UMSL Leadership Engage in USC Equity Institute

Due to the huge success of the institute and the ongoing development sparked by the group, the campus will seek to engage another 20 campus leaders in the fall 2019. Several of the leaders shared how they plan to implement some of the strategies discussed during the institute with their respective leadership teams. In their upcoming monthly meetings, members of the group have decided to dig deeper into some of the topics covered during the institute; engage in case studies of actual situations that they have encountered; and draw upon the knowledge of peers and others.

UMSL leaders engaged in the following modules:

- Foundations of Racial Equity in Higher Education
- Talking about Race, Racism, and Racial Inequities
- Leading in Moments of Racial Crisis: Part 1
- Making Racial Equity Data Conscious Leadership
- Creating Culturally Responsive and Culturally Sustaining Curricula
- Recruiting and Selection of Professionals of Color
- Retention and Advancement of Professionals of Color
- Strategic Planning and Action for Racial Equity

The USC Equity Institutes are an eight-week virtual education series for administrators and faculty members on a university campus to increase individual competencies and organizational effectiveness related to issues of equity, diversity, and inclusion. Each Institute has eight modules. These virtual modules are taught synchronously by a USC Equity Institute faculty member and 20 participants simultaneously engage on the same computer screen for 90 minutes at the same time, one day each week.

The USC Equity Institutes aim to bridge a specific gap—professionals often avert leadership roles without having had a proper course of study on how to effectively address persistent and pervasive racial problems, how to responsibly act in periods of racial crisis, or how to achieve racial equity. The USC Equity Institutes enable institutional leaders to achieve long-term, significant, and sustainable organizational change.
Leaders from the University of Missouri System and KC Scholars announced that they are creating college opportunities for 800 additional students from Greater Kansas City over the next eight years. MU Chancellor Alexander N. Cartwright announced the new scholarship program at North Kansas City High School. KC Scholars will contribute $20 million, while MU and the University of Missouri System will contribute $10 million each, for a total commitment of $40 million.

STORY BY: CAI林 RILEY

KC Scholars, UM System Will Provide $40 million in Scholarships

Over the next eight years, 800 additional students will receive $10,000 scholarships that can be renewed for up to five years

KC Scholars, launched in 2016, currently awards approximately 500 college scholarships annually for students from the Kansas City metro region to attend one of 17 partner colleges and universities in Missouri and Kansas, including MU. Currently, 86 KC Scholars awardees are enrolled at MU, the largest proportion of KC Scholars students at any college or university. The new funding will support 300 additional scholarships at MU over the next several years, each worth $10,000 per year for up to five years, for students who choose to enroll at MU.

“This commitment will take our partnership with KC Scholars to a new level,” MU Chancellor Alexander N. Cartwright said. “KC Scholars works hard to provide financial assistance to students who want to attend college, and this partnership will ensure that even more students who qualify for KC Scholars will benefit from this important effort. We are dedicated to our pursuit of eliminating financial barriers for students from Missouri and the Kansas City region who want to come to Mizzou.”

This announcement reflects a commitment of the UM System’s Promise and Opportunity Scholarships program. Last September, UM System President Mun Choi announced that the system would invest $100 million in scholarships — $75 million of which will be used for Promise and Opportunity Scholarships.

“We have been focused on creating pathways to success for students and stakeholders who want to invest in the University of Missouri,” UM System President Mun Choi said. “The system’s investment in the KC Scholars program is another way for us to provide more opportunities for talented students to achieve their full potential.”

“We at KC Scholars are thrilled with the $20 million matching commitment from MU funding up to 800 additional scholarships for area high school students,” said Terry Bassham, president and CEO of Evergy and a KC Scholars board member. “The Kansas City-area business community recognizes that it goes a long way to help fill the workforce pipeline our economy desperately needs. I am confident the region’s philanthropic community will step up to match MU’s $20 million.”

The first students to benefit from this agreement will enroll at MU in fall 2019. The new scholars applied earlier this year and were eligible, but there were not enough funds. Students eligible for the KC Scholars traditional scholarship must be juniors in high schools in one of six counties in the Kansas City region, have at least a 2.5 GPA and present a financial need for additional support. The counties included are Johnson and Wyandotte counties in Kansas, and Platte, Clay, Cass and Jackson counties in Missouri.

“We are grateful that MU selected to invest in KC Scholars and in our incredible Kansas City metro students,” said Beth Tankersley-Bankhead, president and CEO of KC Scholars. “As a first-generation college student myself, I understand that earning a degree changes the trajectory of one’s life.”
In the 34 years I have been on this earth, I have lived in four different states and 11 counties. My computer’s hard drive is filled with a lifetime of memories from my travels. I have made new friends, visited landmarks, eaten new food, drank delicious beer and wine, and even found time to wonder off the well-worn tourist trail.

Through all these experiences, I have learned a lot about myself and the world. Most of all, I have learned the importance of humility and empathy. We humans have a lot to learn from one another. Being a well-worn tourist trail.

I have always been interested in helping people develop self-awareness of biases and the rules such biases play both personally and professionally. I seek to learn to how to create a community where all feel valued and can thrive, to recognize privilege and oppression and their twin impacts on our community, and to commit to impacting the systems which oppress others personally and professionally.

Over the course of spring and summer, I attended a variety of Passport Experiences. Some were big and celebratory; others were small and directly focused on stated objectives. At each experience, I was surprised and encouraged by the willingness of community members to engage and personally.

Although the Journey Toward Inclusive Excellence is tied to the University of Missouri’s Division of Inclusion, Diversity & Equity, members of the broader Columbia community attended each experience I visited.

I met nurses, writers, teachers, and stay-at-home parents. I also met people of diverse ages, skin colors, genders, and sexual orientations. I took note of participant demographics at each of the smaller experiences that I attended, and I was typically one of the only participants associated with the University of Missouri. At most, I was one of two or three white males present.

While I attended nine total experiences from March through August, five experiences stood out to me as particularly noteworthy.

Five Standouts

My first experience on the journey took place on March 6, 2018. The experience was titled “Unnatural Causes: When the Bough Breaks.” Not knowing what to expect, I arrived at the Columbia/Boone County Public Health and Human Services building at noon and found my way back to a small meeting area. After checking in (and earning my first passport stamp) I sat at one of the tables, which were arranged in a U-shape. One of the presenters greeted us and explained that there would be rounds of self-introductions — there were 12 of us, plus two presenters. Next, we watched a segment of the documentary titled Unnatural Causes.

This segment focused on the relatively high number of infants in the U.S. who die before their first birthday. Worse still, we learned that Black infants are nearly twice as likely to die before their first birthday, even though these babies are born to parents with high socioeconomic status. I was stunned and saddened by what I learned, but I was equally encouraged by the thoughtful, solution-oriented conversation that took place afterward.

Not all experiences were as sobering as my first. In fact, my second experience was the exact opposite. On April 4, I was fortunate to attend the Ellington’s Evening of Music and Poetry featuring Lalah Hathaway.

Before Hathaway even took the stage, Jazz Auditorium was filled to the rafters with energy from spoken word poetry and soaring bass solos. IJ Spark span reconstructed the interval while the crowd parted and danced, elegantly anticipating the main act. And then… Wow! Hathaway flat-out owned the night. Hit after hit, Hathaway’s soulful voice sent chills down my spine. I remember looking around during her set and seeing everyone in the auditorium absolutely spellbound. This experience was my favorite because it brought together the entire community to celebrate our common humanity through art.

The third notable event that I attended was the Mid-Journey Mixer at Kimball Ballroom on the campus of Stephens College. Like the Ellington’s Evening of Music and Poetry, the Mid-Journey Mixer was celebratory and well-attended. I arrived to find the ballroom set up with circular banquet tables. Music played as children enjoyed a book sale and photo area. A group of teenage hip hop dancers warmed up in one corner of the event space, while a high school slam poetry team nervously rehearsed near the entrance.

As 400 people gathered, there were well over 100 participants. To kick off the event, Nikki McGruder welcomed the attendees and discussed the successes of the Journey Toward Inclusive Excellence at the mid-year point. Next, Dr. Kevin McDonald, MU Vice Chancellor and UM System Chief Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer, spoke about the program’s successes, as well as the importance of improved inclusion, diversity, and equity initiatives throughout Columbia.

Following the presentations, the audience enjoyed performances from several dance teams, a slam poetry team, and a mother-son dance quartet. Attendees then mingled, savored refreshments, and shared experiences. Again, I felt the event feeling encouraged by seeing people from across the community come together in celebration.

The fourth experience that I attended was the Inclusive Excellence Mile. By this point in my journey, I knew what to expect community, positivity, and celebration. The Mile Run was equal parts pep rally, athletic competition, and block party. As music pumped throughout the area around Stankowski Field on the Mizzou campus, young and old alike gathered to chat, snack, and cheer as participants ran a timed mile.

After everyone had crossed the finish line, attendees strolled around Stankowski Field and ate a catered lunch. Of all the events that I attended, this one had a decided collegial feel, as there were many attenders who were clearly university students. With that said, I saw a few familiar, non-student faces from previous experiences that I had attended.

Finally, I attended a community meeting that focused on bringing together Columbia residents to discuss issues concerning access to healthful food. The experience was hosted at the Columbia Activity and Recreation Center, and as best as I could tell, not all attendees were participating in the Journey Toward Inclusive Excellence. There were several interactive displays throughout this experience, and each display featured a presenter who asked participants to explore solutions for providing access to healthful food for all residents of the city.

Because I am not a resident — I live in Kansas City — I found myself observing more in this setting than I had in previous experiences. As I took in my surroundings and the interactions all around me, I was overcome with feelings of hope. Roughly 40 people were engaged in conversations about making their community a better, healthier place for all. The conversations were all about solutions and not just diagnosing a problem. Again, I felt hopeful.

During my experiences with the Journey Toward Inclusive Excellence, I became a better citizen and traveler without ever leaving Columbia. My critiques for the program are the same that I have for traveling in general: seeking and enjoying celebrations, food, and music is easy, while leaving the well-worn trail in search of more challenging experiences remains difficult.

I hope that non-celebratory experiences gain greater traction in future iterations of this program. It would be a wonderful sight to see hundreds of community members contemplating the challenges of infant mortality or access to food. Nevertheless, I hope for a brighter tomorrow. I am inspired by what I saw during my journey, and I am better for having traveled.
Irene Juzkiw has spent 40 years at Mizzou inspiring countless international students

Irene Juzkiw was 26 years old and working at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in 1978 when she received a call from the University of Missouri that would change her life. She was asked to interview to establish an intensive English language program for international students on MU’s campus. Juzkiw would go on to commit her career to advancing international student education at MU for the next four decades.

“Working with international students is like travelling internationally,” said Juzkiw, who serves as senior associate director of the Center for English Language Learning and the director of the English Language Support Program. “It’s making a difference in the world and touching someone’s life.”

Something Juzkiw encourages all international students to do is to practice their English language learning from the classroom out into the community.

“One of my favorite stories is of two students who came up with the idea to together interview people about Homecoming,” Juzkiw said. “They did the project for fun and asked other students why they were excited for the festivities. It’s great to see students use their English skills like that to meet new people.”

Growing up with her family that had recently immigrated to America from Ukraine taught Juzkiw firsthand the struggles of language barriers and inspired her value of being able to communicate clearly and accurately. She has been able to pass on hard-earned lessons to thousands of international students, like concentrating on language as a guide for further education and cultivating English skills to gain success.

As a first-generation college student, Juzkiw earned her bachelor’s degree at Bradley University and went on to earn her master’s degree in teaching English as a second language at the University of Illinois. She came to MU at a young age but with a deep understanding of the value of English skills and higher education.

Juzkiw has touched thousands of students’ lives being a teacher, advisor and administrator. She cherishes the opportunity to work with international students and her colleagues in her role. Juzkiw has seen plenty of ups and downs with her long-time career, but most recently has gained success alongside her colleagues with the accreditation of the Intensive English Program from the Commission on English Accreditation. And after 40 years working to increase the international student population at MU, Juzkiw does not have plans to retire anytime soon but to continue doing what she is passionate about.

“I’m still doing what I was 40 years ago, and I still love it,” Juzkiw said.

As a testament to her esteemed career, Juzkiw has been honored with the MU International Engagement Award this year. This award recognizes faculty, staff and students who demonstrate meaningful and sustained commitments to international initiatives on behalf of the university.

New Center For Every Body

Center for Body Image Research and Policy aimed at improving body image, health and wellness for individuals, families, and communities

Poor body image impacts people of all ages and genders. Now, a new center at the University of Missouri-Columbia will bring together a diverse group of researchers dedicated to improving body image. Virginia Ramseyer Winter, a nationally recognized body image expert and assistant professor of social work, will serve as director for the Center for Body Image Research and Policy in the MU College of Human Environmental Sciences. The interdisciplinary research center is aimed at improving body image, health and wellness for individuals, families, and communities.

“So many factors can impact how a person perceives his or her appearance,” Ramseyer Winter said. “Race, age, education, medical history, family, peers, and behaviors are just a few of the factors that can shape body image. In bringing together a diverse group of researchers, this one-of-a-kind center will hopefully produce research that will improve body image, thereby improving the well-being for Missourians and others across the U.S. and internationally.”

Ramseyer Winter along with Antoinette Landor, the center’s associate director, assistant professor of human development and family science, and a leading scholar on colorism and skin tone—a form of body image, will oversee multiple projects focused on body image, including developing trainings for foster parents, exploring how factors of elementary school girls can promote positive body image, and examining skin tone and the tanning phenomenon among white young adults.

Other University of Missouri System faculty members who will work with the center include Kristen Morris, assistant professor of textile and apparel management at MU; Sarah Pilgrim, assistant professor of social work at UM-KC; Erin Robinson, assistant professor of social work at MU; Michelle Teri, associate professor of health sciences at MU; and Fang Wang, assistant teaching professor of information technology, electrical engineering and computer science at MU. Mackenzie Cook, doctoral candidate in the School of Social Work, and Michaela Ward, master’s student in social work and public health, are also working with the center.

Megan Gillen, associate professor of psychology at Penn State Altoona; Elizabeth O’Neill, assistant professor of social work at Washburn University; and Lindsey Rae Rueb, assistant professor of social work at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock, are also involved with the center.
External funding helps SUCCEED Program continue to grow and evolve as it enters sixth year

STORY BY: STEVE WALENTIK
PHOTO BY: AUGUST JENNEWEIN

T he SUCCEED Program at the University of Missouri–St. Louis is entering its sixth year helping students with intellectual and developmental disabilities learn independent living and job skills as they enjoy a college experience and work toward a Chancellor’s Certificate. New external financial support is helping the two-year college experience and work toward a Chancellor’s Certificate.

“A grant from the Pettus Foundation is allowing Lidgus to hire three student staff members who will serve as job coaches throughout the year,” said Jonathan Lidgus, who took over as SUCCEED director last year. “We’ve really been reaching out – with the help of UMSL’s development team and Associate Professor April Regester in the College of Education – and trying to use what our strengths are and what we’re doing to get support for scholarships and to supplement our program so we don’t have to raise tuition rates.”

In the past year, SUCCEED has received more than $162,500 combined from individual donors such as Steve Novik and Cathy Barancik and from philanthropic foundations such as the Employees Community Fund of the The Boeing Company, the Pettus Foundation, the YouthBridge Community Foundation and the Mary Ranken Jordan and Eric A. Jordan Charitable Foundation.

“External funding is really the reason why we’re able to grow and keep our costs down,” said Jonathan Lidgus, who took over as SUCCEED director last year. “We’ve really been reaching out – with the help of UMSL’s development team and Associate Professor April Regester in the College of Education – and trying to use what our strengths are and what we’re doing to get support for scholarships and to supplement our program so we don’t have to raise tuition rates.”

New external financial support is helping the two-year residential program expand and adapt to meet the changing demands of its students. In the past year, SUCCEED has received more than $162,500 combined from individual donors such as Steve Novik and Cathy Barancik and from philanthropic foundations such as the Employees Community Fund of the The Boeing Company, the Pettus Foundation, the YouthBridge Community Foundation and the Mary Ranken Jordan and Eric A. Jordan Charitable Foundation.

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“A grant from the Pettus Foundation is allowing Lidgus to hire three student staff members who will serve as job coaches throughout the year.

They will work with SUCCEED students on fitting into a work team and better understanding how to communicate with their bosses and advocate for themselves. The coaches will also speak directly with job supervisors to get feedback on how students can improve their job performance.

“This is going to be a huge win for us,” he said. “Competitive employment is an area that individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities struggle with. The reason for that is gaining job performance.

Job coaches will help students navigate the complexities of employment in order for them to SUCCEED and grow.

Support from the Employees Community Fund of the The Boeing Company helped with costs for the annual Summer Enrichment Camp, which provides students ages 17 to 22 a SUCCEED college experience in which they stay overnight in Oak Hall, utilize a meal plan on campus, take various academic workshops, complete vocational training and engage in recreational and traditional camp activities on campus.

A $50,000 Think Big for Kids Grant from the YouthBridge Community Foundation split between SUCCEED and the College of Education is targeted to improve inclusion at other camps across the St. Louis region. Lidgus and Regester are aiming to create online training videos that teach other camps ways to adapt their curriculums to serve students with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

Lidgus said there is a need for that because other than a handful of summer camps geared only for those children, there aren’t many options available for parents.

BluePrintSummer, a web app operated by Build-A-Bear Founder Maxine Clark that provides easy access to information about camps and events to help families plan their summer activities, has agreed to host the videos on its website. The videos are to be filmed at UMSL’s U-CREATE Summer Camp at the Recreation and Wellness Center.

Much of the other funds are to be directed toward scholarships for SUCCEED students and program development.

“The primary problem I see is the access issue that our students have,” Lidgus said. “We have a lot of middle- to low-income families that want to join the program but just cannot afford it even with loans. So grants and donations from Steve Novik and these corporations have assisted those families in doing that.

A total of 25 students were part of the SUCCEED Program last year, including one who piloted a new program for degree-seeking students called SUCCEED+.

That student rumbled in courses the same as every other degree-seeking undergraduate but received tutoring support in the SUCCEED office.

A cohort of five new students will be following that lead in the SUCCEED+ Program this fall. Four of them earned their Chancellor’s Certificate through the SUCCEED Program last spring.

“It’s interesting because we were at UMSL Day, right outside the doors of the Anheuser-Busch Performance Hall, and as parents were coming out and going through the all the academic programs, we just kept getting the same question: ‘Do you support degree-seeking students?’” Lidgus said. “That’s what we’re doing.”

Lidgus is excited by the evolution of the SUCCEED Program.

Though he’s only been in his director role about a year, he worked with the group that started the program in his previous role as director of the Office of Residential Life and Housing.

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Passionately Involved

The first organization Waldman founded was Aces and Aros, a group for asexual and aromantic students and allies to learn and find support. Next was Oasis, a trans student group, that formerly was a program in the LGBTQ Resource Center.

“We set it up to center the most marginalized voices in the trans community and voices we were told had been left out of the conversation to that point,” Waldman says.

They also founded the Gabriella Rosé Justice Support System. The fund is run by students, for students, with the purpose of helping transgender folks continue their education in the case of financial hardship.

Waldman also got involved with organizations that already existed at Mizzou. Because they lived in the residence halls all three years and continue to do so while pursuing their advanced degrees, they were a member of RHA. One of Waldman’s pursuits there? Expanding the gender-neutral offering, which Waldman lived in, to the rest of campus housing. As of fall 2018, students anywhere can enjoy it.

What’s Next

Though it’s not an official program, Waldman plans on finishing both their JD and MSW in four years. And they’re still staying involved on campus despite the taxing academic workload.

“There’s a lot of people from various backgrounds in law school, which is cool,” Waldman says. “I’ll invite people to attend events on things like relationship and sexual violence prevention with me, and they’re like ‘That sounds interesting! I’ve never been to anything like that before.’ So it’s good to engage in conversations with people who don’t have that background knowledge.”

“I’ve found a lot of people who are really interested in getting involved, which is cool, because as law students we don’t have very much time,” Waldman says. “But they’re interested!”

After graduating, Waldman’s keeping their plans relatively open since there are so many niches. They’re interested in education fields like civil rights, Title IX, ADA, IDEA work at a large school district or university setting. Another route Waldman is looking at is diversity hiring and training at large law firms. Regardless of the specific path they take, activism, advocacy and community involvement will be a part of their life forever.

“I really love learning, and I just keep questioning things, pushing myself and pushing the people around me to question what they’re learning,” Waldman says.

Oh, and they graduated Summa Cum Laude. In just three years. With such extensive academic accomplishments, it’s hard to envision there being much time for anything else in life. But Waldman, who came to Mizzou from Chesterfield, was as involved in organizations and extracurricular activities as they were in academics. Why do so much? Their philosophy is ‘get in where you fit in.’

“There were needs that weren’t being met,” Waldman says. “I’m the type of person who kind of fills gaps. Sometimes you see a population that isn’t being served, and people need things.”

A love of learning and serving their community has led Sterling Waldman down many paths. Some people describe them as a change agent; others as a role model. All of them wonder exactly how Sterling does everything they do.

Waldman, currently pursuing degrees in both Law and a master’s in Social Work, graduated with a bachelor’s in Women’s and Gender Studies from Mizzou in May of 2018. And they earned four minors: Black Studies, Religious Studies, Sociology, and Leadership and Public Service. With the Multicultural Certificate. From the Honors College.

Sterling Waldman Takes the Lead When Seeing Need

STORY & PHOTOS BY: RYAN GAVIN

Waldman was also an active member of the Missouri Students Association (MSA) from the moment they stepped on campus. One of the biggest undertakings? The bathroom mapping project.

Waldman gathered a group of students and literally traveled to every single building on campus looking for gender-neutral or single-occupancy bathrooms to be made gender neutral. They passed legislation their first semester of their freshman year that all single occupancy bathrooms must be made gender neutral.

From there, they worked with Campus Facilities to update signage. And they manually did the data entry for the maps function of the GoMizzou app so people could be able to actually find them.

“There are all kinds of people on this campus, and you will find some who are the same brand of weird as you,” Waldman says. “Or not, and you’ll just like being in each others’ presence. Even if you don’t have a huge community here, there are lots of little ones who will love and support you.”
For S&T Hispanic students, community is key

STORY BY ANDREW CAREAGA

At first, Eulice Claros didn’t get the insult.

A grade schooler in the predominantly white, southwest Missouri town of Pleasant Hope, population 614, Claros was getting off the school bus when some other kids — “troublemakers,” as he now describes them — hurled insults about Mexicans.

“The one thing that stuck out was, they said, ‘All Mexicans can go to hell,’” Claros says. “And I thought, ‘Wow, they really don’t like Mexicans.’”

As the son of Salvadoran immigrants, Claros didn’t realize that the slurs were aimed toward him. And Claros, who was born in Connecticut, didn’t think of himself as anything other than a U.S. citizen.

“My mom always told me, ‘You’re an American. Don’t let anyone tell you otherwise.’”

Today, Claros is among a record number of Hispanic-American students enrolled at Missouri S&T. The mechanical engineering major also serves as president of the S&T chapter of the Society for Hispanic Professional Engineers (SHPE), which serves as a connector for many students of Hispanic, Latin American or Latinx backgrounds.

While he and other Hispanic students may not face the type of hate speech Claros experienced in grade school, they are not immune from it at S&T or inRolla.

“I’ve got a pretty thick skin because of where I grew up,” Claros says. Still, Hispanic students sometimes feel isolated on a predominantly white campus, and they often confront stereotypes that are difficult to shake. SHPE treasurer Isamar Alhakeem can relate. After transferring to S&T from Metropolitan Community College in her native Kansas City, Missouri, Alhakeem — the daughter of a Mexican mother and Iraqi father — had a tough time finding a connection with her instructors.

“I didn’t know anyone on campus,” says Alhakeem, a senior in chemical engineering. “I was here for a whole year and I didn’t see any other Hispanic students. I felt very alone.”

It wasn’t until roll call in one of her classes, when she heard the instructor call out an obviously Hispanic surname, that she realized she wasn’t alone.

Claros, too, felt somewhat isolated after transferring to S&T from Missouri State University in Springfield, where the Hispanic population was more robust. But he discovered SHPE on S&T’s OrgSync online student community and decided to join the group.

“Wherever I am, I always look for the Hispanics,” he says.

“My mom always told me, ‘You’re an American. Don’t let anyone tell you otherwise.’”

Not only does SHPE provide opportunities for U.S.-born and international Hispanic students to connect.

SHPE is one way Hispanic students can stay connected, whether members are from the U.S. or abroad, from small towns or larger communities, or undergraduates or graduate students. A recent SHPE meeting drew students from the U.S. territory of Puerto Rico, urban and rural areas of the U.S., and Colombia and the Dominican Republic.

“You don’t even have to be Hispanic and you don’t have to be studying engineering to join SHPE,” Claros says. “It’s open to anyone.”

That information wasn’t obvious to Nicholas Villanueva, a 2006 history graduate.

“I pursed the best way to describe my experience as a Latino student on campus is neutral,” says Villanueva, who is now an assistant professor of ethnic studies at the University of Colorado Boulder and the author of the award-winning book Lynching of Mexicans in the Texas Borderlands. “I do not remember many clubs or organization that reached out to Latinx students.”

“I didn’t know they existed” when he was a student, says Gillis, a Los Angeles native whose grandmother is from Mexico. Gillis joined SHPE as a professional and discovered the S&T chapter two years ago during Miner Rama.

Claros, Alhakeem and other SHPE members are trying to raise their organization’s visibility. As part of that effort, they’re working with co-advisor Shannon Cox, a member of the student diversity initiatives staff, to promote Hispanic Heritage Month activities across campus.

United by food and language

S&T’s U.S.-born Hispanic student population has grown significantly in recent years — up 14.8 percent from 2016 to 2017 (fall 2018 numbers are not yet available). Even so, the community is small, and encompasses a diverse array of countries and cultures.

One thing that unites most Hispanic students at S&T, however, is the common language.

That’s one reason why Hispanic students at S&T sometimes get together informally to cook, listen to Hispanic music and celebrate their diverse cultures. Claros enjoys preparing pupusas, the traditional dish of El Salvador, to share with fellow SHPE members. “Almost every week, we’ll get together and cook at someone’s place,” he says.

“Network, network, network”

Even with a record number of U.S.-born Hispanic students now enrolled at S&T, the students hope more will come. But they also want to be sure S&T provides opportunities for U.S.-born and international Hispanic students to connect.

SHPE co-advisor Gillis suggests Hispanic students not only get involved with SHPE, but also with other diversity organizations on campus.

“They groups will help you understand the campus resources that are available to you,” he says. It boils down to making connections.

“Network, network, network,” he says. “Try to get to know and understand people who are different than you. You will definitely have that opportunity at S&T!”

Members of Missouri S&T’s student chapter of the Society for Hispanic Professional Engineers gathered at a regional conference in Chicago last April. From left to right are Jesus Ramos, Isamar Alhakeem, Eulice Claros, Jose Sarrastia, Maria Briceno, and Minh Nguyen. (Submitted photo.)
For its fifth iteration, the Transgender Spectrum Conference returned to its original home at the University of Missouri–St. Louis. Held annually, the conference brings together the transgender communities of the greater St. Louis area and beyond to enhance visibility and provide resources for community members, parents, allies and professionals such as counselors, social workers and teachers. It took place on Friday and Saturday in the J.C. Penney Conference Center.

The conference is the result of ongoing collaboration with Washington University in St. Louis, which hosted the conference for the past two years after UMSL served as a host in the inaugural and subsequent events in 2014 and 2015. “It was a collaboration of some professors, students and staff here at our campus,” said Harry Hawkins, conference chair and LGBTQ+ coordinator at UMSL. “It’s empowering and allows the trans community to talk about events in the St. Louis area over the past year. It’s also a chance to educate cisgender allies that may not know as much about the transgender community.”

In addition to Hawkins, a board comprised of community members and academics from UMSL, WUSTL, Webster University and Saint Louis University organized the 2018 conference. Turnout trended up from 2017’s 300-some attendees, and a record number of students from UMSL and area schools such as Lindbergh, Maryville, Webster and WUSTL registered.

“It just brings in a lot of people,” Hawkins said. “Parents who had transgender kids or even some transgender parents themselves.

They come to this conference every year to get the latest information on, really, just anything—education or medical advancement or community updates, things like that. Some folks, they come every year, and they get to see their friends, and they get to see people they haven’t seen, and I’m looking forward to seeing some people that I just last year as well. It’s a conference that serves a lot of needs.”

Kristin Sobolik, UMSL provost, executive vice chancellor and professor of anthropology, kicked off events on Friday by telling a personal story of advocating in the Doe v. Clency case, which was the first instance of a state court ruling in favor of transgender bathroom rights.

“Progress has been made and lost and made again,” she said. “It’s part of my privilege to be part of that process.”

The opening plenary panel, the State of Trans Address, featured speakers Sayer Johnson from the Metro Trans Umbrella Group, Jamie Hilman from Trans Education Service of St. Louis, and Jay-Marie Hill from the American Civil Liberties Union of Missouri. Hill spoke on the Missouri Nondiscrimination Act, which, for the second time in 20 years, the state house committee passed this May.

“We need a whole state that cares that we exist,” Hill said. “We can disagree about things unless your objection interferes with my right to exist.”

Hilman followed, covering the Affordable Care Act, bathroom bans, St. Louis’ new Transgender Memorial Garden, the military ban and more. Despite the challenges, she chose to see possibility in the victories, calling it “a case for hope.” Johnson wrapped up the panel with a discussion of the lack of systems in place for transgender peoples and how MTUG is changing that.

Other panels ranged in topic from Trans or Nonbinary 101, parenting, education, medicine, lobbying, legal advice, storytelling and more. The speakers themselves were just as varied and represented organizations such as Babson College, Armstrong Teasdale, Ferguson Readings on Race, Johns Hopkins University, Louisiana State University, McDaniell College, PROMO, SAGE: Advocacy & Services for LGBTQ Elders, Sisters of St. Joseph of Camelot, TransParent USA, That Uppity Theater Company, ThinkWell Counseling, VA St. Louis Healthcare System, UMSL, University of Michigan, Walden University, Women’s Empowerment through Cape Area Networking, WUSTL, Virginia Commonwealth University and others.

Students from Doctor of Business Collaboration and Assistant Teaching Professor Perry Drake’s “Digital and Social Media Marketing Lab” took on the conference as a client and provided social media branding for the event. The class created a hashtag, #TSC18, and BBVA students Madison Martin, a senior, and Lauren Pivac, a sophomore, were on hand at the social media wall to run the Instagram and Facebook feeds and share the stories of participants.

Our attendee, Rachel Wyrick, a counseling MEd student, said she had decided to come because she was interested in the research, information and speakers as well as exploring more about non-binary gender identity and being an ally.

“It’s important to educate people in the community that are ignorant to this culture,” Wyrick said. “On an education and political level, it feels really important right now.”

The gender-nonconforming activist Janaya Khan gave the keynote address on Saturday. Khan founded Black Lives Matter Canada and is a prominent social justice educator. She implored attendees to advocate for justice for all peoples.

“We need to protect each other, but it can’t just be trans and nonbinary people protecting ourselves,” Khan said. “We actually need to rely on others who are taking it just as personally. We need a culture shift.

“I want us to leave with this if nothing else: We need to reframe how we enter movements. I believe that identity should be and can be our entry point into movements. But it should not be our exit point. I originally started fighting for black people because I am a black person. That makes a lot of sense. But it is no longer why I fight for black people. I fight for black people because I understand that black liberation can help the liberation of others. Because I am bound by my politics, I can show up for native struggles, Muslim struggles, for feminist struggles.

I need to show up for people in the same way that we show up for ourselves. Identity should be our entry points into movements, but they should not be our exit points. If I was only fighting for people like me, all I would be doing is reifying colonialism to be more convenient for someone like me. It is time for us to take—personally.”

Hawkins considers UMSL a natural fit for the conference and notes the university’s new mission statement, We Transform Lives, goes perfectly.

“The impact that it has, how it brings the community together, how we have folks that come to it once a year from all over Missouri and in the region—we are going to transform people’s lives,” he said. “That we can have these types of conferences here and provide that information for our community, that’s huge; that’s a really big thing I just go back to We Transform Lives, and also, the word ‘trans’ is in it. It’s all very good.”
An Interview with Dean Kurpius

STORY BY: RON STODGHILL
PHOTOS BY: KEVIN JONES

Earlier this fall, David Kurpius, dean of MU’s School of Journalism, hosted a lunch on campus for Dr. Donald M. Suggs, publisher of The St. Louis American, the venerable black weekly newspaper. The occasion, held at the Journalism School’s Reynolds Journalism Institute, was a milestone in what had historically been a lackluster relationship between the world’s first School of Journalism and St. Louis’ longest publishing weekly newspaper.

The moment was particularly proud for Kurpius, who took the Journalism School’s helm in 2015 with plans to, among other things, make good on timeworn rhetoric about creating a culture of diversity and inclusion at MU. In fall 2017, I accepted a position at the Journalism School, my alma mater, as an associate professor. I was fortunate to join several other faculty of color Kurpius hired, including Baby Bailey, executive editor of the Columbia Missourian and Missouri Community Newspaper Management chair; Monique Luisi, assistant professor; Jeannette Porter, assistant professor; Emily Reed, associate professor and director of innovation at RJI Futures Lab; and other existing faculty of color such as Cynthia Fribby, professor; Ron Kelley, associate professor; Cristina Melin, assistant professor; Janimic Stavala, associate professor and supervising producer at KOMU-TV; and Earnest Perry, associate dean of Graduate Studies.

During the lunch, Dean Kurpius introduced us to Suggs, who was visibly impressed by the team Kurpius had built since their initial meeting. Even more, he was encouraged by our interest in collaborating before, he couldn’t help but be impressed by Kurpius’ passion. That such a pledge was coming in the aftermath of racial protests by African-American students seemed even more laudable. That such a pledge was coming in the aftermath of racial protests by African-American students seemed even more laudable.

I recently sat down with Dean Kurpius in his office in Neff Hall to discuss his push to create a culturally diverse and inclusive education at the Missouri School of Journalism.

Why were you so confident you could change the culture at the Journalism School?

I didn’t know if I could do it, but I knew I was going to fight to do it because I knew it was the right thing to do. I had a student, Glenn, when I was at Louisiana State University, and I was advising their National Association of Black Journalists chapter. This was a really smart African-American student and I was mentoring him. I was trying to get him to take this one class, and he said you don’t understand, I’m going to take this other class. I said, but Glenn, you don’t need that class. And he said, yes, but I’m not leaving this university until I take a class with an African-American professor. And I said, you’re going to take that class you don’t need because of that? And he said, yeah, it’s important to me. There should be more faculty of color here because they understand the perspective that I’m coming from, and they value my voice in class. And that conversation has stuck with me.

What are you looking for as it relates to diversity within the Journalism School?

I understand students of color need to see people like them not only in the classroom, but they also need to see people like them in the newsroom. If you’re going to do that, you have to go actively look for talented people who can come play that role and will do it in a way where it’s not just for the students of color, but it’s for all students. All students know that our faculty are going to mentor them well, they are going to give them good guidance, help them see the world differently, and help them to be good journalists. It’s important for our students to learn from diverse faculty members because they’ll get a different perspective.

Recently, when we went to hire for two open positions at KOMU, I said to the hiring committee, if you don’t bring me a diverse pool, I’m not hiring anybody. As a result, of the three candidates we were looking at, we had two people of color. And there was no external funding under that. We’ve changed the culture of what we’re doing here.

Additionally, I want people who are going to move the needle at the School. Some people frame it as a quality issue, and I hate that argument. Everybody we hire here has to be able to improve what we’re doing, and there’s not a single way of measuring that.

I’ve had people ask me whether the black faculty get together and plan how we’re going to make a difference. Something seems not quite right about the assertion that it’s our responsibility to carry this extra load for the University. What are your thoughts about this?

I think a lot about culture. You will see me around the school asking faculty how they are doing; taking the temperature. I can’t make a faculty or staff member’s work life happier every day. It’s just not possible. If a person’s overall trajectory is positive, then you’ll have a happy worker who will work hard and have fun doing it. The faculty will bring interesting ideas to the table, and I’m here to help them accomplish these new initiatives. I treat faculty of color like I treat any other faculty member. They are just part of the group.

What are some of the Journalism School’s immediate goals around cultural diversity?

I think the likelihood of us doing a lot of hiring in the future is very limited. So, I think we need to do two things. We need more students of color in our graduate programs and in our undergraduate programs. And when I see graduate program, I’m thinking of building the faculty of the future through our doctoral program, which is why Dr. Perry is out there recruiting doctoral students of color. A lot of those students attend historically black colleges and universities.

We also have to answer the question of why aren’t there more doctoral faculty of color. I don’t like the argument there isn’t anybody out there. We ought to build them. The second thing is, I really think we can move the numbers on our African-American students in our undergraduate program. I think that’s important because this is the best place to get trained in journalism and strategic communication, and it opens doors.

Any final thoughts?

I think the bottom line is let’s stop making excuses and start providing opportunities for people to succeed. I will hear, ‘news organizations don’t have enough well-trained people of color for their newsrooms.’

Then, we ought to train more people of color at a high level to be available for those newsrooms. If we don’t have the leadership, then we ought to be putting our students though the Novak Leadership Institute to train them. If you don’t have enough doctoral faculty of color, then we ought to build those positions down the road. It’s about trying to take a holistic approach to answering the issues we often lean on as excuses.

If we continue to offer excuses, we’re not actually solving some of the problems this society faces.
I had the honor of sitting down with Associate Professor RonStodghill to discuss the School of Journalism’s diversity efforts. In reflecting on my time here, it is powerful to see the change that has taken place in the last few years.

Minorities now represent 17.2 percent of the Journalism faculty up from 11.1 percent in July 2015. African-Americans now represent 8.6 percent of our faculty compared to 2.5 percent in July 2015. Cynthia Frisby, Ph.D., was promoted to full professor this year, the first African-American woman to be promoted to that status in the school’s history. This diversity in our faculty is making a difference in our school. They are representing the school and the university in a very positive way.

The school’s diversity efforts extends to our student body. The school graduated one of the most diversified Ph.D. classes this spring that included two African-Americans, one Latino and two Asian students. We saw an increase in the diversity of our undergraduate student population grow from 17 to 20 percent over the last year. This fall, Ron Kelley, Ph.D., launched a new pilot mentoring program for upper-class minority students who will be matched with minority journalism and strategic communication alumni. The goal of this program is to have the mentors provide guidance to our students for retention and professional development. The mentorship will continue after graduation to help students make the transition from college to their professional careers.

Our goal is to make sure our students of color are successful and that the School of Journalism and the University of Missouri is a place they feel comfortable.

We are building a community of diverse faculty, students and staff. A place where the best students, professors, researchers, leaders, entrepreneurs, innovators and others come to collaborate, create, discover, learn and more.

MU IDE Champion: Missouri School of Journalism Dean David Kurpius

PHOTO BY KEVIN JONES

There has never been a more exciting time to be a part of our Missouri journalism family. Journalism, as we know it, takes on many forms. At the Missouri School of Journalism, we embrace the various storytelling techniques that help citizens fully engage in society. This means not covering the story in the same way as everyone else, allowing silent voices to be heard and respecting others’ viewpoints and opinions.

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MU IDE Champion: Missouri School of Journalism Dean David Kurpius

PHOTO BY KEVIN JONES

Holding into her freshman year at the University of Central Florida, Sandra Miles had it all figured out. Bachelor’s degree, then grad school and full speed ahead to a high-paying professional career. Three and a half years later, a voice inside her spoke out, demanding a new direction.

“I realized my heart wasn’t in it,” she said. “It was all about me.” She sat down with a student organization advisor to try to plan a new career direction, one focused on giving rather than getting.

“Well,” the advisor said, “you could do this job.”

And there it was. The woman who was raised in what she calls “a family of nurses and educators” in Jacksonville started to realize what those helping professions were all about. She changed course and started the journey that led earlier this year to her being named vice provost for student affairs — dean of students at the University of Missouri-Kansas City.

Among the many educators in her extended family, two relatives served as dean of students at universities — a great uncle and her mother’s cousin. In graduate school, “I finally got it. This is what they’ve been doing. This is who I am — a person helping people, showing them the way through education.”

Miles had been dean of students at Indiana University Purdue University Columbus (IUPUC) in Columbus, Indiana, since 2016. She holds bachelor’s and master’s degrees from the University of Central Florida, and a doctorate in higher education administration from Florida State University.

Sandra Miles wants to be inspirational and aspirational.

STORY & PHOTOS BY BRANDON PARIGO

“Making a difference makes it worth it.”

Through the interview and transition processes, she has recognized what she called “a culture of caring” among UMKC faculty and staff — people who are engaged with students and campus life and committed to public service. She wants to cultivate a similar feeling among students: “that what happens here is important.”

And she fully intends to realize her goals. She describes herself as both “ridiculously competitive” and a workaholic, but for all the right reasons. “Making a difference makes it worth it.”

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STORY & PHOTOS BY BRANDON PARIGO

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And she fully intends to realize her goals. She describes herself as both “ridiculously competitive” and a workaholic, but for all the right reasons. “Making a difference makes it worth it.”
Amie Mbale was organizing a few of her belongings earlier this year when a piece of paper she didn’t recognize fell to the floor. Curiosity drew her to pick up the note and begin to read through the bulleted list:

- **Graduate from high school**
- **Wait until at least 30 to get married**
- **Leave the village**

The list continued on with 27 more self-imposed challenges for Mbale, a Malawian native, to meet by the time she was 30. Some of the checklist items were frivolous goals her 13-year-old self had composed after flipping through magazines. Eating pizza with her hands and reenacting Beyoncé were a few such items. Others were lofty career and educational ambitions she wasn’t sure she’d ever be able to accomplish.

Fifteen years later, the University of Missouri-St. Louis graduate and recent MBA student Mbale has crossed off all but three items and expanded on many of the goals. But until recently, Mbale wasn’t particularly proud of what she had accomplished thus far:

> “I wish I was proud,” she said. “That’s one of my struggles. I don’t get satisfied that easily, and that’s because I’ve always said I needed to do better; I didn’t feel very accomplished until I found the list I wrote myself when I was 15. When I read it through, I finally felt like I had done well.”

Until the list reappeared around her 30th birthday, Mbale had never discussed or shown it to anyone. Even she had forgotten about it. But she does remember drafting it at a tearful moment in her teens and tucking it away, somewhat embarrassed about its contents and never discussion or shown it to anyone. Even she had forgotten about it.

> “It was a tough ride, but I knew that only the way I could get out of that was to get an education. It wasn’t easy. I won’t lie. It didn’t feel hard until now that I think about it and see American culture. I wasn’t supposed to be going through that at 15, but I did.”

Luckily, Mbale found someone who took a vested interest in her education during her junior year.

Alexis Denny, an American Peace Corps volunteer, arrived at her school as its first female instructor. Other teachers directed Denny to Mbale since she was the highest achieving female in the class and founder of the school’s Girls Club.

The pair began to build a strong rapport until Mbale started missing school. Denny caught Mbale prying through a window one day and reprimanded her for missing class. Mbale explained that her absence wasn’t her choice; simply didn’t have the money to continue going to school.

Denny then gave Mbale a life-changing proposal. She offered to pay for Mbale’s education if she came to live with her and helped her navigate Malawian culture, cook on an open fire and live without electricity.

> Mbale agreed enthusiastically. “I was scared at first,” she said. “But I told my friends and family, ‘This is an opportunity, and I need to go.’ We became friends, and now we are sisters.

The assistance helped Mbale finish high school and also provided an introduction to the American education system.

At the time, there was only one university in Malawi, and Mbale had little hope that she would gain admission. She mentioned the dilemma to Denny, who encouraged Mbale to apply for a student visa to study in the U.S. It took three years, but Mbale eventually acquired a visa and admission into Jefferson College, a community college near Denny’s family in Hillsboro, Missouri.

Now that she was continuing her education and out of the village, Mbale had one major goal remaining – develop a meaningful career and then empower other women through her knowledge and experiences.

None of those goals were simple.

Mbale’s parents, who were educated professionals, died when she was 11. The couple had invested their life savings to start a business a year earlier, leaving Mbale and her three siblings with no financial stability. The children then left their comfortable life in the city to live with extended family in a small village.

Mbale’s strained financial circumstances particularly plagued her high school education. All students pay for high school in Malawi. If students don’t pay tuition after three weeks, they’re sent home.

> “I realized a few years ago that I’ve been a feminist for a long time.”

Mbale’s attitude toward advancing women’s rights and interests is based on the plight of those in her home country and the strength of the females in her family.

> “My family is influenced by women,” she said. “But growing up in an environment that as a woman you are less, I think that’s what inspired me. I won’t lie that it has made me the person I’ve become today. I’ve been seen as less and less, but I’ve believed in myself. I’m not less. I can be more.”

When she arrived at Jefferson College, Mbale still maintained her desire to become a human rights attorney. She eagerly navigated her way through school and life in America with the assistance of her newfound family, adding a term as Jefferson College’s Student Senate president to her résumé.

As her graduation approached, Mbale began researching institutions where she could finish her bachelor’s degree. She stumbled upon UMSL and its high-ranking international business program. It was then that she realized a business degree could better serve her interests in advancing the lives and careers of women.

Mbale enrolled at UMSL, and quickly became involved in a variety of international student and College of Business Administration activities. By 2016, she had earned her long-sought college degree with an added certificate from the Pierre Laclede Honors College. She’s the first woman in her high school class to earn a bachelor’s degree.

Mbale now expects to graduate with an MBA and certificate in digital marketing in May.

Until then, she’s keeping busy as a graduate research assistant for UMSL’s International Business Institute, digital marketing teaching assistant and virtual mentor for girls in Malawi. She’s also interning this summer for Odd Couples Housing, a service company that pairs healthy single individuals with young professionals or college students for shared housing.

As a digital and social media manager for Odd Couples, Mbale is helping enhance the online presence of the fledgling company. But with Odd Couples’ two distinct demographics, she’s also offered input on traditional marketing methods.

> “Honestly, I’ve gone through a lot, and I’ve survived it all,” she said. “That’s something that I’m proud of about myself. I know that no matter what life throws at me, I’ll be able to handle it.”

> “The internship has been a challenge, which is good for me,” she said. “It’s challenged me to think beyond. When I came in, I had this proposal of what I was going to do. Now that I’m doing the internship, it’s changing every day.”

With two semesters left and professional experiences underway, Mbale is looking ahead to the future. She’s not sure where she’ll be in 10 years, but she’s creating a new checklist to help guide her.

> “Honestly, I’ve gone through a lot, and I’ve survived it all,” she said. “But I’m proud of myself. I know that no matter what life throws at me, I’ll be able to handle it.”
Proud Missouri

LGBTQ individuals from across the state come together for Show Me Pride College Summit

STORY BY: MADI BAUGHMAN

Winter 2019

When we think of “pride events,” we often think of parades, dinners, rallies, or something else of that sort. However, pride events can also come in the form of a statewide conference—or conference, as in the case of the Show Me Pride College Summit.

Every year, Show Me Pride provides a safe space for college students and faculty all over the state of Missouri to discuss topics in our community and come together to solve problems.

Ciara Pate is a sophomore at UMKC, and she has expressed a huge love for attending pride conferences.

“Nothing has made me more appreciative of my personal identity than the conference,” Pate said. “I was in two forums with students from Rockhurst, a university only a block away from UMKC, and they discussed how difficult it was being a person of color and a part of the LGBT community.

This conference has inspired myself, as well as many others from UMKC, to reach out to these individuals to help them feel welcomed for all their intersections.”

Above all, the conference provides a great place to make connections and encourage students and faculty alike to become more involved in their communities. While some schools are fortunate enough to have a whole center dedicated to the LGBTQ community with paid staff, some schools may have no place to go, but very passionate students. Whatever the situation, the conference is a place to come together to push for the change we’d like to see at a community level, as well as a national level. The importance of the conference may be summed up best by Molly Hart, a student coordinator at the LGBTQ Resource Center at MU.

“I would say that it’s easy to kind of forget that we’re doing work in the community, because a lot of times it’s just like hanging out with my friends, but then you see that the resources we’re providing and the topics we’re discussing are actually really important,” Hart said. “It’s pretty empowering to realize that we can make that difference in people’s lives.”

Student Experiences Show Me Pride

Schools from across the state of Missouri attend sixth-annual event at MU

STORY BY: MADI BAUGHMAN

Before going to the Show Me Pride College Summit, I wasn’t really sure what to expect. I’d never gone before, so I didn’t know how it would go. I had a basic idea of what the event was like from planning and working with people who had gone before, but I still couldn’t put together a picture in my mind. The main thing I wasn’t prepared for was how much I would love it.

At the conference, we decided in the morning which topics we would like to see, and who would facilitate them. We also came up with rules and expectations, which felt so necessary to me. It made sure we were all on the same page, and that we were being as inclusive as possible. It gave each of us just a little bit more control over this one, special day in our lives, which can feel so rare to grasp, especially in a society where our input is often ignored.

Two of the earlier sessions I went to covered topics from diversity to inclusion to religion and more, and I really feel like I learned a lot, especially because people had such different experiences within the community. It was amazing to see the level of connections developed between people who had never met just hours before, even ones who had totally different experiences in life. It was really valuable to me, to be able to hear the voices of people who are so often talked over.

Then I walked into the Bi+ Closed Caucus, and I felt beyond safe. I felt comfortable; for the first time in a long time. Sure, working in MU’s LGBTQ Resource Center gives me the privilege of being around queer people all the time, but this was different, in a way, sitting with only people who shared my identity. It felt like a safe space, where we could freely discuss the problems inside and outside of our community, and bond over shared experiences. It made me light up from the inside out.

Instead of going to my last session, I headed back to the Center, where one of our own students was giving free haircuts to anyone in attendance. That small act of kindness, providing a service to people who might not otherwise have it, really cemented for me how truly compassionate our community can be. It made me proud of us—of who we are, and who we aspire to be. We look out for each other. We support each other. We work to be better. I feel at home here.

All in all, this conference is something so important that we rarely find in today’s society. I’ve never felt closer to dozens of literal strangers—there’s something there that bonds us together, something powerful, and tapping into that has changed my point of view. I am beyond excited for next year’s conference. All the hard work that everyone put it was undoubtedly worth it, and I hope that other people were able to have the same experience that I did.
FOR RESEARCH EXCELLENCE 1

Creating a space to talk through it is one of the reasons why McDowell said the group is only open to students of color. “We already don’t really have a space, so making a space available is like ‘This is your space, you’re free to talk about whatever without feeling like you have to be restricted or someone’s going to put you down,’” McDowell said. “Not saying that if white members did come they would do that. But it’s just to have something that you can feel more comfortable talking about issues you might not get to talk about.”

Former psychology graduate student Angela Huneke co-founded the support group in 2014 to help students cope with the side-effects of minority underrepresentation on campus. A year later, during the fall 2015 protests, student activist group Concerned Student 1950 raised similar issues in its highly publicized list of demands to the administration. Demand number seven was for an increased mental health budget for the purpose of hiring more mental health professionals of color and boosting outreach for the MU Counseling Center.

In the spring of 2017, MU students did vote to increase funding toward the center, which was intended to pay for three additional counselors, according to previous KRCU reporting. Of the 31 mental health care professionals employed by MU, 10 identify as people of color, according to data provided by MU’s spokesperson Liz McMeans.

In 2016, 32 percent of psychology doctoral degrees were granted to people of color, according to data compiled by the American Psychological Association. But as of 2015 less than one-fifth of the U.S. psychology workforce identified as racial or ethnic minorities. Those numbers suggest finding a mental health professional who looks like you, and can empathize with racial trauma, is an ongoing challenge for people of color.

Huneke says the need for the support group, which is not considered official mental health treatment, is obvious. But continuing to meet that need comes at a price known as “the minority tax.”

“People of color have to take on additional things like starting this group,” Huneke said. “Yoanna and Jonathan, they’re not getting paid or getting credit for this, because we see that it’s a need we take on these types of responsibilities.”

McDowell said the total costs for running the support group is around $1,000, and that covers the cost of food and renting the space in the Multicultural Center. The support group received support from numerous sources on campus including the Division of Inclusion, Diversity & Equity; the Department of Educational, School and Counseling Psychology; and MU Black Studies Department.

Huneke moved to Connecticut in 2017 to complete a residency in clinical psychology at Yale School of Medicine. Now, Ferguson and McDowell lead the group together. From what he’s seen, Ferguson says MU has a long way to go before the group is no longer relevant: “I can’t really envision a time on this campus where it’s not necessary to have a space like this.”

In the meantime, Ferguson and McDowell welcome all students of color in need of healing from racial injustices to join them from 2-3 p.m. on Thursdays in the Multicultural Center. No appointment necessary.

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Mark Pope, Distinguished Professor Emeritus of the UMSL College of Education, was awarded the inaugural Mark Pope Social Justice and Advocacy Award during the 2019 National LGBT Counseling Organization Conference.

The award recognizes individuals who have made significant contributions to the field of counseling and social justice over the course of their careers. Pope, who served as a professor in the UMSL College of Education for 21 years before retiring at the start of the fall term, the UMSL Alumni Association helped plan an event in his honor on Sept. 28 with more than 100 former students and colleagues coming to St. Louis from places such as California, Colorado and New York City to celebrate a trailblazer in his field.

"Mark has done it all," said Ann Taylor, dean of the UMSL College of Education. "He has devoted his professional life to advocacy and scholarship, publishing more than 100 articles, books and chapters on multicultural awareness and career development. Notably, he developed a model of career counseling with underserved populations that is recognized as one of the major theoretical works in his field.

"Through all of this, he has preserved forward the cause of freedom and equity for all people. His colleagues professionally recognize him as an outstanding thinker and honor him with national awards, while his students know him as a great teacher and supporter, recognizing him with their gratitude for his care and attention to their growth. The college has been the recipient of his strong leadership and organization, as he has worked tirelessly to bring education programming nationally ranked for its rigor and excellence." 

Now, Pope is on limping up a purposeful cleaning of his two offices on the UMSL campus. He is working with Charles Brown, the University Archivist and Oklahoma State University Library Curator of Reference for the St. Louis Mercantile Library, to establish both a Mark Pope Special Collection of his historical papers and an archive of the remainder of his professional papers in the Thomas Jefferson Library. Both are scheduled to be available by the end of 2011.

Sorting through papers from a career well spent is taking a little longer than Pope expected.

"It's very time-consuming, because it's going through every piece of paper that I've saved and reflected," Pope said. "I tried to be a packrat." 

STORY BY: DAVID MORRISON
PHOTOS BY: AUGUST JENNEWEIN

Mark Pope's distinguished career as a counselor and educator made him a natural choice for the inaugural Mark Pope Social Justice and Advocacy Award, given annually to just one recipient across all four universities in the University of Missouri System to recognize the college has been the recipient of his strong leadership and organization, as he has worked tirelessly to bring education programming nationally ranked for its rigor and excellence.

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Hidden in Plain Sight
Mizzou students talk about navigating college with a non-apparent disability.

STORY BY: ERIK POTTER
PHOTOS BY: SAM O’KEEFE

oughly 900 Mizzou students have non-apparent disabilities. That is, they have neurological or psychological conditions or learning disabilities that are not immediately apparent to casual observers. Nonetheless, these disabilities are very real. We recently spoke to three Mizzou students with non-apparent disabilities and asked them to share their stories as part of Mizzou’s ongoing effort to demystify disability.

You can join the conversation, too. Share your own story on social media with the hashtag #TheFutureIsAccessible. You also can visit the Disability Center to learn more about resources for students with disabilities and those who support them.

Emily Martin
Emily Martin had just finished the Jump Rope for Heart challenge when she got her first migraine. She was in fifth grade. “I thought I was dying,” she remembers.

Migraines came a year later. With medication, she kept them at bay until high school. Then, during sophomore year, Martin developed daily hemiplegic migraines, which mimic the symptoms of a stroke. She missed so much school that she withdrew to be homeschooled. She didn’t return until senior year. For college, the Oakville, Missouri, native sent in a request to St. Louis Community College, then transferred to Mizzou for major in biology.

But one year in, Martin’s grades were suffering. She still had daily migraines and missed a lot of class. On bad days, the migraines nearly paralyzed the left side of her body. Sometimes they caused her to see double and speak with a speech impediment.

“People thought I was drunk,” she says.

During a doctor visit over the summer, her doctor suggested she explore any accommodations Mizzou could make for her. That’s when she discovered the Disability Center. The center helped in several ways. For instance, during tests Martin is allowed to wear a wide-brimmed hat, which shields her eyes from light and glare. Also, the exam questions are written in large print on blue-tinted paper, which reduces eye strain.

Perhaps the biggest accommodation has been extra time on exams. Tests are stressful, and stress is a migraine trigger. To manage the pain, Martin does a breathing exercise — breathe in for four beats, hold for seven, exhale for eight. Doing the exercise helps, but it takes time away from answering questions, making the extra time critical.

“It’s meant everything, just putting those accommodations in place,” Martin says. “That little bit of help has allowed me to do the work to get where I need to be.”

Martin expects to graduate in December 2019 with a double-major in biology and psychology. She knows she wants a career in medicine, but isn’t sure if she will choose medical school, a physician’s assistant program or paramedic training.

Since 2017, she has worked part-time as an emergency medical technician for Cole County, Missouri, going out on medical calls with paramedics. She likes using her skills during psychiatric calls where someone is in distress, unable to cope and is acting out.

“I just love comforting them without medication,” she says. “I walk them through the breathing exercise — if it’s a kid I’ll give them a stuffed animal to squeeze during the breaths.”

Sometimes the patients will marvel at her as she knew just what to do or say. Martin, however, doesn’t find it that surprising. “Anyone who has an experience of going through something that has a better idea of what the person needs,” she says.

John Eccleston
Since 2017, he has worked part-time as an emergency medical technician for Cole County, Missouri, going out on medical calls with paramedics. She likes using her skills during psychiatric calls where someone is in distress, unable to cope and is acting out.

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The flight attendant brought John Eccleston’s drink to him near the beginning of his long flight home from a short-term study abroad trip in China. “Xièxie,” he said, taking the cup from her. He was hours into the flight before he realized he was saying “thank you” in Chinese to the American airline crew.

Eccleston’s 10 weeks in China were an immersive experience. He facely-led cohort spent five weeks in seven cites learning business management and studying the Chinese language. Then they spent five weeks in internships in Shanghai.

The experience was possible for all of the students because of Mizzou’s strong study-abroad program. For Eccleston, it was also possible because of the MU Disability Center, which ensured that he had the accommodations he needed for his studies and exams while he was half a world away from Columbia.

Eccleston has attention deficit disorder, which makes it difficult for him to focus and tune out distractions. He gets note-taking assistance, receives extra time on exams and takes exams outside the classroom in quiet rooms provided by the Disability Center.

It’s part of the reason he chose Mizzou. While in high school, Eccleston toured several colleges within driving distance of his Chicago-area home. At each campus, he asked what accommodations they could make for him. The reception he received and the answers he got varied.

“Mizzou was the most welcoming,” he says, and he clicked immediately with the access adviser he met. “He was one of the reasons my mom was comfortable sending me here and a half hours away.”

With accommodations in place, those barriers that might have kept Eccleston from succeeding were gone. And the business major with a minor in leadership and public service has been able to thrive.

Eccleston has taken several classes through the MU Office of Service Learning, which gave him the opportunity to tutor refugees from Eritrea, a country on the east coast of Africa, and it led him to intern with the Missouri Department of Economic Development, where he has worked in the energy division since August 2017.

He is interested in a public policy career at the state or federal level that promotes economic development and energy sustainability, particularly as it relates to infrastructure and climate change.

Sophie Endacott
Sophie Endacott has always liked the idea of being a veterinarian, but the thought of having to put an animal down was enough to make the junior in biology students aim for medical school instead. The pull of her four-legged friends has proved too strong, however.

“Just want to help them and the people who care for them,” the Nixa, Missouri, native says. “If they’re sick, they can’t help themselves.”

Her appreciation for animals has only grown in the past two years since she started using a service dog, a disability accommodation she arranged through the MU Disability Center. The dog was a family pet — a golden retriever and Great Pyrenees mix named Hudson — that she had trained to be a service dog. “He’s been perfect,” Endacott says.

Bringing a service dog to campus and into class with her has helped Endacott perform at her best, but it has also led to challenges.

“A lot of people try to pet my dog or do things to distract him,” Endacott says. “I know most people just love being around animals, but what they don’t realize is that by distracting him, he’s not able to do his job for me.”

Sometimes, she says, people will talk to Hudson and ignore her; they’ll take her picture without permission or explanation, or because they can’t see a visible disability, they’ll accuse her of taking a dog to bring her dog with her to class.

Most of the time, though, the awkwardness stems from people simply not knowing how to behave around someone with a service dog.

Endacott has some advice:

- Always ask permission to pet a service dog
- Talk to the person, not to the dog
- Treat the person normally — be respectful and kind
- Don’t take the person’s picture without their permission

As a student with a non-apparent disability, Endacott has found comfort in the Disability Center. “You need a place where they understand you,” she says, “and the Disability Center is that place.”
S

heila Grigsby believes in being a servant to the community. That is why, in 2010, she jumped at the opportunity to lead a group of nursing students for a day of preventative health screenings done in neighborhood barber shops conceived by the nonprofit 100 Black Men of Metropolitan St. Louis.

In the years since, the University of Missouri–St. Louis College of Nursing has been a tremendous partner in making sure we provide these services. Sheila and the student nurses at UMSL have been a tremendous partner with us in making sure we provide these services.

The tour first came to be in 2009 as a project between the 100 Black Men and an eight-student clinical group from SLU. The modern iteration is a collaboration among UMSL, the 100 Black Men, Saint Louis University and the City of St. Louis Department of Health. In 2018, the program ran on Saturdays in March and April and took place in 10 locations each month. The students provided blood pressure and diabetes screenings and educated patrons on HIV/AIDS and prostate cancer.

Each day of volunteering started in a central location, where Grigsby, Gilbert and Harrison passed out supplies and gave last-minute instructions to the students.

"Barber shops are very unique, and they are neighborhood specific," Grigsby said. "The barbers and beauticians that we interact with are key leaders in the community. The barber shop is where people come to talk about problems and the issues of the day."

The to-be nurses participate in the tour during their last semester. During its annual gala, the 100 Black Men awarded its Pillar Award for Health and Wellness Saturday at the SLU student nurses that we can make a difference one person, one barber shop at a time."

On Saturday, she was recognized for her contributions. During its annual gala, the 100 Black Men awarded its Pillar Award for Health and Wellness to Grigsby and Gilbert in recognition of their efforts for the Barbershop Tour.

"Sheila has worked very diligently with us, with the Barbershop Tour, to help bring some heightened awareness about health issues that affect the communities that we serve," Board President Lenny Shumpert said. "It’s important because it’s really taken the needs to the community.

The tour incorporated a dietician who performed healthy food demonstrations, and the organizers are in the process of thinking about the logical next steps, which might include new interventions or programs. first, however, there’s a lot of data to collate and much thinking to do about what might benefit the community the most.

In addition to the tour, Grigsby and her nursing students assist with the Barbershop Tour’s Community Health Day, an effort to increase awareness and raise research funds for tackling prostate cancer. In this, she finds a personal angle: Her father is a longtime prostate cancer survivor.

Grigsby came to UMSL in 2007 after working for the St. Louis City Department of Health and last year achieved a tenure-track position in the Department of Health and Social Justice. She expanded the single day of screenings to each Saturday for the Barbershop Tour virtually unrecognizable. She explained that the tour can be life changing for the students and sometimes the only point of entry that people have. We are the most trusted profession."

Throughout the 10-plus years the Barbershop Tour has run, Grigsby and others have tracked data and collected patron surveys. As a result, this year the tour incorporated a dietician who performed healthy food demonstrations, and the organizers are in the process of thinking about the logical next steps, which might include new interventions or programs. first, however, there’s a lot of data to collate and much thinking to do about what might benefit the community the most.

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Grigsby came to UMSL in 2007 after working for the St. Louis City Department of Health and last year achieved a tenure-track position after completing her PhD. Her area of research is HIV prevention in the St. Louis African American community, and she primarily works with the faith community to spread awareness.

"Believe, now, it would be very hard to find someone who has not been personally touched by someone in their life that is living with HIV or has died from the complications," she said. "The challenge is to continue to be innovative in ways to keep congregations engaged because they have many competing demands other than just addressing a particular issue or health issue. I’m working with congregations to develop health ministries and to find ways they can incorporate this information into the work they are already doing, which has been key in allowing us to continue to do this work. I feel strongly that we need to do everything we can."

"I can’t tell you the number of times the students will come back and say, ‘I can’t believe everything they told me.’

“The benefits are just so large for the community because they see the presence of these nursing students,” Grigsby said. “The patrons may not go to a doctor, but they will talk to the nursing students. I can’t tell you the number of times the students will come back and say, ‘I can’t believe everything they told me.’

This just demonstrates that nurses are critical in the healthcare field, and sometimes the only point of entry that people have. We are the most trusted profession.”
Student veteran Miron Clay-Gilmore plans to pursue PhD in philosophy after completing degree at UMSL

STORY BY: STEVE WALENTIK
PHOTOS BY: AUGUST JENNEWIN

Miron Clay-Gilmore took a notable step toward his future on Saturday as he walked across the stage at the Mark Twain Athletic Center and accepted his diploma and degree in philosophy from the University of Missouri–St. Louis. He appears to have made a lasting impression on the professors he’s known at UMSL.

“Clay-Gilmore is a truly passionate student,” said Assistant Professor Tommy Dunaway, who chairs the Department of Philosophy and taught Clay-Gilmore in one of the first courses – Early Modern Philosophy – he took at UMSL. “He’s an extremely well-read and diligent worker,” said Assistant Professor Jon McGinnis, who chairs the Department of Philosophy and taught Clay-Gilmore in for his BA in philosophy from the University of Florida Panhandle, where he worked in an administrative role, aiding in the training of Marine Corps pilots, helicopter staff, parachute and divers.

He’d taken a few classes at Pensacola Community College in the Florida Panhandle, where he worked in an administrative role, having been in the Marines for five years, before transferring to UMSL. “I wanted to talk to them. We talked about potential schools,” said McGinnis.

Clay-Gilmore felt himself pulled toward philosophy by his father, a philosophy major at UMSL, who encouraged him to major in philosophy. He was interested in black nationalism after reading the autobiography of Malcolm X in 12th grade. He began to think about the notion of black nationalism after reading the autobiography of Malcolm X in 12th grade. He’d always been a deep thinker, eager to explore weighty topics even as a high school student at Hazelwood Central in north St. Louis County.

“He’s an exceptionally impressive young man,” said Jon McGinnis, who chairs the Department of Philosophy and taught Clay-Gilmore in for helping cultivate his thinking since enrolling at the university in the fall of 2016. “It’s her degree more than mine at this point,” he said. “There’s no way I could do more.”

Clay-Gilmore is hoping to continue those efforts as he pursues a PhD in philosophy or perhaps Africana Studies. He’s applying to schools such as Cornell University, the University of Michigan, Northeastern University and the University of Massachusetts Amherst.

“I’ll be a miscarriage of justice if he doesn’t get into one of the top schools,” McGinnis said.

For now, Clay-Gilmore is merely happy to have reached the end of his undergraduate studies and is grateful to his wife for getting him to Saturday’s stage.

“I wasn’t much of a scholar in high school,” Clay-Gilmore said. “All the things I was interested in, none of them were on the curriculum. I was looking up ancient African history, but I was supposed to be doing something else. Anytime they put me in front of a computer, I had other tabs open.”

Clay-Gilmore came to UMSL about a year after separating from the United States Marine Corps, where he served four years. For more than half of that, he was stationed in the north St. Louis County, where he worked in an administrative role, aiding in the training of Marine Corps pilots, helicopter staff, parachute and divers.

He’d taken a few classes at Pensacola Community College while working in nearby Milton during his return to civilian life. Ultimately, he and his wife, Lauren, decided to move back to his hometown so he could enroll in college full time.

There was just something about them,” he said of the recruiters he encountered at Hazelwood Central. “I wanted to talk to them. We talked about potential schools, and all these different things, and I really didn’t have any plans at all. I knew I could do more, and I wanted to try to challenge myself in different ways.”

Clay-Gilmore didn’t grow up in a military family and said the experience was “really out of my arena.” He’d never hiked or shot a weapon before, and he didn’t consider himself an athlete. He chose the Marine Corps because it seemed like the biggest feat. “I had talked to all the branches beforehand, and the Marine recruiters, they were different in a way that was good to me,” he said. “I wanted to have that kind of distinction.”

Clay-Gilmore’s experiences in the Marines helped make him a focused scholar. He’d examined it in much greater depth, drawing on philosophers such as Walter Rodney during his undergraduate studies. Much of his work has been thinking through a long-standing scholarly debate between assimilationists and black nationalists about the best way to deal with racial issues and accommodate the needs of people whose ancestors were brought here from Africa as slaves.

He’d always been a deep thinker, eager to explore weighty topics even as a high school student at Hazelwood Central in north St. Louis County. Often that was at the expense of the subjects he was being tested.

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Clay-Gilmore’s experiences in the Marines helped make him a focused scholar. McGinnis noted that he’s unafraid to ask questions and get answers to anything on his mind.

He began to think about the notion of black nationalism after reading the autobiography of Malcolm X in 12th grade. He’s examined it in much greater depth, drawing on philosophers such as Martin Delany, Marcus Garvey, Frantz Fanon, Amilcar Cabral and especially Walter Rodney during his undergraduate studies. Much of his work has been thinking through a long-standing scholarly debate between assimilationists and black nationalists about the best way to deal with racial issues and accommodate the needs of people whose ancestors were brought here from Africa as slaves.

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“For now, Clay-Gilmore is merely happy to have reached the end of his undergraduate studies and is grateful to his wife for getting him to Saturday’s stage.”

For more information, contact Clay-Gilmore at mirongilmore@gmail.com or call 314-660-2795.

Clay-Gilmore plans to pursue a PhD in philosophy after completing his undergraduate studies at UMSL.
Betancourt and Franco encourage their peers to save the date for January 1 when the HDF starts accepting scholarship applications. In the meantime, prospective and current students can visit the UMKC Financial Aid website for more scholarship and grant opportunities.

Over the past three decades, the Hispanic Development Fund has awarded more than $4.5 million in scholarships to more than 3,000 prospective college students. Their mission is to improve the quality of life of Latinx families in Greater Kansas City by engaging the Latinx community in philanthropy to build stronger communities through grant making and scholarship support.

Betancourt said this opportunity especially means a lot to him because “it’s supporting our Hispanic community, which doesn’t have a lot of the opportunities that others have.”

Both Franco and Betancourt are first-generation college students and have had personal experiences with the challenges that come with paying for college.

“For most DACA students, this means they’re able to stay in school,” said Franco, who proudly proclaims her DACA status despite its accompanying challenges. “With the way politics work, DACA students have to pay international tuition, so every bit helps.”

Kansas City barbecue is good for so many things – besides being a favorite pastime for locals and attracting visitors from across the country to experience what real barbecue tastes like. For University of Missouri-Kansas City juniors Maria Franco (mechanical engineering major with a minor in mathematics) and Bryan Betancourt (finance and management major), a simple invite to a barbecue led to a huge opportunity for their student organization, Association of Latin American Students, to help Latinx students stay in school.

ALAS recently participated in a Hispanic Development Fund fundraising campaign and competition that resulted in the student organization raising nearly $9,000 in matching scholarship dollars for Latinx first-generation and DACA students. The group competed against three other universities – Rockhurst University, University of Kansas and Kansas State University – to see who could raise the most money; the winner received a matching gift from the HDF. ALAS outdid their competition by raising $4,400.

Franco, ALAS president, said they dedicated the entire month of September, Hispanic Heritage Month, to hosting off-campus fundraisers for the competition. However, according to ALAS treasurer, Betancourt, the majority of their success was a result of direct donations from community members, professors, peers and the students’ individual networks.

“We went out and talked to people, told them we were raising money and why,” said Franco, adding that networking and connecting with the community is important to ALAS. The organization has an underlying goal of increasing the Latinx student population at UMKC.

As another fundraising – and low-key recruitment – strategy, ALAS students designed Latina-inspired button pins for high school students as a way to show them that not only do Latinx students go to college, there are ways to pay for it and that “UMKC is the best.”

“The Chancellor had my same idea of using ‘La familia’ because that was going to be one our buttons,” she said, adding that the Spanish phrase often used by Chancellor C. Mauli Agrawal, in reference to UMKC’s campus community, immediately resonated with her. In fact, Franco said that makes them “best friends now.”

The money ALAS raised for scholarships will go back to help DACA students at UMKC pay for school. Area high schools participated in their own division of the competition, as well as local businesses and organizations.

Alta Vista High School, a Guadalupe Center charter school, won the high school division of the competition and those scholarship dollars go toward seniors. The Society of Hispanic Professional Engineers won first place in the professional division and those scholarship funds go toward high school and college students.

“Most DACA students, this means they’re able to stay in school,” said Franco, who proudly proclaims her DACA status despite its accompanying challenges. “With the way politics work, DACA students have to pay international tuition, so every bit helps.”

STORY BY: KELSEY HAYNES

Student Organization Raises Funds for Latinx Scholarships

Association of Latin American Students helps Dreamers stay in school

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Inaugural World Languages Day encourages St. Louis high school students to continue studies

STORY & PHOTOS BY: JESSICA ROGEN

A girl lost a game of rock-paper-scissors only to have her opponent bring a hammer down toward her head. She quickly flipped a large bowl up, over her noggin and deflected his blow.

Not to worry, though. The hammers were plastic and part of a Japanese toy called rock paper scissors hammer helmet. The two demonstrated it to a group of St. Louis-area high school students as part of the University of Missouri–St. Louis' World Languages Day.

The event, held in the Century Rooms in the Millennium Student Center, was the brainchild of Sandra Trapani, UMSL teaching professor in French and chair of the Department of Language and Cultural Studies.

Along with the entire Department of Language and Cultural Studies faculty, Trapani rallied support from departments and organizations around campus, and the Advanced Credit Program helped with funding. Together, they planned a host of language-themed activities and games: poetry recitations, skits, a scavenger hunt, spelling bees, tongue twisters, geography games and a poster contest, to name a few.

Between 80 and 90 UMSL students, as well as the entire faculty in languages, volunteered. And around 300 high school students participated from Eureka, Fort Zumwalt North, Fort Zumwalt South, Marquette, Northwest and Rockwood Summit.

Della Thompson, French instructor at Marquette High School, thought seeing the campus and getting an idea of college life would encourage students to continue studying languages after high school. Her colleague, Emily Thompson, agreed and hoped that her students' peers would enhance their experiences.

“They hope to talk to students who are at the same level as them in other schools and see that everyone is on the same level,” Thompson said.

The event opened with a welcome from current UMSL language students Abby Naumann, Seth Huntington and Valerie Foster. Each stepped up to the microphone in turn and introduced themselves, their studies, their study abroad experiences and their career aspirations in a different language—or two. Spanish, French, Japanese and German boomed out to the seemingly delighted crowd. Other speakers included Trapani, Associate Dean of Students in the College of Arts and Sciences Birgit Noll, Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences Andrew Kersten, Associate Provost for Student Affairs Beth Eckelkamp and others, but it was the college students that made the biggest impression.

“The kids have it so that everything speaking different languages,” said Grace Puchalski, senior at Fort Zumwalt South High School. “I do think it was kind of cool because we hear our teachers all the time, but we don’t really hear anybody else. Students, especially. Lots of Japanese—I didn’t expect that.”

Born in Frankfurt, Germany, Puchalski moved to the U.S. when she was six and gradually lost her language skills since her family mostly spoke English at home. However, she quickly regained lost ground in her high school classes.

“I liked how involved everybody is,” she said. “I was on the fence about continuing German into college, but now I want to.”