Napier News - Fall 2026
An E-Newsletter for Friends and Supporters of The Napier Initiative at Pilgrim Place

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The Napier Initiative Has Its Own “Triple Threat”



Contributed by Paul Turner, Napier Communications Chair

Years ago, as a new football season unfolded, sports writers would herald the next “triple threat” player who could run, pass, and kick, especially those who did all three in the same game. Specialization and free substitution have eliminated such players but, as reflected in Paul Cromwell’s reflection below, The Napier Initiative has its own “triple threat,” a repeat Napier mentor, Napier co-teacher, and soon-to-be a Napier committee member. Such versatility is most welcome when seeking to accomplish The Napier Initiative’s diverse goals.

“Participating in the Napier Initiative has been a major highlight of my three-year residency at Pilgrim Place and a natural extension of my work as a community organizer (CO), CO trainer, consultant, and teacher. On two occasions, I co-taught with Professor Tomás Summers Sandoval the Napier intergenerational course Power & People: The History and Practice of Community Organizing at Pomona College. Professor Tomás uses examples from the Mexican-American

political history and experience. I gave interactive trainings on CO skills such as how to build effective relationships, conduct research that leads to community solutions, effectively negotiate with governmental and other leaders, and build democratic and sustainable citizen organizations. The class's intergenerational composition leads to an extremely rich learning environment. Community learners contribute from their varied professional and volunteer experiences, including work as lawyers, teachers, and community activists. But they also learn from the college students and the unique perspectives these young adults bring as they pursue their education and begin their professional lives.

I have also mentored two Napier Fellows who have implemented their self-designed youth empowerment projects with Napier financial help - one in the South African township of Soweto and the other in the Fellow's hometown and Mexican-American neighborhood of San Juan Capistrano. It is a real joy assisting these very bright and big-hearted students further develop their vision of doing good in the world. And it was especially rewarding that one of my Fellows transitioned from the CO class I co-taught to developing the following year a CO and empowerment project with his hometown youth.

Both Napier co-teaching and mentoring have helped me feel that my life extends beyond the 'bubble' of a senior community and that I can share my professional experiences with a new generation of young adults while also learning from the experiences of others.

My future involvement with Napier will include co-teaching at Pomona College once again in fall 2027, ongoing Fellows mentoring, and being a future member of the Napier Courses Committee, which I hope can put me in touch with more professors at The Claremont Colleges."

Our Histories, Ourselves, and Our Future



Contributed by Dick Johnson, Napier Communications Committee

The first time Professor Diana Selig taught her Napier intergenerational course, Histories of Second-Wave Feminism, there were some remarkable surprises.

College students were surprised to learn how many barriers in the 1960s through the 1980s had confronted the women of their grandmothers' generation. The elder community members in the class were surprised to find the younger students surprised. Was there a revolution and nobody noticed? International students in the class added other perspectives. The class became a marvelous opportunity for teaching and learning from everyone.

Professor Selig rolled up her sleeves and went to work. She invited the class to be part of a larger conversation, bringing in primary sources as voices from history. Selig carefully organized the course to indicate the diversity of opinions and experiences. She promised the students, "We will analyze key texts, legal battles, grassroots organizing, and ideological debates that shaped feminist thought and activism." She experimented with different sizes of groups for conversations and zine projects.

Selig encouraged students to develop empathy for the multiple perspectives that arose in primary sources as well as among the class members. The goal for students was not to find a particular perspective and cling to it. It's the role of historians, she said, to try to understand how and why people came to the positions they held. The class should instead become part of an extended conversation where the experiences of the past resonate in the present and provoke questions about the future. "We will draw connections between past and present," she assured students, "while exploring how history can help us understand events today."

Professor Selig saw great value in the Napier intergenerational aspect of the class. In addition to assigned readings, students could savor the memories of classmates who had lived through that era and participated in its struggles.

A community member shared her impressions of the course. "It was everything I could have hoped for. The professor was fabulous, and all my fellow students were fun and inspiring. Best of all, not only did I get to revel in nostalgia, I also learned so much about that time period [the 60s and 70s] that I knew little about, despite having been in the middle of it all. It was just fascinating to look at my history from the perspective of 50 years later, through the eyes of people who were not even alive at the time."

Buoyed by the enthusiastic response of students, Professor Selig is hoping to offer the course a second time in Spring 2027.

LEARN MORE ABOUT SPRING 2027 NAPIER COURSES

Helping Students Help Others: Napier Council Welcomes Isabelle Thacker



Contributed by Dick Johnson, Napier Communications Committee

As four-year-old Isabelle and her African-American caretaker, Mae Mae, boarded a de facto segregated public bus in the late 1960s in New Orleans, Mae Mae asked Isabelle, “Would you like to sit up front, or in the back with my friends?”

Isabelle Thacker remembers that event as an awakening moment. Something was not right. Why should there be restrictions on people based on the color of their skin? She remembers going to an integrated public swimming pool in New Orleans with her father, who told her he had worked on getting it reopened after local officials closed it rather than integrate it. On some level, she understood that changing wrongs required people to act.

Sometimes small events, practically unnoticeable to others, can have a profound effect upon a sensitive child. Isabelle soon set her sights upon becoming a lawyer, thinking she could use her talents to help others. “I have always tried to help people overcome barriers,” she said.
Three years after law school, however, feeling almost burned out by the overwhelming needs of her clients in rural Georgia, Isabelle gladly accepted the chance to reset by moving to Mexico with her husband, Strom, who had been offered a position as a professor in Mexico City. There she gave birth to the first of their three sons.

When Strom accepted a teaching position at Boston University, Isabelle initially focused on raising their three sons and volunteering in their community. Eventually she joined Greater Boston Legal Services, focusing on the intersection of domestic violence and immigration. Her work there and at subsequent organizations began to focus more on immigration cases, as she loved helping immigrants navigate the complex legal system.

As they planned a move to Southern California where Strom would become president of Pitzer College in 2023, Isabelle envisioned using her immigration skills as a volunteer attorney for local non-profits. However, given the convulsions in the federal immigration system, she decided to step back from direct representation and look for other meaningful ways to volunteer.

Isabelle accepted an invitation to join the Napier Council at Pilgrim Place. Here was a wonderful opportunity for her to help students help others overcome obstacles. She sees real value in the intergenerational Napier college classes that bring together different generational perspectives and provide a potential mentoring experience for students. She enjoys her conversations with college students, saying, “They give me such hope.” Outside the classroom, the Napier Awards program offers students an opportunity to connect with people knowledgeable in their project area and career choices. Looking ahead, Isabelle recognizes The Napier Initiative as an important path to a more hopeful and just future.

Napier Fellow Continues Commitment to Environmental Justice



Abby Powers was named a Napier Fellow in 2022 while studying at Scripps College. “Being a Napier Fellow significantly impacted my senior year and my career thus far. The program and specifically my mentor Ela helped me think deeply about the ways I could use my skills to create an impact in the world.” For her Napier project, Abby proposed a citizen science project in Tangting, Nepal, to address the effects of climate change on agricultural sustainability. “While I was developing my project proposal, Ela helped me refine my ideas, understand where I could build off my strengths, and also challenged me to further consider and research new ideas. Even though my project was planned with a focus in Nepal, I have been working on local issues in my career, and a lot of the skills and perspectives I gained have continued to influence me. I still have a strong relationship with Ela and her husband Douglas, and they both have continued to support me as I've grown in my career.”

In her current role as a policy advocate for the Leadership Counsel for Justice and Accountability, Abby is now leading a coalition of local organizations and residents to push for stronger environmental justice policies in the City of Bakersfield's General Plan. "I was initially drawn to working with Leadership Counsel because of their focus on advocating for environmental justice and health equity. I work with residents of rural communities in Kern and Tulare counties and residents of Bakersfield to ensure that their voices are heard in local government and that their ideas are integrated into state and local projects." When asked about the most rewarding part of her work, Abby shared it was
"collaborating with the communities and coalitions I work alongside to achieve stronger environmental protections and to earn commitments to crucial infrastructure they need."

READ MORE ABOUT ABBY'S WORK

If you are a past Napier Fellow, we'd love to hear from you! Email **advancement@pilgrimplace.org** about what you're doing now so we can share in future communications.

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In Case You Missed It: 2025-2026 Impact Report



NAPIER INITIATIVE

Impact Report
2025 - 2026 Academic Year

In our 16th year, The Napier Initiative continued its commitment to encourage creative ecological and social change through intergenerational learning and leadership. We are grateful to the many volunteers and donors whose collective gifts of time, talent, and treasure ensure the Initiative's work, and we are pleased to share this year's updates on Fellows, Courses, and Special Projects/Events in this report.

2025-2026 Academic Year: At A Glance

7 Napier Courses offered by Claremont College undergraduate faculty members

11 Napier Fellows named, each benefiting from a mentoring relationship with a Pilgrim Place resident

3 Awardees granted a total of $49,000

20 Students from Pomona College attended first-year orientation hosted by Draper Center and the Napier Initiative as an inaugural intergenerational special event

READ IMPACT REPORT

Your tax deductible contribution directly supports
The Napier Initiative, including student projects, intergenerational courses, and mentoring. Gifts of all sizes make a difference and ensure these enriching experiences, now and in the future.

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