestone, BSCRC Director Dr. Thomas A. Rando, Professor of Neurology and Molecular, Cell and Developmental Biology, said in a statement, "From paradigm-shifting technologies to innovative therapies, we are transforming the field of regenerative medicine from a realm of possibility into one of reality, bringing hope and healing to patients facing the most difficult health challenges."

Leading the charge over those years were outstanding women scientists. Of the five internationally renowned scientists BSCRC initially recruited to UCLA, four were women. All are still at UCLA today. Among them is Dr. Amander Clark — Professor of Molecular, Cell and Developmental Biology, as well as Director of the UCLA Center for Reproductive Science, Health and Education — who has participated on Women & Philanthropy panels on several occasions.

Dr. Clark participated in a panel with other BSCRC women scientists at the Center's inaugural Women in Stem Cell Science Symposium in March, moderated by Dr. Judith Gasson, Senior Advisor for Research and Innovation, David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA. Clark highlighted, "From the very beginning, the stem cell



center has been celebrating the careers of women, lifting up the careers of women, and providing opportunities for our research programs to flourish."

During the discussion, Clark also addressed the importance of philanthropy for BSCRC. "It enables you to form new partnerships with other scientists and to pursue ideas that are really transformative and perhaps not as predictable."

At a time when research funding is no longer guaranteed, BSCRC is charging forward with its mission to reshape health. From engineering next-generation immunotherapies and creating three-dimensional lung "organoids" to gene and base editing, the breakthroughs and advancements are awe-inspiring.

"As we celebrate two decades of progress, let us also set our sights on the future," Chancellor Julio Frenk said at the recent symposium. "A future where the next life-changing treatment is developed because this Center had the vision to pursue it. A future where the next generation of scientists — more diverse, more inclusive — leads the charge. And a future where breakthroughs are not just for a few, but for all."

FOR MORE INFORMATION
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Did You Know ...

Over the last two decades, the Eli and Edythe Broad Center of Regenerative Medicine and Stem Cell Research at UCLA (BSCRC) has advanced our understanding of stem cells and their potential to improve human health, including these life-changing accomplishments.

- In 2008, BSCRC scientists — three of them women — reprogrammed human skin cells to become induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs). With the same unlimited properties as embryonic stem cells, iPSCs offer potential for treating diabetes, leukemia, and Parkinson's, plus tissue engineering and transplantation.
- In 2016, BSCRC scientists created three-dimensional lung "organoids" — laboratory-grown, lung-like tissue — that can be used to study diseases like pulmonary fibrosis.
- A key biologic process in the development of late-stage, small-cell cancers of the prostate and lung was discovered in 2018, potentially leading to the development of drugs to treat those cancers and small-cell cancers of almost any organ.
- In 2025, BSCRC welcomed its new class of trainees, bringing the number of young scientists trained in the field to 385.

UCLA Women & Philanthropy

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Women & Philanthropy is going green!
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The United States has long called itself "a nation of immigrants," yet this narrative often conceals hard truths and injustices that have shaped the nation's history.

A panel of UCLA faculty from different areas of campus will discuss how current immigration policies and enforcement practices are impacting immigrant communities, what they mean for our democracy, and their ripple effects throughout the country.

AN INVITATION
TO AN INFORMATIVE EVENT ...

Understanding the Impact of Today's Immigration Enforcement

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TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 18, 2025
5:00 PM – 6:30 PM
Webinar

TICKETS
https://tinyurl.com/WPIMM