HALCYON TIDINGS

A Newsletter of FPU's University Scholars Program

Luke 12:48: "To whom much is given, from them much is expected."

October 2026

FRESNO PACIFIC UNIVERSITY

Greetings, University Scholars Community!

Midterms are finished, and we are approaching the early November Holy Days of the Church! This is also the time of year when we “fall back,” although that tradition may not prevail much longer...

There are many things going on at the beginning of November, and the first week is an over-arching celebration of our first-generation colleagues. Check out the Dates of Interest to see all the engaging opportunities!

We are so pleased to bring you an overview of the successful tenth-anniversary *Green Light* release party! Following that article, you can learn about the 2026 Fall Honors Banquet, and even read Roberto Perez-Puente’s Keynote talk!

We include a comment on the *Twelve Angry Men* staged reading. These readings are a tradition at FPU that allows us to enjoy many classic plays without the time and effort of larger productions.

You will find many other opportunities in the newsletter, including the Friday afternoon Tolkien film sessions. We also recommend investigating your grad school options through the resources we include!

Fall '26 Dates of Interest

November 2-6	Preparing for Grad School Week: Grants Available!
November 3	Calling and Career
November 3	Tri-Alpha Induction
November 4	Trivia Night @ Shehadey Dining Hall 7-8 PM
November 6	Tolkien films on Friday afternoons - (See flyer on page 14)
November 10	Screening: *The Force Awakens*
November 17	Calling and Career
November 17	Screening: *The Last Jedi*
November 18	Town Hall: Feed Your Inner Space Cowboy, Kobie Boykins @ William Saroyan Theatre 10 AM
November 23-27	Thanksgiving Break
December 1	Screening: *The Rise of Skywalker*
December 1	Calling and Career
December 7-10	Final Exams

To learn more about USP, check out the USP website.

Click here

Verse of the Month

Paragon Scholar Hannah Rusconi selected the verses Ephesians 2:8-9 as we say farwell to October and go into the second half of the fall semester: “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God —not by works, so that no one can boast.”

Rusconi explains: “Who gets to go to heaven? Many people who aren’t Christian might think that they will go to heaven, because they believe themselves to be good people. It is not the good we do that saves us, though, because we are all imperfect. We cannot enter heaven and be in the presence of a holy and perfect God as sinners. Even the smallest imperfections cannot enter, making this a feat mere humans cannot attain, yet Jesus did. Only he was sinless, and he, as a perfect sacrifice, took our sins upon his shoulders and nailed them to the cross. We need Jesus and the salvation God freely offers us. This is the importance of faith alone. If it required any amount of our goodness to enter heaven, no one would be there.



Dr. Marshall and USP alumna Kourinthia Burton share a delightful meal at Love and Thai.

“Works aren’t entirely irrelevant to the conversation. A faith that produces no good works is a dead one (James 2:26). They do not play a part in our salvation, but rather are a product of it. A true love for God and relationship with Jesus will be the source of goodness. By doing good works, we aren’t covering some last little bit of our sins. Jesus paid for all of our sins, and we are clean, as long as we receive it. We cannot do anything for our own salvation; we depend upon God. Any attempts to save ourselves are arrogant and prideful because it is the assumption that we are doing something that God could not. If we boast in our achievements, we must also take responsibility for our sins. By God’s grace, and His grace alone, we are saved. And what does a saving faith look like? Romans 10:9 says, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved”. It truly is that simple. No good works, no boasting. Through the gift of God, we are saved.”

Vol. 10 Green Light Release Party

by Evanie Adame, USP English and Communication Scholar

As the sun set over the wooded area known to FPU as “The Forest” on October 15th, FPU’s literary journal *The Green Light* celebrated the release of its tenth volume—and its tenth anniversary. Inspired by the style “Whimsigoth,” The Forest was littered with tables adorned with scarves, books, and pottery graciously supplied by students. Near the edge sat a display of the artworks found in the newly published journal, along with racks filled with the journals for the taking. A photo booth, along with coffee and cookies, sat at the opposite edge for anyone to use or take. Acting as a stage, green lights were pointed toward a spot near the benches where selected authors would be able to share their work with the audience.

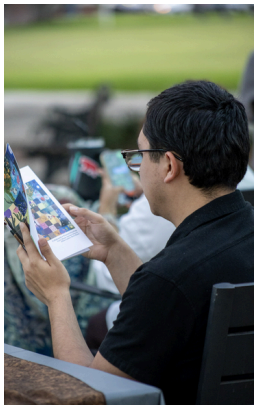
As the event kicked off, editor-in-chief Evanie Adame introduced the editorial team for *The Green Light*: Judith Flores Mora, Abigail Spain, Riley Kirk, and Belana Pranger. She then announced that submissions were currently open and anyone was free to submit—whether it be writing or art of any kind. With that, the first reader was called.

Raymond Andrade opened with his process for his two poems, “A Prodigal Son, the Millionth Job” and “Shadow Boxing,” whose rhythm takes inspiration from rap music. Next was Victor Hugo Manríquez with his writing, “Little Tree”, which was based on a certain tree on FPU’s very own campus. Recently graduated student Brooke Barham read her poem, “deserted,” along with other selected poems from her works in previous *Green Light* journals. Though Tamara Treber could not make it that evening, her daughter read in her place—a fitting substitute, as the first poem she read, “The Deep End,” was about her miraculous birth. The second, “The Scenic Route,” was about Tamara and her husband’s deep love and relationship.









Vol.10 Green Light Release Party by Adame

Following was Victoria Stephens with her creative nonfiction work about her journey to obtaining an autism diagnosis and her relationship with baking, which was aptly titled “Cookie Girl.” Just as with Brooke, Laura Hand read multiple of her works from both the recent volume and others. Faculty advisor Daniel Larson introduced her as this year’s “Distinguished Author” for her contributions to The Green Light. Along with her essay, “Fire, Fantasies, and Futility,” she also read a poem from the chapbook (which is a mini book that holds several of her past works) made to honor her title.





Last, but not least, David Samuel outlined his process for the poem that won first place in *The Green Light*’s found poetry competition last semester. Titled “Looking for a summer job?”, this poem was formed from a job ad that David found intriguingly worded. A short interview about his experience with creative writing followed. With that, the official program ended, but guests were encouraged to stick around and talk about the works they heard. And that they did, with students, faculty, and the family of the readers mingling well into the night. *The Green Light* looks forward to starting work on the next volume.

Honors Banquet

by Dylan Velvick, USP Criminology Scholar

On October 16th, I attended the Fall Honors Banquet for all distinguished scholars alike. Most of those who were there were part of the Perspectives in Leadership class, which I am a part of as well. I attended the event with my girlfriend, and we both had an extraordinary time. I got to converse with many familiar faces and eat amazing food. The food that was served for the event was beyond incredible.

Honors Banquet by Velvick

The chicken parmesan was delicious, the pasta was tasty, and the bread was yummy. Actually, I took home several pieces of chicken parmesan because of how awesome it was. Back to the content of the banquet, scholars were given many items and gifts from the staff that hosted the event. We got a certificate, a pin, a leadership prayer book, and a fidget spinner. Dr. Marshall Johnston introduced the scholars and showed pictures of us taken individually. Then, all of us scholars took a group community photo together.

The night was full of keynote speakers who spoke to us professionally and fluently. First, Roberto, who is a current student at Fresno Pacific University (FPU), gave a speech about community, our place at FPU, and what it means to be a part of something greater than oneself. I really enjoyed his speech, and he did a fantastic job presenting it. Next, Rene Swan gave her own speech to the audience. She talked to us about her journey, improving her faith during college, and highlighting the importance of togetherness. That is something that both speeches had in common: they both emphasized the importance of community and unity with everyone at FPU. In all, this was a wonderful event that I had the greatest pleasure to attend. Everyone was very kind and hospitable. This was truly a night of compassion for learning, compassion for community, and compassion for Christ.









Student Research Speech

by Roberto Perez-Puente, USP Pre-health Scholar



Good evening. My name is Roberto. I am a student-athlete and a transfer, but more than these, I am enthusiastically a student. I often asked myself in my early years of college life: I am a pre-dental major; I'm going to be a dentist. Why do I need to take a class on the History of Asia? Why must I take a course on J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* or understand the complexities of mid-century artwork? I don't need it.

I could say I just saw the destination, and not the journey, but my experience asks more reflection out of me than that. Just one semester ago, January of this year, I struggled with finding meaning in school. I was partially interested in my science classes, but fulfilling is not something that I would call my scientific endeavors. I have a love for dentistry, but these classes were, as I saw it, just a landmark, or better yet, an obstacle in my way to my goal of becoming a dentist.

Around the same time, I was taking a class on the late great author C.S. Lewis, and found the class boring and tedious, mostly due to the simple fact that repeated in my mind like a tape recorder; why do I need this? How is this applicable to my job?

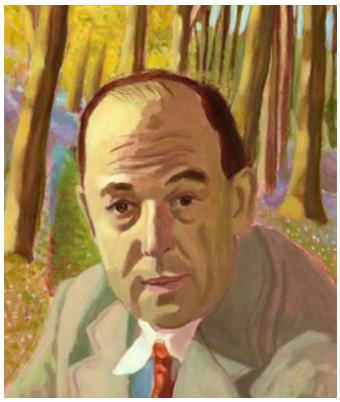
While I thought, I noticed on the board—not one of C.S. Lewis's many theological allegories—but the words: book report due next month. And not wanting to fall behind, I started my reading. The book was his autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*. This book gave me a chance to ask important introspective questions I didn't know I had. It was as though a cork was pulled from my creative mind, allowing my thoughts to rush like a raging river.

I chased this feeling of newfound clarity by writing about these thoughts through an analysis of the book and found that writing handed to me a sort of construction from my thought and asked me to search for truth, for meaning of my world.

Student Research Speech by Perez-Puente

And Lewis, who spent his life with the Greeks, knew an old divide: Socrates against the Sophists. The Sophists taught you how to win. Socrates asked how to know what's true. "The unexamined life is not worth living." So, I had to ask myself: which was I doing? Was I collecting knowledge to win, for the grade, the degree, the title, or to find out what's true?

And that raises the question I want to ask you: what makes someone a scholar? Sure, you can go to college, but does that make you a scholar?



As I went through Dr. Nickel's C.S. Lewis class—studying everything from how to read children's books to God's relationship with human suffering—I gained a new understanding of higher education, but we will get back to that. I met Marshall Johnston in January as well, and as I spoke more to him, I was absorbed by an insatiable desire to learn. I didn't just want information anymore. I wanted understanding, as our mission statement says, wisdom.

Marshall asked me about halfway through the semester if I would join a conference that was coming up, speaking about a topic that was interesting to me through a researched presentation. Well, I thought about it; although I was a science major, I was interested in my culture. My father is Cuban, and I hadn't been to Cuba since I was 4 years old, and the chances of another visit are slim. Through my introspection, I realized this is something that is a yearning, a longing in my life- as C.S. Lewis would say, a Joy.

Curiosity attached to a investigation of my past unlocked a perspective to life that I hadn't reflected upon, and this opportunity functioned as more than an essay, it was a reflective moment for me to wrestle with my identity, the person I am, and the person I will be, and there I stood on Research Night, a future dentist at a podium, presenting on the intertwining of Cuban and American history. Nobody was more surprised than I.

Student Research Speech by Perez-Puente

Developing this mentality took time, but it took for me to let go of my pride. The contrast from sciences to humanities is not a stereotype- and for the first time in my young adult life, the clinical, proud, rigid feel of a science textbook that I held on to so tightly met the warmth of history's fiery beauty.

Maybe you have a class right now that you're sitting through, asking what I asked: why do I need this?

Here's what I learned by tumbling about: the things that look disconnected from afar are quietly feeding the same person. The science textbook and the story of my family were never competing. They were both teaching me how to see more clearly.



The semester prior to this awakening, I attended another university where I also played water polo. I did not enjoy the program, and I had a hard time finding my place. I cannot attribute this to the coaching or give an example of how I was treated badly by a professor; all I can say is that I was not connected. I was Roberto, the water polo player. Athletics has its own challenges, but the biggest was that I felt no call to do anything that was not required of me. Consistency in the gym, but coasting in college, and wondering why I don't feel connected.

FPU took me in with open arms, and I'm so grateful for the opportunity ive been given to study again, but then why wasn't I grateful for the classes I didn't feel were important?

When you are a dentist, you talk to people every day, you focus on their problems of pain, you observe their griefs and hardships. If you have an ounce of good dentistry, you have a quart of chemical prowess, but a gallon of love in your heart and a mindset of lifelong learning.

Student Research Speech by Perez-Puente

The questions that these classes pose are just as important to my career as science courses. Yes, I need to know how dentistry works to the highest degree, but I am not an algorithm, I am not a robot, and I am a growing, developing human being that needs interpersonal, artistic flourishing just as much as I need to know the composition of enamel if I am to help and serve others.

Reading C.S. Lewis will make me a better dentist. Scholarship is just that, and digging into my liberal arts classes is not abandoning my dream; it's leavening it. It's the same dream, but it's now richer. College, all of college, unlocked a new chapter in the book of my life, a chapter of connection and expansion. A chapter of versatility and flexibility. A breaking of a made-up mold. An imposition of enamel, if I am to help and serve others.

I now notice just how much scholastic richness there was at my old institution and how different my experience would have been if I tapped into it. I wish I would have taken advantage and explored.

I invite you to learn from my mistake, because maturity is not complaining, and scholarship is not straight A's. Investigation, exploration, and intellectual satisfaction go hand in hand. Be willing to connect to things you didn't think were possible for yourself. Science majors, dig into history or literature. Liberal Arts majors, dig into biology or statistics. Round yourself out, become multifaceted, be a SCHOLAR, the time is now, how will you use it?

As Georg Friedrich Hegel said, "The learner always begins by finding fault, but the scholar sees the positive merit in everything."

Thank you.

Twelve Angry Men

by Emily Ebury, USP English Scholar

The moment I heard the cast list of our staged reading of *Twelve Angry Men* and found out that Dr. Eleanor Nickel was directing it, I knew it would turn out to be a fantastic show!

Twelve Angry Men by Ebury



The brilliant cast of students and faculty (and husbands of faculty) highlighted the unique interpretations and elements of each character, and they managed to have fun with the show while maintaining the commentary and intentions behind its writing. The performance was well worth the watch and, according to those involved with the production, a joy to be a part of.

Among the most memorable actors in this reading was Ray Winter, as Juror No. Three. His portrayal of rage and hatred as he debated those opposing his views was both incredibly impressive and surprising to the audience, as it so contrasted with his usual demeanor. I've only ever interacted with Ray once—I held a door for him while walking out of McDonald Hall—yet his smile and humorous personality shone through to me immediately. To see him perform the most emotionally hostile character in this play was shocking yet universally respected, according to the audience post-show

One of my favorite portrayals in the cast was absolutely Izaiah Ruiz as Juror No. Eight. I would say that he, by far, had the most work to be done in preparation for this performance, as he was the most prominent speaking role in the cast by a long shot. I note especially all the instances where his character's vote went directly against all others, and he effectively portrayed the determination of a man who knows the weight of his verdict. I was thoroughly impressed by the completeness of Izaiah's portrayal, and am still left in awe at his character's brilliance and impact upon the show itself.



Twelve Angry Men by Ebury

Though I have my own highlights from this production, it was nothing short of wholly impressive, emotionally touching, and well-performed. I congratulate all fourteen men who volunteered to be actors, as well as Eleanor Nickel for directing and leading the entire project. Additionally, I thank all the professors who offered extra credit for attending the production: both for packing the house with audience members and also for boosting my grade in American Lit a percentage or two. *Twelve Angry Men* was a wonderful show to see, and I'm so excited for what Eleanor Nickel has up her sleeve for the next one!

Grad School!



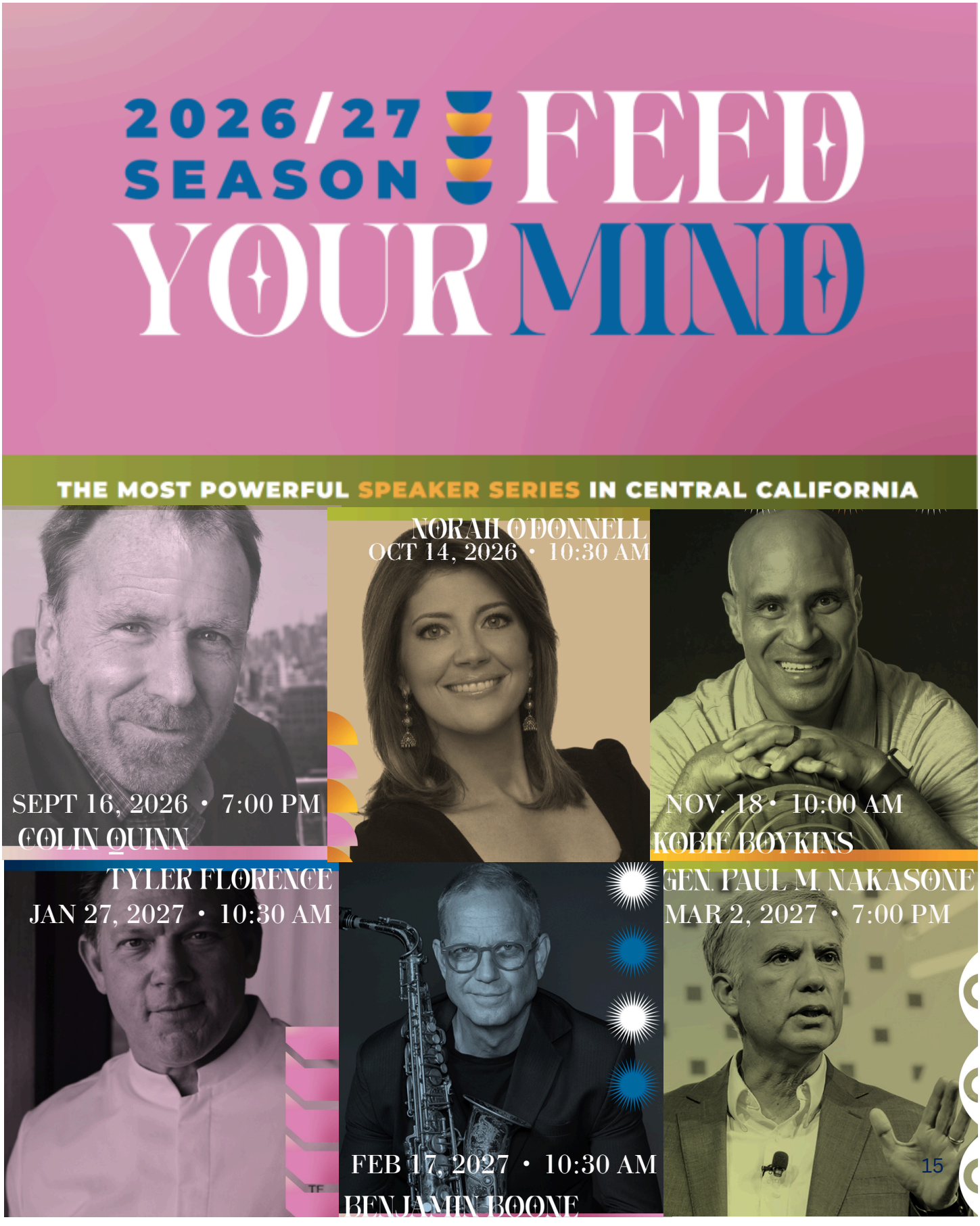
Fresno Pacific students have shone brilliantly in graduate programs in Fresno, around the country, and around the world just as much as they have in their undergraduate studies among us! The University Scholars Program wants to join our FPU Graduate Admissions team in finding ways to make an understanding of and decision for graduate studies a little more transparent. This QR code will take you to a document where we have gathered the contacts of a number of successful current and former graduate students in different areas who are willing to be mentors for you — and it includes some good ideas to have in mind as you think about grad school!


A JOURNEY OF FAITH
THROUGH
MIDDLE-EARTH
FAITH, FELLOWSHIP, & FORMATION
WATCH
DISCUSS
GROW
Journey through The Lord of the Rings together as we watch the films and reflect on themes of faith, hope, sacrifice, friendship, courage, and calling.
Fridays | 2:00 – 3:30 PM
October 2 – December 4
Commuter House
"All we have to decide is what to do with the time that is given us."
— GANDALF


FRESNO PACIFIC UNIVERSITY'S
ANNUAL
Thanksgiving
Luncheon
Join us for this Fresno Pacific University tradition as we share a meal together and give thanks to God for His abundant blessings!
November 12, 2026
11:45 a.m.
Special Events Center
Students, staff, and full-time faculty may pick up a FREE ticket in the Student Development Office
October 19 - 30, 2026


SPRING 2027
COURSE OPTIONS:
ICS 300 A/B: STUDY ABROAD (2+1)
WILD 100 A/B: INTRO TO WILDERNESS STUDIES (2+1)
WILD 300 A/B: WILDERNESS AND THE LIBERAL ARTS (2+1)
ENV 152 A/B: NATURAL HISTORY (2+1)
QUESTIONS:
Dr. Ray Winter
(ray.winter@fresno.edu)
Dr. Darren Duerksen
(darren.duerksen@fresno.edu)
ANTICIPATED COST: $3,200
FPU GOES TO
NEPAL
MAY 13-30, 2027
Real Learning.
Real Immersive Cultural Experiences.
Real Life.
Explore Nepali cultural and religious traditions and sites, trek through the Himalayan Mountains, and be immersed in village community life.
Fresno Pacific University
WILDERNESS STUDIES
Explore. Experience. Inspire.

2026-27 Town Hall Speaker Line-up



2026-27 Speaker Line-up





More on Sunny's Blog

Check out the most recent posts on Sunny's Blog: Click here



For more weekly announcements, check out *The Scoop* or the *Sunbird Spotlight*!

Shalom, Judith, Marshall, and the University Scholars Team

Marshall.Johnston@fresno.edu; jzf135@students.fresno.edu; LaKosha.Wharry@fresno.edu

The FPU Honors Council:

LaKosha Wharry, Program Assistant; Quentin Kinnison, SAS Dean
W. Marshall Johnston, USP Coordinator; Judith Flores Mora, USP Student Assistant
SAS: Chris Janzen, Brian Schultz, Pamela Johnston, Daniel Larson, Andrew Sensenig
GPS: Sharon Starcher, Jon Clark

HONOR SOCIETIES

To learn more about the interdisciplinary **Alpha Chi Honor Society**, please visit:
https://www.alphachihonor.org.
Advisor: Dr. Daniel Larson

To learn more about the **Phi Alpha Theta Honor Society** for History, please visit:
http://phialphatheta.org
Advisor: Dr. Pamela Johnston

To learn more about the **Kappa Mu Epsilon Honor Society** for Mathematics, please visit:
http://www.kappamuepsilon.org/pages/a/index.php.
Advisor: Professor Jeremiah Ruesch

To learn more about **Theta Alpha Kappa Honor Society** for Biblical Studies, please visit:
http://thetaalphakappa.org
Advisor: Dr. Eric Vail

To learn more about the **Pi Gamma Mu Honor Society** for the Social Sciences, please visit:
http://pigammamu.org
Advisor: Professor Anita Rodriguez

To learn more about **Alpha Alpha Alpha Honor Society**, for our first-generation scholars:
https://www.1stgenhonors.org
Advisors: Dr. Sharon Starcher

To learn more about **Phi Alpha**, for our most outstanding Social Work students:
https://phialpha.org
Advisor: Sai Mounaoutoua, MSW

Luke 12:48: “To whom much is given, from them much is expected.”

Why the name “*Halcyon Tidings*” for our newsletter? Whenever we have discussed a merit scholarship in the program, the name “Halcyon” has always come up, because it evokes a calm and peaceful place, that center that we have in our community, founded in Christ. “Tidings” worked as a nicely learned and archaic word for news.