



# NEWSLETTER



## OUR MISSION:

To inspire academic excellence and build 21st-century skills that prepare students for college and careers

EST. 1968

### Alumni Words of Wisdom

*"Academic Decathlon taught me how to read more critically, write more clearly, and think more rigorously about a wide range of disciplines. It taught me the value of grit, as my team and I fought together to achieve our common goals despite the different challenges that each event threw at us. But most important, it taught me to always love learning and to be open to new experiences - no matter how scary or difficult they seem."*

**Kevin Li, UC San Diego,  
Woodbridge HS class of 2016**

For more information about the Orange County Academic Decathlon, please visit:  
[www.ocde.us/decathlon](http://www.ocde.us/decathlon)

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## Coach Spotlight: Kressler Nguyen-Valdez



Kressler taking a selfie with her decathletes (2016)

Kressler Nguyen-Valdez, currently teaching biology at Esperanza High School, is in her thirteenth year as a teacher. Twelve of those thirteen years (including the current year) have also been spent coaching Academic Decathlon.

As a high school student, Kressler was always intrigued with Academic Decathlon as an extra-curricular activity but never joined. Coming full circle years later, she was asked by her school administrator if she had an interest in leading the program. Once again intrigued by its possibilities and knowing it was a program that could benefit so many students, she said yes to the opportunity of coaching. Eleven years later she has

consistently been able to field a winning program, accumulating awards including a 2nd-place team award in division two for last year's main competition and a 1st-place team award in division two for last year's "JV" competition. As Kressler enters her twelfth year as a coach, let's just say Esperanza's future looks bright!

Kressler states that "Decathlon brings together students you would not normally find together as a group. They work with students in different grade levels and different GPA categories, finding that they have more in common with each other than they would have thought." Although she understands that the preparation can be exhausting and the commitment at times a struggle, she keeps motivated as a coach by realizing the positive impact of a program that gets her students wanting to learn more outside of the classroom and excited about academic competition. On competition days, Kressler sees the fruits of her coaching labor by witnessing such great energy and comradery from her team of students.

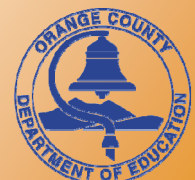
Words of advice from Kressler to new coaches: "Plan a calendar for the semester of what to do and what material to study each day you meet." As a coach who never lets a meeting go to waste, she understands that team bonding is of great importance, also suggesting mixing in fun social activities to help students grow as a team.

As a true advocate for Academic Decathlon, Kressler personally believes in tackling the program with a growth-mindset: "Academic Decathlon, to me, is about making yourself a better person. You learn how to improve your reading/study skills, how to be a better communicator, and how to work with others with different abilities/interests. You make connections and build relationships that last beyond high school. Ultimately, you become a better version of yourself."

Thank you, Kressler, for being a true leader, gifted educator and inspiring Academic Decathlon coach!

### In This Issue

- Coach Spotlight: Kressler Nguyen-Valdez
- The History of OCAD
- OCAD Donation and Volunteer Opportunities
- OCAD Student Survey Data



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## OCAD: Made by History While Making History

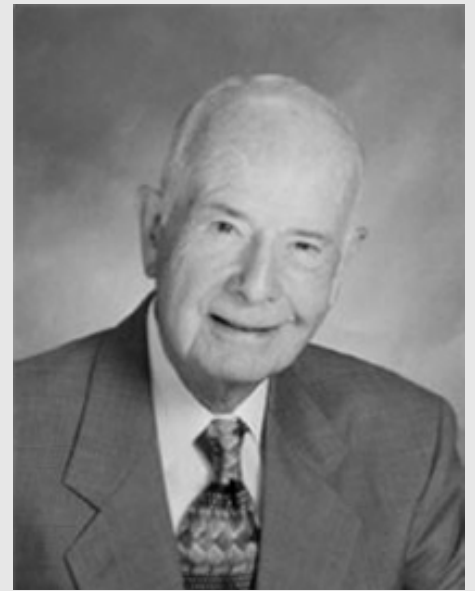
Did you know that the Academic Decathlon in Orange County is heading into its golden age? Yes, in 2018, OCAD will turn 50 years old! That is 50 years of preparing students for college and beyond by challenging students in, as Dr. Robert Peterson would call it “a contest of academic strength.”

Who is Dr. Peterson, you ask? He is the beginning of OCAD’s storied history and the reason why such a competition that celebrates academics exists, not just in Orange County, but throughout the nation. So, let’s continue the celebration by sharing OCAD’s history.

“There ought to be more rallies and academic activities for all students,” were notes hand written in pencil, found in the late Dr. Robert Peterson’s belongings. Peterson was a B-17 pilot in World War II who was shot down over Italy and became a German Prisoner of War in Austria for 18 months. History tells us the concept for the Academic Decathlon was created in a German concentration camp. How apropos for this article, as this year’s curriculum theme is focused on World War II. Let’s continue!

Appointed Superintendent of Orange County schools in 1966, Peterson sought to establish an idea called an Academic Decathlon. It would include high school students, regardless of their grade-point averages. The aim was to get the average student to participate and work up to his/her potential. By 1968, these small pocket journals written in pencil in a concentration camp were transformed into an Academic Decathlon competition.

In 1968, the first Academic Decathlon was held in Orange County, California. In 1979, the California Academic Decathlon was established as a formal organization. In 1981, the United States Academic Decathlon was established as a formal national organization. In April, 1982, the first United States Academic Decathlon (USAD) was held with eighteen states participating. Since 1968, the Academic Decathlon has grown into the premier scholastic competition in the United States, while even hosting a number of international teams. To this day, the program hosts schools in 41 states as well as the United Kingdom, Canada, the United Arab Emirates, and China. *Article continued on page 3 of the OCAD newsletter.*



Dr. Robert Peterson  
Father of Academic Decathlon

### Volunteer Now! Here’s How...

*Do you want to help hard-working and dedicated teens achieve their scholastic goals? Do you want to utilize your personal and professional skills in a fast-paced and engaging volunteer opportunity?*

If so, please visit the OCAD website [www.ocde.us/decathlon](http://www.ocde.us/decathlon) and click on “**Volunteer Information**” to learn more about our opportunities and to register as a volunteer.

***We hope to see you at the 49th Annual  
Orange County Academic Decathlon!***

### Donate Now! Here’s How...

**Option 1:** Donate online at [www.ocde.us/decathlon](http://www.ocde.us/decathlon). Click our “Donate” button on the right side of the page.

*Note: You do not need to set-up a PayPal account to donate online.*

**Option 2:** Download our Champions for OCAD brochure online at [www.ocde.us/decathlon](http://www.ocde.us/decathlon). Click on the brochure link and fill out the form.

**Option 3:** Corporate sponsorship opportunities are also available, which include various levels of recognition for your organization.

For more information please contact:

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714.966.4435 or [kriquiry@ocde.us](mailto:kriquiry@ocde.us).

*you can make a*  
**DIFFERENCE.**

### Important Volunteer Dates for 2017

#### **Interview or Speech Judge**

January 28 2017 —Tustin High School  
Registration: <http://day1ocad.eventbrite.com>

#### **Classroom Test or Super Quiz Proctor**

February 4, 2017 —Westminster High School  
Registration: <http://day2ocad.eventbrite.com>



## Continued from OCAD: Made by History While Making History

The Academic Decathlon continues its long-standing tradition as a program that fosters a deep respect for critical thinking, collaboration, and student engagement. It is also a program making history by focusing on history, as each year students are entrenched in a theme and asked to look at it from the perspective of seven different subject areas. Beyond the pages of the curriculum, students are also challenged to build their communication skills through giving a speech, participating in an interview, and organizing their thoughts on paper in an essay. It is because of the efforts and excellence of the program's dedicated decathletes that Dr. Peterson's legacy thrives. 50 years, here we come!



The exciting live-audience Super Quiz Relay then and now! Left: 1973, Bolsa Grande High School. Right: 2016, Westminster High School.

## Our Mission Celebrated in Numbers!

The mission of OCAD is to inspire academic excellence and build 21st century skills that prepare students for college and career. Last year we reported our first annual results from our student surveys that assessed the program's impact on student engagement and developing 21st century skills in the areas of communication, critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, and positive character traits. The results are in for our second annual student survey and it's easy to see that our program continues its positive impact! Check out the graphics below for the results of our 2015-2016 OCAD Student Survey.



**88%**

of students reported that the program improved skills in **critical thinking**



**95%**

of students reported that the program improved skills in **communication**

**91%**

of students reported the development of **stronger character traits**



**94%**

of students reported that the program improved skills in **team work**



**70%**

of students reported that the program improved skills in **creativity**

In addition to the **Five C's**, survey results showed that...

**92%**

of students reported that the program helped them to **build relationships with their peers**

**90%**

of students reported that the program helped them to **become more involved at school**