

# The Stanford Daily

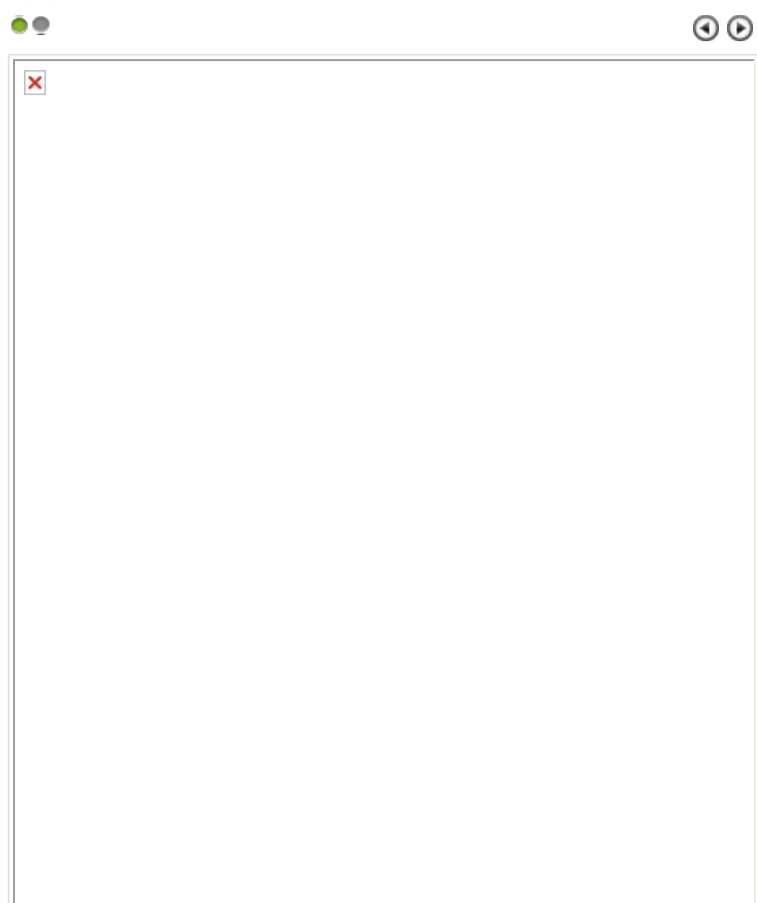
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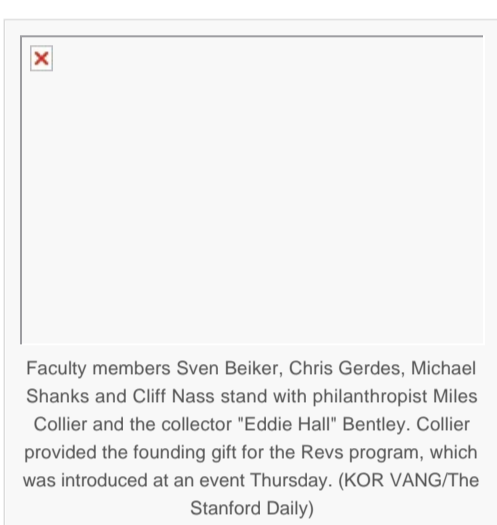
Revs extends Stanford car research to humanities, social sciences

By Tyler Brown



Faculty unveiled the Revs Program at Stanford Thursday in a daylong symposium examining the culture of the automobile.

According to Revs director Cliff Nass, the program aims to “tap into this potential for enormous amounts of research and opportunities for students to be done that just hasn’t been tapped into, not just by Stanford, but by no university.”



Faculty members Sven Beiker, Chris Gerdes, Michael Shanks and Cliff Nass stand with philanthropist Miles Collier and the collector "Eddie Hall" Bentley. Collier provided the founding gift for the Revs program, which was introduced at an event Thursday. (KOR VANG/The Stanford Daily)

Three other main faculty members are involved in the launch: classics professor Michael Shanks, associate mechanical engineering professor Chris Gerdes and mechanical engineering lecturer Sven Beiker.

“There’s nothing that’s been less studied relative to its importance than the automobile,” Nass said. “There’s so little academic work on the automobile and its role in society is so large. The potential is so great that it really was critical that universities take this on.”

Revs is in some ways similar to the industry-sponsored [Center for Automotive Research at Stanford \(CARS\)](#), a two-year-old program that brings together researchers, but seeks a broader approach to studying cars than just through design work.

“First of all, we envision it being supported by individuals more so than industry because it’s not looking just at the future, but at the present and the past,” he added.

Nass said the idea behind Revs is “to capture cars in their full generality,” expanding beyond Stanford’s automobile engineering programs to “really pull together the people across the University who have understanding and insights about cars—from the social sciences, from the humanities, from the law school and the medical school.”

Revs is the brainchild of Florida philanthropist Miles Collier, who sought a partnership with an educational institution to put his automobile collection to intellectual use. After considering a number of universities, including Northwestern, MIT and Carnegie-Mellon, Collier decided on Stanford.

Revs at Stanford is starting with a multi-million dollar initial gift from Collier. Collier’s collection, all made available to the University, consists of car-related memorabilia and artifacts, including newspaper clippings, magazine covers, design plans and hundreds of thousands of photos. Collier also owns more than 100 classic cars and vintage replacement parts for many of them.

“There really isn’t an opportunity available [besides this] to go out and instrument cars like this and really understand how cars in the 1930s, 40s and 50s performed, why they made the design decisions they did,” Gerdes said.

At least for now, most of the Revs program’s material will continue to reside at Collier’s private Revs Institute in Naples, Florida. Stanford students and researchers will have the opportunity to visit the Florida location, while collectors and experts may visit Stanford.

On the Farm, one of the Revs program’s goals is to help faculty design new courses on cars and encourage people to bring cars into their discipline and curriculum. One of the Revs program’s major goals is to reach out to, for example, someone who studies 20th century American literature “and say to them, hey you’ve ignored the car,” Nass said.

“Let us help you with this amazing archival content, these amazing people, these amazing artifacts,” he added.

With the Peninsula’s changing technological landscape, the area itself is an object of study.

“Not only is Silicon Valley becoming the Detroit of the 21st century, Silicon Valley is now the heart of the car industry,” Nass said. “So that’s another important change that we’ll be tracing and looking at.”

Beiker said that digitizing information from Collier’s archives might become a substantial part of the program as well. And when it comes to research, Beiker envisions taking an interdisciplinary look at what it was like to drive a car back in history and learn from that information to create future cars.

“One thing is to understand the past and that’s already a big thing in and of itself,” Beiker said. “But there’s this notion that cars are getting safer and more comfortable—that’s great, but also a little bit more boring.”

With so much car technology available to examine, we can “study it to make it exciting again, learning from these past vehicles,” he added.

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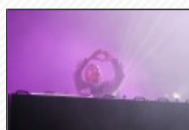
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