‘Dune’ exhibit a collaborative effort

A chemist, an illustrator and two librarians walk into a bar...

It sounds like the beginning of a joke, but in fact it’s the true story of an inspiring collaboration at Cal State Fullerton that has resulted in the just-launched exhibit and speakers series celebrating the 50th anniversary of the publication of Frank Herbert’s classic science fiction novel, “Dune.” (Well, a true story, minus the bar.)

“It was luck,” said Scott Hewitt, interim university librarian and professor of chemistry at Cal State Fullerton. He was sitting in his office in Pollak Library discussing the origins of the idea for the 50th anniversary. The “luck” he alluded to was a series of serendipitous events that placed him – a lifelong Frank Herbert fan – into a leadership position just when the 50th anniversary of “Dune” was right around the corner.

Hewitt already knew that the library housed a vast collection of Herbert’s materials in our University Archives and Special Collections, including some eight boxes of typescript carbon leaves documenting first drafts of what eventually became the “Dune” books, as well as personal correspondence and early manuscripts of dozens of Herbert’s other short stories and novels, some of them unpublished to this day.

The confluence of these three elements was auspicious, and it ignited the spark of an idea. From that spark has emerged the largest program ever put on by Pollak Library – and one of the most expansive community, cross-divisional and cross-disciplinary collaborations at Cal State Fullerton in recent years.

Planning for the Dune 50th Anniversary Celebration has been spearheaded by Hewitt (the chemist), Cliff Cramp (the illustrator/art curator), and Patricia Prestinary and Trish Campbell (the librarians: curator and project coordinator, respectively), and has involved 20 faculty and staff members and administrators from II academic departments, two institutional centers, two library departments and the Division of Information Technology; approximately 20 students; one alumna; and several community partners. The final program will involve seminars, speakers, panel discussions, a Fullerton Arboretum walking tour, a writing workshop for students, an extensive library exhibit, screenings of “Dune” movies and the TV miniseries and even a “Dune” costume contest. (I can’t be the only one who’s hoping to spot a sandworm or two...)

“Part of what’s so beautiful about ‘Dune’ is that you can look at it from so many different angles,” Hewitt points out. Indeed, the topics covered in the program range from the impact of “Dune” over five decades (in a lecture by Kevin J. Anderson, co-author of the “Dune” prequel series with Frank Herbert’s son Brian) to an exploration of how plants affect our planet’s weather (in a talk by Cal State Fullerton’s own Jo Chen Schenk, associate professor of biological science). The harsh desert landscape of the setting in “Dune,” the fictional planet Arrakis, is a subject of particular relevance – and urgency – given the ongoing drought crisis in California.

Also impressive are the contributions of five illustration students, three library exhibit student assistants, two library marketing student assistants, one special collections student assistant, and students in the Science Fiction and Fantasy Club, all of whom have used their time, talent and energy to elevate the “Dune” program planning into a High-Impact Practice – an experiential laboratory, where they can apply the skills learned in their majors to real-world challenges.

While our institution is no stranger to cross-disciplinary collaboration, rarely do such endeavors encompass so broad a scope. The fact that these events and exhibitions are free and open to the public highlights Cal State Fullerton’s commitment to welcoming
our local community into an enriched educational fold.

With this program, Cal State Fullerton is once again proving our relevance to today's most pressing literary, social and political issues, and reinforcing our role as an intellectual and cultural center for Orange County.

So, was it luck that got us here? Perhaps, in part. But mainly what I see is hard work, dedication, and the passion of an entire campus community coming together to honor and celebrate a beloved piece of our national past through the lens of our collective future.

I hope you'll join us.

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Full list of programs at: library.fullerton.edu/

visiting/programs/2015-dune-50th-anniversary/index.php

Exhibit information at: library.fullerton.edu/visiting/exhibits/exhibit-2015-dune.php

José Luis Cruz is CSUF's provost and vice president for academic affairs. He holds a doctorate in electrical engineering from the Georgia Institute of Technology.

Pollak Library through Dec. 23 is hosting events to mark the 50th anniversary of the science fiction book "Dune."