

While “organic” may appropriately describe her plans for growing international studies at UC Irvine, it is certainly a less than fitting word to describe her birth place in the urban San Fernando Valley. She is, however, returning to her roots with her recent move back to California.

Born an official “Valley girl,” Avant’s family relocated when she was in second grade to San Diego where she spent the rest of her childhood on into college, attending UC San Diego (UCSD) for her undergraduate degree in political science.

Upon completion of her degree, Avant left California in pursuit of a joint J.D. and Ph.D. degree, but ultimately returned to UCSD to complete her master’s and doctoral degrees in political science, specializing in international relations and comparative politics.

The focus of Avant’s research is “somewhat eclectic” as she likes to call it, explaining that she brings together the study of American and comparative politics with political theory and international studies to examine global structures of power.

With three sons and a husband, one may assume to know from where her interest in power structures stems. When asked, however, Avant laughs and replies, “I am outnumbered, but I suppose I really became interested in political science when I was studying social relations. I kept finding that power always seemed to be behind the big issues.”

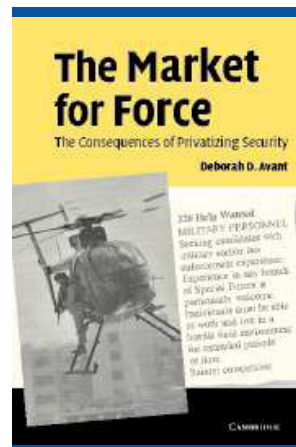
Heading to the east coast to begin her academic career at the State University of New York’s University at Albany, Avant continued to pursue her research interests in civil-military relations and military change; topics she says are inherently linked with power.

“The ultimate use of power is often associated with how societies use violence,” she says, highlighting the military as a major player in this realm. Avant’s research findings on this topic have been published in multiple journal articles, as well as in her first book, *Political Institutions and Military Change: Lessons from Peripheral Wars*, in which she analyzes civil-military relations through a comparison of British and U.S. Army strategies in wartime situations.

International Affairs, a leading international journal, describes her work as “pertinent with policy-makers now requiring militaries to make peace instead of war,” further noting, “Avant’s

model provides the best tool yet for predicting which militaries are likely to shape up to these new tasks.”

“The private security industry exploded in the 1990s. Private companies began providing not only logistical support, but training and operational support via weaponry and battlefield training,” Avant says.



After spending several years in Albany, Avant transitioned to Washington, D.C.’s George Washington University (GWU) where she spent the next twelve years as a political science professor. During this time, she became interested in the transforming role of private security corporations across the globe which led to her most recently published book, *The Market for Force*.

In her book, Avant examines this shift toward privatized security, its effect on democratic processes and its impact on the control of force in different regions – topics that are receiving quite a bit of attention as of late. “There is quite an intense focus in D.C. right now on the analysis of contractors in Iraq as far as the work they are performing, the roles they are playing and the way in which they are being managed,” says Avant. Accordingly, she has presented her findings and on-going research in this area at a number of high level conferences involving government officials, military personnel and others in the D.C. area.

With her return to California this summer with her husband Tim, their three sons and Forrest, their black lab, Avant is “happy to be home” where she’s closer to extended family and sunshine. “We love the weather and topography of California,” she says. Avant and her family plan to take full advantage of both as they are all avid runners, hikers, bikers and kayakers. As for surfing, the common hobby of many local Californians, Avant leaves that one to the boys. “My two older sons are surfers and my younger one would like to be... we’ll see about the rest of us,” she says.

Avant will be sharing her research on the privatization of security at the Social Sciences Dinner Club on Thursday, October 18. For more information or to RSVP, please call (949) 824-1659.

photo courtesy of Becki Scola



Women and Politics

Education funding and healthcare reform are two of the hot-button issues currently sparking debate between presidential candidates gearing up for the 2008 elections. These often-termed “women friendly” issues are a driving force behind the research of political science graduate student Becki Scola who examines the under-representation of women in state legislatures and the causes of its variance across the United States, a topic which combines her undergraduate interest in women’s studies with her passion for political science.

“The number of women in state legislature directly correlates to the number of ‘women friendly’ laws passed from state to state,” she asserts, citing examples of expanded access to day care, reproductive services and healthcare in states with higher numbers of women legislators. “If we seek to change these areas in our country, then it would intuitively be in our best interest to have more women in office.”

Highest Percentage of Women Legislators (2007)

Vermont	37.8 (%)
New Hampshire	35.8
Colorado	35.0

Lowest Percentage of Women Legislators (2007)

South Carolina	8.8 (%)
Kentucky	12.3
Oklahoma	12.8

*Source: Center for American Women and Politics, Rutgers

Women currently comprise 51% of the total United States population. Yet, according to a 2007 study completed by the Center for American Women in Politics at Rutgers University, only 1,734 – or 23.5% – of the 7,382 state legislative seats in the nation are held by women. This illustrates a substantial disparity in gender representation within state government, Scola says.

What causes this disparity? Scola explains, “Women just don’t run for office.” When they do run, she says, women experience the same rate of success – if not higher – than that of men who run for office, which raises the question – why don’t more women run? By conducting surveys and interviews with women currently in elected office, Scola seeks to find the answer.

Location appears to play a major role, she says, when comparing the percentage of women state legislators in Northern and Western parts of the United States vs. Southern states. “California typically runs a bit higher than average in terms of the percentage of female state legislators. For

instance, in 2007, California ranks 15th with 28.3% of their legislature comprised of women,” she notes.

Taking this information a step further, Scola is examining the socioeconomic factors, institutions, political culture and impact of race and ethnicity within these states to determine their contribution or hindrance to women candidates running for office. “My preliminary findings show that institutions – political organizations, parties, etc. – matter. The more institutions within the state that recruit, train and encourage women to run, the higher the percentage of women in the state legislatures,” she says, information which could prove extremely valuable to organizations within states interested in passing women-specific laws.

Since arriving on campus in 2002, Scola has produced a significant amount of research on the topic, including a forthcoming article in the *Journal of Women, Politics and Policy* entitled, “Women of Color in State Legislatures:

Gender, Race, and Legislative Office Holding.” Her work has earned her numerous awards and accolades, including the 2007 Most Promising Future Faculty Member award – an honor given to just two UC Irvine graduate students this year. Part of the 2007 Celebration of Teaching awards, the honor recognizes her performance and achievements in teaching, research and service.

“Scola does it all – teaching, research and service,” says Mark Petracca, professor and chair of the political science department. “She is absolutely a first-rate teacher and is well on the road to becoming a highly productive and visible scholar.”

After completing her doctorate, Scola plans to pursue a faculty position at a university or community college in Colorado where she and her family have relocated. “This is and always has been an exciting endeavor for me,” she says. “Being able to research, teach and provide service to the academic community is an honor and a privilege that I take very seriously. I hope my contributions inspire the next generation of young scholars.”

Making “Dreams of Education” Come True for Local High School Students



photo courtesy of Kisty Harris

For Luis Lara, attending college “is a dream come true.” Growing up in the border town of Mexicali, Lara vowed he would not succumb to the drug and violence conflicted lifestyle that defined his neighborhood. He turned instead to education.

“When I was younger, I had the opportunity to meet a student from the local Universidad Autonoma de Baja California,” Lara says. Taking Lara under his wing, the student brought Lara into university classrooms to experience first hand what it was like to go to college and develop his own dreams of someday obtaining a degree. “I became fascinated with the study of economics,” he says, noting it’s relevancy to everyday life issues.

When he was sixteen, Lara’s family migrated to the United States so he could continue pursuing his educational goals. Arriving in Anaheim to begin high school, Lara was faced with yet another challenge. “I didn’t speak a word of English,” he says. “It was frustrating because I was placed in very basic courses. I knew the material, but I didn’t know the language.”

With continual guidance and assistance from his mentor and others, Lara overcame this obstacle and eventually found himself completing advanced placement courses and applying to college.

Now a third-year honors economics major at UC Irvine, Lara seeks to serve as a mentor to others and instill the same dreams of education among socio-economic disadvantaged children in Santa Ana community schools. A recipient of the 2007 Donald A. Strauss Public Service Scholarship, Lara has founded “Dreams of Education,” a program that provides mentoring services, academic assistance and college admissions information to students and their parents at local high schools in the Santa Ana community. His goal: to help students – much like himself – realize their higher education potential through consistent interaction and guidance from university mentors.

“There are a number of barriers to entry into college,” Lara says. “For many students, the biggest barrier is not believing in themselves that they can get somewhere.” Lara, who knows a thing or two about overcoming obstacles, hopes to help students

overcome these and other hurdles in their paths so they may pursue their educational goals.

Utilizing student volunteers from UC Irvine, Santa Ana College – where Lara attended community college – and California State University, Fullerton, his “Dreams of Education” program will be established at Saddleback and Santa Ana high schools in fall 2007. “Our goal is to get a working model that we can then implement in local elementary and middle schools,” Lara says, emphasizing the importance of establishing educational aspirations early in life as a means to combat increasingly high dropout rates among adolescent teens. He will also work with the City of Santa Ana, Latino Health Access, Libreria Martinez and other community organizations to help students in the Santa Ana area succeed academically.

“Luis’ ‘Dreams of Education’ has all the key ingredients to inspire our students; successful role models with whom students can relate as well as the commitment of the Santa Ana Unified School District, Santa Ana College, UC Irvine and the entire community of Santa Ana,” says Jane A. Russo, superintendent, SAUSD. “We look forward to working with Luis in supporting our students.”

“Dreams of Education” provides me an opportunity to inspire young people to pursue the path of higher education.

-Luis Lara

In addition to his work with “Dreams of Education,” Lara is a member of the UC Irvine campus wide honors program, a recipient of the Orange County Hispanic Education Endowment Fund Scholarship, and the Engaging Latino Communities for Education Scholarship. He is a mentor with the Santa Ana Transfer Mentorship program, and founder and current president of “The Little School Program,” a community organization designed to assist immigrant men and women in the Anaheim community with English language development skills.





Students Trade In Rest, Relaxation and Rays for Reading, Writing and Arithmetic



photos courtesy of Ellen Schlosser

Summer break is a time for students to kick back and enjoy the three R's of summer – rest, relaxation and soaking up the warm rays of the beautiful Southern California sun. One group of students, however, opted this summer for something different.

Over late night meetings fueled by various forms of take-out food and the sheer energy level only college students are capable of possessing, the students of the School of Social Sciences' Global Connect program could be found diligently creating lesson plans in preparation for the launch of their fall high school curriculum program.

Offered for the past five years in Newport Mesa School District's high schools, Global Connect is a university-led program in which UC Irvine faculty, undergraduate and graduate students bring their knowledge of international issues into high school classrooms in order to better prepare secondary school students to become more informed global citizens.

This fall marks a milestone for Global Connect's high school curriculum program, Global Scope. Covering Newport Mesa's eighteen-week semester, Global Scope will be offered for the first time as part of the school district's formal curriculum.

"It is the unique and open collaboration among faculty, graduate students and undergrads that has fueled the program," says Ellen Schlosser, director of Global Connect and recipient of the 2007 UC Irvine Alumni Association's Lauds & Laurels Award for Outstanding Community Service. "Actively sharing knowledge, time and talents in secondary classrooms has allowed Global Connect to become a catalyst for change. Each member of the team has added their passion and expertise on specific international topics to the program's curriculum base."

As part of the curriculum program, a pilot course on international studies will be introduced at Newport Harbor and Estancia high schools. The five-day-a-week course will highlight specific global issues and their geographic identities. The course structure is being built to allow secondary students the opportunity to learn about global issues through a dynamic bibliography of issue-related readings, challenging writing prompts, expository writing exercises and computer driven projects.

A hallmark of the program's success is the ability of the UC Irvine faculty and students to translate university-level material into age-appropriate lessons for high school students. Co-teaching a lesson this fall on internal conflict, genocide and