Histories of the Boise Valley
are a veritable who’s who of early
movers and shakers. Names like
Morrison, Simplot, Albertson and
Pierce dot places and spaces
throughout the City of Trees.
But the city wasn’t founded
on wealth alone. Hidden in the
shadows of the socially elite were
the vulnerable and marginalized
populations that helped define the
valley — in good ways and bad.
"The Other Idahoans: Forgotten
Stories of the Boise Valley" tells
the stories of alternative
cultures relegated to the fringes —
the prostitutes of Levy’s Alley,
Japanese immigrants
working on the Oregon Short
Line railroad, poor farmers
struggling to scrape by, families
touched by pandemic, women
incarcerated for minor crimes,
and miners betting personal
safety against an ounce of gold.
Through a series of short
essays, their stories are told
at last.
The book, edited by
historian Todd Shallat, was
collaboratively written by
participants in Boise State’s
annual urban studies field
school, hosted by the School of
Public Service. It is part of the
Investigate Boise Community
Research Series, which
publishes fact-based essays of
popular scholarship concerning
the problems and values that
shape metropolitan growth.
"Narratives bond us," Shallat said.
"But many narratives have been shut out
of the historical record. That’s a problem
because when we glorify success it
hinders our capacity to deal with current
issues. We wanted to look at those who didn’t make it
and use their stories to make us
think more deeply and
understand the city.”
“Pol Sci Fi: An Introduction to Political Science through Science Fiction”
Edited by Dr. Michael Allen and Dr. Justin Vaughn

Michael Allen and Justin Vaughn have boldly gone where no one has gone before, or at least, no political science faculty. Their book, “Pol Sci Fi: An Introduction to Political Science through Science Fiction,” is a collection of essays explaining core discipline concepts through the lens of popular science fiction films or television episodes.

The book’s emphasis on science fiction speaks to the popularity of the genre as well as to how a shared understanding of popular culture can be democratizing and make difficult concepts in politics and society more accessible.

The authors said there is a natural link between political science and science fiction. Both wrestle with phenomenon important to each individual life, and both provide unique perspectives to questions of power, justice and institutions we have — and should have — in society.

“Pol Sci Fi” tackles topics like beauracracy (“Futurama”), civil war (“Star Wars: A New Hope”), identity and race (“The Hunger Games”), inter-state relations (“Ender’s Game”), political ideology (“Divergent”) and gender politics (“Battlestar Galactica”), among others. Chapters were submitted by political scientists from across the country.

“Science fiction highlights how changing a variable or technology can affect how we behave as humans,” Allen said. “It makes us ask, ‘Is this how we expect humans to respond? Does it coincide with what we know?’”

The pair expect the book to appeal to students as well as general readers with an interest in political science, justice and a sense of adventure.

In an increasingly digital age, it’s no surprise that online dating sites are growing in popularity. A recent Pew Research Center poll showed 15 percent of adults say they’ve used the sites. But how do they work, and do they all work the same?

Dawn Shepherd, associate professor of English and associate director of the First-Year Writing Program, tackles these questions and more in her book that looks at online dating in relation to the larger culture.

In an age where more and more households are headed by single adults, Shepherd said that the idea of dating and marriage still gets people to think about adulthood and transitioning out of their parents’ homes. And the most popular sites are geared toward lifelong relationships, keeping at least the idea of marriage at the center of American culture.

Using the premise that we don’t really “search” for information on the internet, but instead are “paired” with relevant information, she delved into how questionnaires for various sites focus on different aspects of a client’s life and values, including how they describe themselves and how they establish and maintain information. As “matches” come in, how do people respond? And how do those responses affect future “matches?”

Shepherd compared various sites, such as eHarmony and Match.com, to see what went on behind the curtain. Each site has unique values integrated into the questionnaire and varies in how search results are paired.

The U.S. is in high cotton on the world stage thanks to its agricultural subsidies on this lucrative crop. Cotton brings in about $5 billion annually, and U.S. sales account for around 30 percent of the total export market globally.

But in 2003, Brazil called foul, claiming that U.S. subsidies gave it an unfair advantage that hurt developing countries by skewing the market. The World Trade Organization (WTO) ruled against the United States in both the original suit and on appeal in 2009. In 2010, the two countries reached a settlement agreement where the U.S. paid $300 million to the Brazilian Cotton Institute.

The story of that dispute and the ongoing effects of the United States’ cotton dominance is detailed in Meredith Taylor Black’s book “King Cotton in International Trade,” the only comprehensive study of the dispute.

Published in June 2016, the book evaluates the efficacy of the new trade system that grew out of the landmark agreement and its effect on global economies, offering legal, economic, political, historical and ethical analysis.

“Cotton accounts for 2 percent of the agricultural output for the United States, but more than 22 percent of all agricultural subsidies,” said Taylor Black, who holds a juris doctorate in addition to her Ph.D. in the area of WTO law. Because of the settlement, “billions now go to farmers as subsidies and to Brazil not to fight it. This defined a legal precedent regarding subsidies.”

Student Success is at the Heart of Education Research

In today’s competitive world, it’s imperative that we prepare our kids to be independent and critical thinkers who not only know how to learn, but understand why it matters.

The United States has one of the highest high school dropout rates in the world, and the U.S. Department of Education reports that nearly half of those who graduate from high school and go on to college need remedial courses. The Program for International Assessment ranks the United States 27th out of 34 countries in math and 20th in science.

At Boise State, we believe that our kids deserve better. The research highlighted in this issue of EXPLORE magazine is helping to improve teaching and learning in K-12 classrooms, particularly in the crucial areas of science, technology, engineering and math. Currently, only 40 percent of fourth-graders are proficient in math. By the time they reach eighth grade, that number drops to 33 percent. We’re striving to change that.

Hard data shows that preparing future teachers to engage kids in the learning process, and making sure they understand what children need both physically and emotionally to be successful, can transform the educational process. The research coming out of our College of Education touches on all aspects of the learning process and is providing solid data to help inform important policy decisions.

I’m confident that with the help of these inspirational education researchers, our future is in good hands.

- DR. MARK RUDIN, VICE PRESIDENT FOR RESEARCH AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT