

**Director Emerita and Founding Director, University of Guam  
Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities (CEDDERS)  
Professor Emerita, University of Guam SEPRS  
Full-time affiliation with UOG: 1988-2019;  
Emeritus Professor Director 2019-present**

**Forgotten No More: The University of Guam Missions  
and CEDDERS National Center of Excellence:  
Serving the 15% who have disabilities on Guam  
and in rural/remote Pacific Islands**

***Personal Background:***

Born in Minnesota and raised in Western Pennsylvania, Dr. Heidi San Nicolas has advocated for and served the community of Guam for 35 years; half of the history of the University of Guam. The 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of UOG coincides with the 70<sup>th</sup> birthday year of her husband, Dr. Gregorio C. San Nicolas, and also marks their 35<sup>th</sup> year of marriage. Undoubtedly, Heidi's greatest legacies are their three adult children: Alexander, Aaron and Austen. Her fourth legacy is her work in the area of disability as a faculty member, administrator, friend, champion to individuals with disabilities, and founding Director of UOG's Center for Excellence in Disabilities.

Heidi's life focus has always focused on serving people with disabilities. This includes people who were born with a developmental disability, acquired it as a result of illness or the aging process, experienced as a result of an accident, or as a result of injuries while providing service to our nation as members of the military and armed forces. Recently, the World Health Organization (WHO) estimated in 2021 (November 24, 2021, [www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets](http://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets)) that worldwide, 15% of the population have a disability. This number encompasses over 1 billion people. She firmly believes that our society is enriched through the full participation of all of its members. As eloquently stated by Mahatma Gandhi, "The true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members."

Dr. San Nicolas has a unique gift of conceptualizing and viewing the world through a macro-planning perspective, while implementing necessary micro-planning steps needed to effectively achieve her goals. She is a passionate proponent of the value of an interdisciplinary approach to problem solving, teaching, research, and service as the best model for serving the needs of all. Heidi embodies a lifespan approach to disability, working with individuals at all ages, all types of disabilities, and all abilities within international, state, territorial and regional environments. She is both innovative and accountable, thinking outside of the box, and designing creative and unique solutions. Heidi accomplishes all this while giving careful attention to the proper use of secured funding, resulting in clean audits and expressed confidence by funding agencies, including federal government and other funders confidence that resources are well-managed.

A leader is only as good as people who work together for the common good. Heidi was honored by UOG President and Academic Vice President for her "inspired leadership" on an anniversary of UAP/CEDDERS. Ascribing to a servant-leader philosophy, Dr. San Nicolas

always credits the entire CEDDERS team for its success in carrying out the mission of “Creating partnerships and pathways to increase the quality of life of individuals with disabilities and their families”.

***Academic Background:***

Dr. Heidi San Nicolas defended her Ph.D. at University of Pittsburgh in late 1987 and graduated in 1988. During her doctoral program, she was elected as President of the University-wide Graduate Student body in 1984. She served on the University of Pittsburgh Provost’s Task Force on Planning 1985 and was recipient of the prestigious Alumni Award and Dissertation Research Awards. Dr. San Nicolas’ dissertation findings were published and nationally disseminated by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting Service (PBS). Dr. San Nicolas served as Departmental Senior Teaching Fellow and Research Associate at the University of Pittsburgh on several federal grants; skills that served her well as she moved to Guam and secured over 143 million dollars in federal funding for University of Guam. This funding also enabled her to hire over 240 individuals including faculty, staff and student employees to support the mission of CEDDERS.

Between 1981-1984, Heidi facilitated services for preschool children with disabilities at a developmental center, taught primary school (Elementary) in Birmingham, England (with largely first generation Indian and Pakistani children); taught elementary school in an inner city school in the Wilksburg area outside Pittsburgh; supported deaf/blind K-12 children as a teacher of the visually impaired at the Pennsylvania State School for Blind Children; and implemented school survival skills, training, and conducted research with high school students with learning and behavioral disabilities in the Pittsburgh Public Schools while implementing a large federal grant to the University of Pittsburgh.

Heidi San Nicolas served in university teaching and research roles from 1984-1988 at the University of Pittsburgh, Duquesne University, and the Community College of Allegheny County (CCAC) prior to accepting a tenure-track appointment at the University of Guam. She also worked with students with learning disabilities at the CCAC and Duquesne University. Heidi served as the assessment coordinator for Western Pennsylvania’s adult literacy initiative, working for the Allegheny County Health Welfare and Planning Division. In 1986 and 1987 she served as the coordinator of the Pennsylvania Governor’s School for the Gifted for International Studies.

In 1988 Heidi was recruited to Guam to serve as liaison for the Guam Interagency Coordinating Council for Infants and Young Children with Disabilities. She worked under the Guam Department of Education Division of Special Education. During this time, she was an adjunct faculty for UOG in the Psychology Department, and taught in-service disability related courses for teachers, related service providers (Speech/OT/PT) and school psychologists. She established the Pediatric Evaluation and Developmental Services Center at UOG in 1988 and oversaw the Center for several decades through subcontracts from DOE to UAP/CEDDERS.

In 1989, Dr. San Nicolas accepted a tenure-track faculty position with the College of Education at University of Guam. Dr. San Nicolas was quickly promoted to Associate Professor at UOG in 1992, achieved tenured in 1993, and earned promotion to Full Professor in 1995. Heidi’s desire was to earn promotion to associate, tenure, and full professor so she could then commit all of her efforts to her life calling: evolving and elevating the quality of life for people with disabilities on Guam, and in the Pacific region. She trained and taught professionals to serve individuals with disabilities, bringing needed resources to the community to extend clinical

supports, technology supports, and provide avenues for program evaluation and research that lead to better outcomes for individuals with disabilities and their families.

Heidi began work to establish the University Affiliated Program (now CEDDERS) at UOG in 1990 and 1991, and in December of 1992 secured initial funding for the UAP for Guam. Over Valentine's Day weekend in 1993, the Pacific Basin UAP located in Guam, CNMI and American Samoa was officially launched. In 1995, Dr. San Nicolas and her colleagues at UAP/CEDDERS secured separate and full funding as a nationally recognized Center of Excellence funding for the Guam UAP/CEDDERS following a federal site visit, and funding of a competitive grant application to the US Department of Health and Human Services. Heidi served as Director of CEDDERS until her retirement on Sept. 30, 2019. During her tenure as Director, Dr. San Nicolas secured over 143 million dollars in external funding to the UOG to support service, teaching, and research missions related to the field of disability. Heidi San Nicolas served as Principal Investigator for dozens of grants and was an economic driver in providing employment to more than 240 individuals. Funding secured by Dr. San Nicolas and the CEDDERS team also supported over thirty students through employment opportunities as research assistants; office assistants; and media and technical support staff; enhancing internship and service-learning opportunities for students from a wide variety of majors at UOG.

In recognition of University of Guam teaching excellence, she was awarded the University wide Faculty Award for Excellence in Teaching in 1992. In recognition of excellence in service to the university and community at large, Dr. San Nicolas was awarded the UOG University-wide Faculty Award for Excellence in Service in 1995. Dr. Heidi San Nicolas was also nominated numerous times for the UOG Administrator of the Year award.

Dr. San Nicolas presented at local, regional, national and international conferences including those held in Japan, Australia, South Africa, France, The USA, Guam, Federated States of Micronesia, Palau and American Samoa. She represented Guam at the United Nations (UN), World Health Organization (WHO) Summit on Aging and Disabilities in Geneva, Switzerland and was an invited presenter in Tsukuba City, Japan at an international disability Asia-pacific convention.

Service as a Federal Grant Reviewer across several health and education agencies continues to this day. Heidi thoroughly enjoys mentoring new faculty, and faculty serving in minority institutions. Over the years, Dr. San Nicolas was affiliated with Project Alliance at the University of New Mexico, Project 2000 at Vanderbilt University, and Project Monarch at University of Illinois-Chicago serving as a Mentor for faculty at minority institutions and providing technical support in the fine art of grantsmanship. She also mentored 5 Ph.D. candidates through completion; three of whom later served in faculty roles at UOG. She recently has mentored other Ph.D. level students still pursuing their degrees. Heidi chaired and or served on more than two dozen master's degree committees at UOG. She assisted other UOG units by serving on various committees, councils and review boards, including as one example, ten years as a member of the Internal Advisory Board of the UOG/University of Hawaii Cancer Grants.

Dr. San Nicolas served under seven Presidents at UOG: Leon Guerrero, Salas, Guthertz, Tsuda, Allen, Underwood, and Krise, and a similar number of AVP's and SVP's. Heidi was tasked with serving on numerous WASC review teams, response teams, and writing teams in addition to several President-initiated planning and reorganization task forces.

Heidi and her CEDDERS team partnered with more than two dozen higher education institutions through formal MOU's and MOA's for the delivery of instruction, research, technical assistance, and clinical support. She along with her staff established a Teleaudiology Program,

bringing audiology support to young children with hearing impairment during a time when no audiologists were available on island. She partnered with National Rehabilitation Hospital and Children's Hospital in Washington, DC through a Rehabilitation Services Administration project to provide telerehabilitation services, and related equipment that was set up at GSAT. She partnered in providing support to children with orthopedic disabilities through telemedicine supports with Shriners's Hospital and University of Hawaii. She served as campus director for a federally funded LEND project at the University of Hawaii School of Medicine providing advanced training to professionals on Guam in the area of neurological and developmental disabilities. For more than 25 years, Dr. San Nicolas served as the principal investigator for the GSAT federal grant providing assistive technology demonstrations and loans of equipment to those with disabilities. She and her staff partnered with the Wheelchair Foundation of America and were able to bring a donation of hundreds of wheelchairs that distributed by GSAT staff at CEDDERS.

Dr. San Nicolas also served as PI for federal grants over more than 17 years from HRSA and CDC in the area of newborn hearing screening and facilitated the testing of every child born on Guam (approximately 3,000 per year) since 2002. Heidi and her team developed and had approved as courses, an interdisciplinary curriculum for disability training to be utilized in university training programs as well as in community-based training. She secured federal grants for numerous speech pathology/audiology programs, wrote and served as PI for an interpreter training for the deaf grant, and secured funding for, and taught in a regional master's degree program in Special Education offered on site in Pohnpei, FSM, secured funding from SDSU Rehabilitation grant for a concentration in rehabilitation at the graduate level, and secured funding from Guam DOE/Special Education for a concentration in early childhood special education at the Master's level.

Dr. San Nicolas and her team provided support for regional assessment projects and instructional materials projects that served both Guam and regional entities. Heidi and her staff provided support to self-advocacy organizations in Guam, parent organizations, and assisted with the preparation of grant applications that led to several community-based programs being funded. CEDDERS has the longest, continuously published disability newsletter on Guam, *I Tellai*, published for 25 years each quarter since 1991. The UOG CEDDERS website, [WWW.GUAMCEDDERS.ORG](http://WWW.GUAMCEDDERS.ORG) has an expansive collection of disability-related research, publications, technical assistance, training, and services offered over the past 30 years. Committed to linguistic and cultural diversity, many of CEDDERS documents and resources have been translated into different languages spoken in Guam and in the Western Pacific.

Over the decades, Dr. San Nicolas served as Principal Investigator for many regionally based training and technical assistance projects that provided outreach to Guam, CNMI, FSM, Palau, Marshall Islands, and American Samoa. She and her team formed lasting relationships and built trust as valued partners in the delivery of training and technical assistance across cultures and languages in the Western Pacific.

***Year UOG Employment Began/Year Ended/Duration of UOG Employment:***

Began in August of 1988 as adjunct professor in Psychology and on a contract to establish the Pediatric Evaluation and Developmental Services Center at UOG; offered a tenure track position under the College of Education in August of 1989. Was asked to co-chair the Social Work program in 1990-91 when program was unexpectedly left with no faculty. Retired on September 30, 2019. Tenure of employment at UOG: 31 years. Years of relationship with

UOG: 35. Note, this includes contractual appointments, independent contract work before full-time hire, after retirement, and full-time appointments.

***Highest Academic Rank You Held & Major Field/Academic or Administrative Position(s) at the time of retirement:***

Academic Rank- Full Professor of Education

UOG Administrative Position- Director of CEDDERS; an interdisciplinary center at UOG, and nationally designated Center of Excellence.

***How were you recruited by UOG? What in particular brought you to UOG?***

I was recruited by Dean George Boughton of the UOG College of Arts and Sciences to teach courses under the Psychology Department as an adjunct professor. I was simultaneously asked by the Acting Dean of the School of Education to establish an interagency diagnostic evaluation center for children ages 0-3 in 1987-88, titled "The Children's Developmental Services Center". My work included securing MOU's between UOG and the Guam Department of Education, and Guam Department of Public Health and Social Services, preparing position announcement for a Director of this center, and facilitating the move of a room-sized Audiology booth, DPHSS Audiologist and DPHSS Speech Pathologist from DPHSS to UOG. I was under contract with UOG to facilitate the establishment of this interdisciplinary center.

During the same period of time, I was recruited to fill a tenure track position in Special Education under the College of Education. I filled the vacated position of Dr. Ron Smith upon his retirement. We decided in 1987 to return to Guam in 1988 so my husband, Dr. Gregorio San Nicolas could fulfill obligations under his Professional/Technical scholarship from UOG. Gregg served as Department Chair, then as Acting Dean of the School of Education and was selected for the Deanship after a national search and offered the position. Instead, he moved into the Executive Director Position of the Guam Teacher Corps program where he provided leadership for several years, wrote a large federal grant to support the Teacher Corps program, and later retired from Government of Guam before moving to the Department of Defense Schools on Guam.

***What UOG was like at the time of the beginning of your employment as you remember?***

When I first saw the UOG campus in 1988 I cried – but these were not tears of joy. I was coming from the research-focused University of Pittsburgh, its 42-story Cathedral of Learning, beautifully constructed colleges and extensively funded departments serving over thirty-five thousand students, and eleven thousand graduate students. By comparison, UOG was tiny, humble, lacking technology support, had buildings that were literally falling apart, with little funds or focus on research. Its beauty was derived almost solely by being cliffside real estate, overlooking the expansive deep blue of the Pacific. I could not fathom how quality teaching, research and service could take place here, and realized immediately that UOG's future would be dependent upon nothing short of revolution and revitalization.

Some of the administrators and faculty on campus had attitudes that were less than welcoming and showed a lack of vision and commitment that things could and should be better at the University of Guam. Rather than recognizing the University needed to be proactive in improving the campus to better serve students and the community, and in creating an atmosphere of research and scholarly pursuit, I was told that the crumbling campus, issues with electricity

and phones, and lack of “microcomputers” for faculty were all a part of “the price you pay to live in paradise”.

Back then, the world lacked many technologies we take for granted today, such as email, cell phones, and the Internet. Landline phones were essential for communications, and at the time GTA would tell its customers that a three-month wait for your landline to be connected was considered “quick”. I quickly learned that if you knew someone, this could be done within a week, and I was fortunate to “know” someone to connect my home telephone in fewer than three months. We were also still using typewriters, and ditto master machines (a kind of copier that you had to press and roll to make duplicate papers) at UOG, which at the time were far from the “microcomputers” (predecessors to desktops and laptops) that were the peak of consumer technology at the time. To give you an idea of what we were working with, about 2,000 microcomputers at the time would barely compare with the power of one iPhone 13 today.

As I arrived on campus, UOG had just gone through a devastatingly poor WASC review. Recent changes in the Presidency led to the appointment of President Dr. Wilfred Leon Guerrero, who was tasked with moving the University forward. President Leon Guerrero led UOG out of sanctions by WASC. Fortunately, leadership from President Wilfred Leon Guerrero, and his relationship with the Governor Joseph Ada also led to a significant facility master plan, addressing much needed new buildings, renovations, and upgrades to technology. Governor Ada’s implementation of a \$5,440.00 salary increase (about \$12,800 today adjusted for inflation) for all Government of Guam employees, including UOG, dramatically increased UOG’s ability to attract and maintain quality faculty and staff. Nearly all of the buildings built on at UOG during the past 35 years were as a result of President Leon Guerrero’s planning in the late 80’s and early 90’s. Gradually, the practice of awarding administrative positions to very young and unseasoned folks, with barely minted Ph.D.’s, subsided and UOG began to right itself. It began to function as a University should, bolstered by facilities improvements evidenced by new buildings, needed renovations, and expanded access to technology.

The UOG campus when I arrived included the Science Building; Fine Arts Building; Field House; Student Center; Library; Buildings A, B and C; an old student center building; the Administration Building; Marine Lab; Dean Circle houses; and the Dormitories. A year or two after my hire, a faculty lounge/CCEOP (Continuing Education and Outreach) building was constructed next to the Administration Building (that currently houses the Business Office). This CCEOP/Faculty Lounge building was blown down during a typhoon about a semester after it was constructed. To address the lack of technology supports, faculty in the School of Education, located in Building B under the leadership of Acting Dean Dr. Gregg San Nicolas, with faculty member Dr. Don Shuster as PI, wrote a Title III, federally funded “Institutional Strengthening Grant” that led to the funding of microcomputers for each faculty in the College. Building C (a mostly wood and tin-roofed building) was torn down, as was the old student center located next to the Administration Building where the Business Office is located today. The new College of Agriculture Building was constructed during this time as well. Around 1997, the new College of Education building was completed, and Building B, made of concrete was demolished. Soon after, the Computer Center/MARC building, and the new English and Humanities Buildings were constructed. Later, Building A, also concrete was demolished, and the School of Business was constructed.

When I first arrived, registration for courses was done, *en mass*, over a two-day period at the UOG Fieldhouse. Each department and college had a table, with faculty or a department chair and the Dean of the School or College and staff available to manually register students for

courses. As classes filled, administrators would add new sections. When technology was enhanced however, registration became decentralized, and to this day I sometimes reflect on how efficient the old system of registration was, with students having access to program faculty, chairs, deans and the registrar in the same location.

***Your legacies are sought to be remembered as part of the 70-year history of UOG:***

The Legacy of CEDDERS/UAP as described in earlier sections is my most significant contribution and legacy to UOG. I was the first professor to teach a UOG credit bearing course via single side band radio. This course was supported by funding from a Title III Institutional Strengthening Grant and was broadcast to the Federated States of Micronesia. I also contributed to the Title III Grant that brought “microcomputers” to the College of Education, and later utilized the PEACE-SAT for technical assistance and follow up instructional support when I coordinated the offering of the M.Ed. in Special Education off site in Pohnpei (approved by WASC). Over the years, I served as Graduate Program Chair of SOE and supported the reformulation of the SOE Graduate Programs reducing credit requirements from 45 to 36 credits to update the programs and make each more competitive. I also served as Chair of the University-Wide Graduate Council, chaired and served on the UOG Board of Regents Nominating Council for many years, served on Administrative Council, Faculty Council and many dozens of committees and councils of UOG over the decades. Mentoring new doctoral level faculty in grantsmanship and providing opportunities for faculty to become active in grantsmanship was a fruitful activity. Over the decades, I expanded facilities in Dean Circle including finding the funding for, and securing major expansions of Houses 22/23, 19/20, 18, and 17. I established the CEDDERS fund under UOG Foundation and raised approximately 100K to be used towards a new facility, endowed Chair, or special research projects for CEDDERS. I contracted for the design of a new CEDDERS/Triton Engagement Center Building to be located on the cliffside at Dean Circle and look forward to seeing this proposed building be completed during my lifetime.

***Academic Awards, Special Professional Recognitions:***

Dr. San Nicolas received the UOG Faculty Award for Excellence in Teaching, the UOG Faculty Award for Excellence in Service, numerous Guam Legislative Resolutions, one US Congressional resolution, and numerous recognitions from the Office of the Governor of Guam. In serving as Principal Investigator for over 143 million dollars in external funding, Dr. Heidi San Nicolas had a perfect audit history. During her 31 years of full-time service to UOG, she had no EEO complaints filed and no grievances filed against her or her unit; a testament to good stewardship of resources and good management of personnel.

***Special Colleagues, Students, and Staff as well as Administrators to be remembered:***

- Dearest Colleague and Mali, Professor Emerita Lourdes Klitzkie, Ph.D. whom I had the pleasure of working with, revising program courses with, publishing with, and presenting with in Australia, Namibia and other glorious places!
- The world’s best Associate Directors, June DeLeon (now Interim Director) and Teresita Fejarang who served with honor and great leadership in making CEDDERS what it is today.
- All CEDDERS staff over the years from the Ph.D. level to the Student Office Assistant level, you all are the best.

- To my right and left administrative and fiscal support arms for decades, Jef Limtiaco and Dolores Cruz, and to Brenda Leon Guerrero who was with me from the beginning as UAP/CEDDERS began.
- Maria Mabayag, Ann Delgado, & Remy Babauta Cristobal who were staff at the College of Education during my early years in the late 80's and 90's and as Remy transitioned into leadership as Registrar & Acting Dean of Students.
- Custodial and Plant Maintenance Staff including custodian Martha (RIP) and electrician Brian (RIP).
- Bruce Best, one of UOG's unsung heroes, quiet champion, and true key to UOG's regional presence through his many years as the Director of PEACE-SAT.
- Business Office Staff (including Nancy Cueto whom I recruited over to CEDDERS)/Payroll Staff and HRO including Larry Gamboa (RIP) and Vice Presidents for Finance Mark Heath and Dave O'Brien should be commended for keeping UOG afloat during various times of financial peril.
- UOG Leadership at the Dean, Vice President for Academic Affairs and Research/Sponsored Programs levels, and at the President level; all of whom gave me the opportunity to create, implement, and leave as a legacy, a solid and important unit at UOG that epitomizes the University's core missions while addressing one of the highest need populations on Guam. Revisiting Mahatma Gandhi's words of wisdom, "The true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members."

***Public Service and Engagements to be remembered:***

Served as faculty in Education, Psychology and Social Work. Served numerous appointments as Acting Dean, Acting Academic Vice President, Acting Senior Vice President. Chaired and served on the Board of Regents Nominating Committee for many years. Supported a federal hearing/input session on the Reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act on Guam. Was a delegate to the United Nations WHO Summit on Aging and Disabilities held in Geneva, Switzerland. Served as invited speaker to numerous conferences including an Asian Pacific convention in Tskuba City, Japan.

***Your advice or Words of Wisdom for current and future professors or administrators:***

An interdisciplinary focus will more fully address nearly every community, research and teaching objective. Challenges in society require broad understanding and expertise from a collective team of scholars. Within a developing community, there is little patience for esoteric research. Academic leaders and faculty must focus the university's teaching, community development/outreach and research to directly support the community through engaged partnerships. Building on relationships forged through true community engagement, research will then become a driver of improved teaching and service. Don't major in the minors! Keep an eye on long term visions focused on those whom you serve and on finding pathways that enhance successful outcomes. It is all about relationships and the pursuit of truth and good citizenship.

***Year you joined SEPRS:*** 2019