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tapestry

UM SYSTEM DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION BIENNIAL

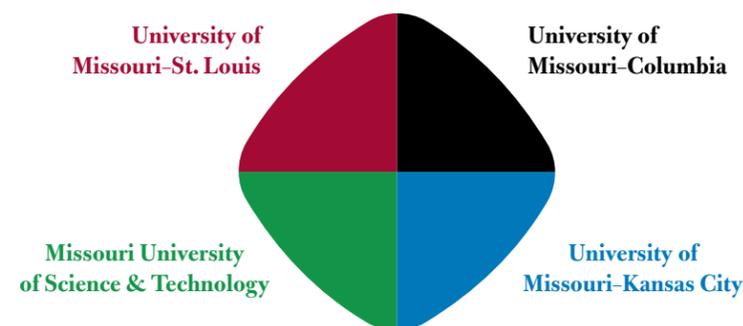


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Universities within the system:



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Welcome to the second edition of *Tapestry*!

Deborah Burris



During the May 2 University of Missouri (UM) System Collaborative Design Session, President Mun Choi noted “the rapidly changing landscape of higher education.” This fact, coupled with the changes that we see in our society, reaffirms the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). DEI efforts are crucial to the success of the UM System and must be included in the future that we are shaping.

DEI efforts support the mission of the UM System in every aspect: education, business, research and service. The cultural awareness programs, events, training and other activities enable individuals to gain a better understanding of themselves and others. These programs also help to reduce bias and unfair treatment of individuals, which can hamper the success of the individual, group or organization. These efforts foster an environment whereby individuals can flourish, resulting in a more vibrant, productive organization.

The experiences of our students are enriched when diversity is infused in the curriculum and classroom setting. The result is an educated, informed, culturally sensitive and skilled citizenry. Prospective employers often speak of needing a workforce with the “soft skills” of being able to work with individuals from diverse backgrounds on a professional level, in the community and from a global perspective. Diverse faculty and staff are a part of this experience for our students because they bring their unique attributes to the classroom and other spaces on our campuses.

DEI has also advanced the research agenda of most disciplines. As a major public research university, we realize that the answers to some of the challenges that we face in society — health, economic development, environmental concerns and more — will come from diverse perspectives and approaches.

This publication represents a brief sampling of the DEI work that is taking place on the UM System campuses. I am inspired by UM System campus community members who are deeply committed to weaving this wonderful tapestry across the state. I invite you to review the articles and take note of the work that is taking place throughout the UM System while reflecting on your role in advancing diversity, equity and inclusion efforts.

“ *The experiences of our students are enriched when diversity is infused in the curriculum and classroom setting.* ”

Deborah Burris,
Director & Chief Diversity Officer
Office of Diversity, Equity & Inclusion
University of Missouri-St. Louis

Emerging Leaders Conference Offers Legislative Leadership Opportunities to High School Students



Photos by Aaric Doyle-Wright

STORY BY MORGAN MCABOY-YOUNG AND MU NEWS BUREAU

More than 50 rising Missouri high school sophomores, juniors and seniors participated in the legislative process during the annual Emerging Leadership Conference, co-sponsored by the University of Missouri Division of Inclusion, Diversity & Equity (IDE) and the Missouri Legislative Black Caucus Foundation, Inc. (MLBCF).

Participants learned about 10 bills from the 2018 Missouri legislative session. They then selected three of the bills to debate on the Capitol floor. Students were housed on the U of M-Columbia campus and worked closely with university administrators, professors, doctoral and undergraduate students and state legislators throughout the conference, which took place June 24–27.

Several members of the MLBCF joined students for portions of the conference, including Rep. DaRon McGee, D-South Kansas City; Rep. Steven Roberts, D-St. Louis; Rep. Clem Smith, D-Velda Village Hills; and Rep. Tommie Pierson Jr., D-St. Louis. Informal dialogue sessions provided participants with opportunities to hear firsthand about the legislators’ experiences with researching bills, leveraging internal and external support and crafting meaningful debate points.



“It’s imperative that we have participation from elected officials, so that we can empower students to engage at all levels of government.”

RHODESIA MCMILLIAN

Rhodesia McMillian, IDE associate director for K–12 Access, Programming and Engagement, works to coordinate the conference and says face-to-face interaction with legislators is critical when working with students to help them better identify with various roles in the legislative process.

“The Emerging Leaders Conference presents Missouri high school students with an opportunity to gain knowledge around legislative processes from legislators who represent their home districts, and

in turn, it helps legislators keep up to date with issues that matter to our youth,” says McMillian. “Every human right, particularly for students of color, has been decided through legislation. It’s imperative that we have participation from elected officials, so that we can empower students to engage at all levels of government.”

Sen. Shalonn “Kiki” Curls, D-Kansas City; Rep. Gail McCann Beatty, D-Kansas City; Rep. Bruce Franks Jr., D-St. Louis; and Kevin McDonald, MU vice chancellor for Inclusion, Diversity & Equity and UM System chief diversity officer, also served as guest speakers and challenged participants to think critically about their role as student leaders. Participants were also exposed to college-preparation workshops led by Mizzou Admissions, faculty and staff; a campus tour; and student-mentor advising sessions.

Since 2016, IDE’s Access and Leadership Development unit has coordinated the conference with the goal to promote civic participation and college access. The Emerging Leaders Conference is one of several programs designed to enhance MU’s ability to engage and impact students from underrepresented and underserved populations throughout various stages of the K–20 pipeline.

To learn more about how you can support this initiative, visit mizzougivedirect.missouri.edu/Item.aspx?item_id=510.

S&T Running Back Also Gives Back



Photo by Sam O'Keefe

STORY BY DELIA CROESSMANN

It's a rare combination of character traits that Deshawn Jones, a sophomore in biological sciences and running back for Missouri S&T's football team, shares with the world.

With smarts, discipline and exceptional athletic prowess, Jones has amassed a coveted collection of athletic titles and records in his two years at S&T. In 2017 alone, he earned the College Sports Information Directors of America Academic All-America® award and the Great Lakes Valley Conference (GLVC) scholar-athlete of the year award, and was selected to the NCAA Division II All-America second team.

Jones was a first-team All-GLVC selection last fall. He set a conference rushing record of 1,579 yards — the third highest

(Above) Deshawn Jones, a biological sciences major and running back for the Missouri S&T Miner football team, mentors Riddik Wisdom as part of an after-school program at Mark Twain Elementary School in Rolla.

by any player in NCAA Division II — and 16 touchdowns for the season. He also broke the conference's single-game rushing record with a 275-yard performance.

Jones has been raking in awards — both athletic and academic — since he was in grammar school. Soft-spoken with a relaxed smile, he communicates his aspirations with humility.

Jones grew up in inner-city Chicago, the middle child of three. He began to cultivate his work ethic as a kindergartner, and today he volunteers at a Rolla, Mo., elementary school to help instill that same work ethic among young people.

"I know what it's like to need help with schoolwork," Jones says. "I relied on my mother to help me at night after she worked long day shifts. I decided early on to take stress off her and learn to help myself, and this early development served me well in the long run."

Motivation matters

Starting with baseball in the third grade, then football in the fifth grade, Jones followed his older brother into athletics. In the sixth grade, he began studying motivational books, tapes and YouTube videos, a practice he continues today by learning the philosophies of Les Brown, Eric Thomas, Zig Ziglar and other motivational speakers.

Jones credits most of his achievements to the motivational impetus of his mother, along with his athletic coaches.

"Motivation brings out the best in me — it's a wonderful thing," Jones says. "I want to create output for others."

“*Motivation brings out the best in me — it's a wonderful thing. I want to create output for others.*”

DESHAWN JONES

When Jones was a teenager, his family moved to Country Club Hills, a suburb of south Chicago, where he attended Rich Central High School. Jones graduated third in his class and was voted the football team's most valuable player, Male Student Athlete of the Year and an Illinois State Scholar.

Jones received offers for full athletic and academic scholarships from nine universities, including Illinois College, Macalester College and Truman State University, in addition to S&T.

"I selected S&T because I liked the diversity there and the opportunity for cultural development," Jones says. "It presented an opportunity for me to connect with, learn and respect different cultures, which will enhance my career as a medical professional."

Jones chose to major in biological sciences based on the influence of his mother and grandmother, who are nurses. Because he also wants to interact with and help people, Jones decided a career in healthcare would provide that opportunity,

and with this major, he's laying the foundation for his ultimate goal to be a trauma surgeon.

But before that, Jones wants to play professional football and save his salary to pay for medical school. Because the leap from the NCAA Division II league to the pros is large, he's trying to get as much exposure in the game as he can.

Jones carefully parses his time between academics and football. "It's a heavier weight to bear," he says. Although he belongs to several honor societies, Jones has little time to divert from pursuing his goals.

Jones appreciates the understanding of his S&T professors. "It's huge," he says. "They ask about the games and want to connect and know me."

Give back what you've been given

Despite this demanding schedule, Jones willingly gives one afternoon a week during the school year to help children develop skills for studying, decision-making, teamwork and leadership at a local elementary school.

"Getting to know Deshawn and watching him work with the students in our program is a true pleasure," says Kathy Heflin, program coordinator for the Mentoring Makes a Difference program in Rolla. "He has a natural, sincere and patient way of effectively working with the student he mentors, as well as other kids in the program. It is rare to find someone who excels in athletics and academics who is also committed to giving back."

"I interact with Deshawn in my role as S&T faculty athletics representative," says Dr. David Westenberg, associate professor of biological sciences at S&T. "I've heard many good things about him from faculty and coaches, but what impresses me most is what he is doing in the community by tutoring local students. I can't wait to see what the future holds for him."

Jones takes a break from athletics and school when he goes home for the summer. This summer, he plans to start studying for the Medical College Admission Test. He's also researching shadowing opportunities at South Suburban Hospital, where he volunteers in the oncology unit.

Jones says he wants to give back what he's been given and has some words of advice for incoming S&T students.

"Come prepared and ready to work, and don't allow failed efforts to deter you from being driven to succeed. Never accept defeat — always battle through and enjoy overcoming the challenges that you may face." 🏈

MU Awarded \$1-Million Grant in Support of Inclusive Excellence

STORY BY JEFF SOSSAMON

The Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI) has selected the University of Missouri to receive a \$1-million, five-year grant in support of the Inclusive Excellence initiative.

As one of 33 colleges selected in 2018, the University of Missouri-Columbia will contribute to the initiative by improving efforts to engage all students in science — regardless of their backgrounds.

“The University of Missouri will transform instructional, institutional and undergraduate experiences for students across the natural sciences through intensive community building and partnering efforts,” says Marcelle Siegel, associate professor of science education in the MU College of Education and College of Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources (CAFNR), and the principal investigator on the project. “MU’s efforts to strengthen science education will provide a powerful model for institutions nationally.”

The initiative, which partners with the Association of American Colleges & Universities, helps universities to engage in the process of culture change. Participating students could include underrepresented ethnic minorities, first-generation college students and working adults with families.

“The goal of Mizzou’s efforts will be to strengthen relationships and align our programming with partner schools,” MU Interim Provost Jim Spain says. “We also will engage with learning

communities of students, faculty and staff to develop a culture of inclusive excellence, by empowering participants in the practice of science.”

Specific goals of the project include enhancing Mizzou’s inclusive culture and capacity through building relationships with community colleges, historically black colleges and Columbia Public Schools. Additionally, the project will seek to enhance inclusivity by working with faculty and advisers in a number of ways, including team mentoring and providing educational videos and other resources. Finally, the project will enhance the retention of undergraduate students by developing peer-mentoring networks, leadership development and extracurricular programming designed to stress the importance of inclusion, diversity and equity.

“Mizzou has actively engaged in bringing diversity into the sciences and, in order to achieve scientific merit, various viewpoints must be considered when finding creative solutions to the challenges facing Missouri and beyond,” says Kevin McDonald, University of Missouri (UM) System chief diversity officer and MU vice chancellor for Inclusion, Diversity & Equity. “I look forward to Mizzou playing a vital role in shaping how science education and engagement can enhance our world. We look forward to contributing to this collaboration with our fellow institutions.”

The project team led by Siegel includes Terrell Morton, Preparing Future Faculty postdoctoral fellow for Faculty Diversity in the Department of Learning, Teaching and Curriculum in the College of Education; Charles Nilon, professor in the School of Natural Resources in CAFNR; Johannes Schul, professor of biological sciences in the College of Arts and Science; and Spain, who also serves as a professor of animal sciences in CAFNR. 🌈

Inclusive Excellence



33

schools selected in 2018

24

schools selected in 2017

\$1M

five-year grant

The 57 schools selected:

1. Identify opportunities to build campus capacity for inclusion of students from diverse backgrounds.
2. Engage in the process of culture change, experimenting with approaches from faculty training to revising curricula.
3. Reflect on the impact of their efforts, discover areas to improve and share results with the scientific community.

Leaving a Legacy

STORY BY CRISTEN MILLINER

As seniors Ryan Cobb and Jerome Young reflect on their time at the University of Missouri-Columbia, they are most proud of the legacy they will leave from their time working with the United Minority Network (UMN).

UMN is an on-campus organization whose mission bridges the gap between minority undergraduate students and minority professionals, providing a unique opportunity for networking, mentorship and professional development. Although the organization’s initial mission is to reach forward and provide access to Mizzou students, UMN has recently highlighted the importance of reaching back to younger students.

“UMN was originally founded by Breon Woods, and in fall 2017 JJ (Jerome) and I were able to take over and expand it,” says Cobb, UMN President. “It’s been an honor to see the transformation and what we’ve done in such a short amount of time.”

The organization has paired with [Men of Color, Honor and Ambition](#) (MOCHA), a program in partnership with Columbia



Photo by Tre Whitaker

(Above) By leading the United Minority Network, Ryan Cobb and Jerome Young have made a difference at Mizzou through the opportunity to mentor others.

“Mentoring allows someone to have representation they might not otherwise have. It’s huge, and it means everything to me.”

RYAN COBB

Public Schools; MU Division of Inclusion, Diversity & Equity; and Dale Carnegie & Associates, all of which are geared towards underrepresented students. Now offered on the high school level, MOCHA provides mentoring for high school students in the Columbia area through social events. Cobb and Young recently showed off their skills in an intense basketball game at Hickman High School.

“Mentoring allows someone to have representation they might not otherwise have,” says Cobb. “It’s huge, and it means everything to me.”

After the game, MOCHA men were paired with their UMN mentors, something Young was especially excited for.

“I’m ecstatic to have conversations with my mentee that I wish someone had with me,” he says. “I can really get to know him and think about the impact I want to have on his life.”

Roman, who is a sophomore at Hickman and member of MOCHA, shared that same excitement.

“Growing up, I was never the type to ask for help, so I’m excited to learn more through my mentors and see where they came from because they’re older and have been through it before,” he says.

Young and Cobb attribute much of their support and success with UMN to Donnell Young, director of the [Center of Academic Success and Excellence](#) (CASE) and advisor for UMN. Cobb and Young are also CASE Scholars who have worked closely with the office throughout their time at MU, helping them find the skills to not only be successful themselves, but help their members do the same. Young feels that, through what he has learned, having the opportunity to mentor others feels amazing.

“Being able to lead UMN and now be a mentor has been great,” he says. “I’m able to provide the advice that I wish I had coming to college.”

Although Cobb and Young are set to graduate in May, both are confident that UMN will continue its legacy on campus and get stronger year after year. 🌈



Conversation on LGBTQ Life at S&T

STORY BY ALAN SCHER-ZAGIER

This is from a series of articles about issues that were brought to light by the university's campus climate survey.

This summer, cities from St. Louis to Singapore will again celebrate gay pride with parades, lectures and other public events, annual occasions for several decades in some communities.

Closer to home, Rolla, Mo., and Missouri S&T will remain quiet — and not only because it's summer.

To be an openly gay or lesbian student on campus (or someone not on the male/female gay/straight gender/sexual binary) can mean being seen but not heard, say S&T community members interviewed for this article.

"It's a lonely feeling," says Brendon Zavala, a rising senior and nuclear engineering major from Kansas City who is out.

"When you look at our LGBTQ student population, they're much quieter, they're much more reserved (than on some other campuses)," says senior assistant director of student diversity initiatives Ben White, who is also gay. "They want a safe, almost anonymous space in which to exist, where they can be themselves without judgment."

Nearly 13 percent of undergraduate respondents considered themselves to be LGBTQ, the 2017 survey shows. Just under 5 percent of the nearly 1,000 undergraduates who responded to the survey identified as being on the trans spectrum.

Among those who reported experiencing "exclusionary, intimidating, offensive and hostile conduct" in the year prior to the climate survey, gender and gender identity was the most-cited reason. Such conduct could mean anything from being shunned or ignored to being bullied and harassed. Sexual identity was also among the characteristics most often cited by those who reported exclusionary and offensive conduct.

Undergraduate respondents described "a pervasive atmosphere where people not of a certain gender or sexual identity are ignored," the report concludes. The 441-page study also notes that those who identify as LGBQ — a category the survey defines as lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer or questioning — as well as other sexual minorities (including asexual) and those on the transgender spectrum were more likely to report unwanted sexual experiences, from harassment to sexual assault.

"There are still pockets of confusion," says Dr. Susan Murray, professor and chair of psychological science at S&T, who publicly identifies as lesbian. "We've gone from blatant discrimination to some people still being uncomfortable, or some people who still don't understand, and so the discrimination may be unintentional, or not as blatant."

"I just tried to avoid interacting with him"

For Zavala, being gay and out at S&T has drawn a range of responses, from tentative support to disinterested ambivalence to intolerant scorn.

"Most of the student body is younger and more accepting [of gay, lesbian and bisexual peers]," he says, while noting that transgender students typically face more challenges — and more overt discrimination — on campus.

In his department, though, Zavala says he "feels more alone. I don't know if anyone else there is gay. And if they are, they're certainly not as out as I am."

After moving out of a university residence hall, Zavala agreed to share an off-campus apartment with a classmate who assured him that Zavala's sexuality was not a concern. The classmate later expressed disapproval over aspects of his roommate's behavior that Zavala suggests were motivated by discomfort.

"I just tried to avoid interacting with him," he says. "I'd open my door, and if I heard him going into the kitchen, I'd just close the door. I'd also avoid having my gay friends over or even talking to gay friends over the phone."

Zavala is an active member of Spectrum, a campus organization for LGBTQ students and their allies. As one of just two campus organizations for queer students, Spectrum provides Zavala and other members with a "safe space" they say can be hard to find elsewhere at S&T or in Rolla.

"It's like going into a store with air conditioning on a hot summer day," he says. "You feel like you can breathe easier."

Until recently, Zavala and other male S&T students — gay, straight or bi — could also join the Beta Nu chapter of Delta Lambda Phi (DLP), a social fraternity "founded by gay men for all men" and chartered on campus in 2007. The chapter dissolved this past academic year due to lack of interest, according to Ben White.

"Members of the gay community who would be a part of DLP have found inclusive spaces that fill the same need in other fraternities. Which is not a bad thing," White says.

"Part of the struggle was DLP not changing with the times," he adds. "There are a number of fraternities on this campus that are very open to having gay members. And that's wonderful. We didn't have that five years ago."

"I really don't think I'd be alive"

The other LGBTQ student organization on campus is Gamma Rho Lambda (GRL), which bills itself as an "all-inclusive, multicultural" sorority whose members include "any past or presently identified females regardless of sexual orientation ... (or) gender identity."

The S&T chapter, which launched in April 2017, has several transgender students, including Steve, a rising junior in the College of Arts, Sciences and Business, who asked to be identified by a pseudonym to protect his privacy and out of concern over possible retaliation.

Steve, a 20-year-old native of northeast Missouri who was born female, says that after his parents rebuffed his attempts to come out as a gay, transgender male at 16, he struggled to "still figure out my identity."

That meant coming out as a lesbian as a first-year student living in residential housing, where what Steve calls "public displays of affection, like cuddling on the couch," led to another student lodging a Title IX complaint of inappropriate touching to university officials.

While records of such complaints are confidential, Steve and several other students interviewed say the allegation was found to be without merit, and one they believe was motivated by intolerance. Though allowed to remain in campus housing, Steve instead moved out at the end of the year and now lives with two friends and fellow sorority members who also don't strictly hew to the male-female binary. "I really don't think I'd be alive if it weren't for GRL," he says.

Faculty mentor

Department chair, faculty leader and lesbian mother of two teens.

Whether on campus or in the greater Rolla community, Murray has long lived a public life, including helping to lead a multiyear effort by University of Missouri (UM) system employees to add same-sex partners to their health insurance plans.

That was hardly the case when the industrial engineer arrived on campus in 1994 to teach engineering management. It would take

nearly another decade — and only with the promise of job security and the realities of motherhood — before she would openly acknowledge her sexuality.

"I was warned that it was very dangerous to come out before I was tenured," recalls Murray, now professor and chair of psychological science at S&T. "There had been people who aren't okay with it. ... I came out as a lesbian after I was married and tenured but before I was pregnant, because that's when a lot of questions come out about, 'How did you get pregnant?'"

Today's campus climate is considerably better, she says.

"The other day, I saw two female students walking down the sidewalk holding hands and thought, 'That's kind of nice.' And nobody seemed to care," she says. "I would have never have thought I would have seen that in the '90s."

Also gone are the days when "the first place arriving LGBTQ students would go was the counseling center, because there was such a stigma" to being gay, Murray says. Many Generation Z students, like society as a whole, now arrive on campus having already confronted issues of gender and sexual identity.

"Because society has moved, a lot of students are figuring out that they're trans or gay or lesbian in high school. They're coming here already having figured that out. Whereas back in the day, they may have started to wrestle with that at the college level."

"What was it going to be like for me working on this campus and living in Rolla?"

Moving from an Oregon liberal arts campus he calls "beyond super-liberal" to the far more conservative Missouri Ozarks, Ben White asked his then-supervisor in the student life department what awaited.

"She had a very honest answer for me," says White, who came to campus from Reed College in Portland. "She told me that at S&T, I believe everyone is treated with respect, [but] you will be among a very small population of staff who are out — and comfortable with being out. You're going to be a very valuable resource for our students. They're looking for solid mentors."

White helps plan activities and programs aimed at students from underrepresented groups, including a National Coming Out Day celebration in the Havener Center Atrium in October 2017 that for the first time included a display of rainbow flags to more prominently highlight LGBTQ campus life.

"That was something I felt really strongly about," he says. "We need to instill some pride, [and] we need to connect our pride as members of the LGBTQ community."

Outside of work, White is co-owner with his business and life partner Jimmy West of Frisco's Grill & Pub in nearby Cuba, Mo. White says the pair, who also live in Cuba, are recognized as local business leaders.

"We are known in the community and have a good reputation," White says. "We're able to serve as positive role models for what it means to be gay business owners. We're not afraid to talk about our identity as gay men and our partners. But it doesn't define us."

Inclusive Excellence Mile



STORY AND PHOTOS BY RYAN GAVIN

The Inclusive Excellence Mile Run is part of the University of Missouri-Columbia's commitment to the Inclusive Excellence Framework, which is designed to help our campus and local communities integrate diversity efforts into core organizational functions.

The goal is to serve as an entry point to greater dialogue and discussions between student organizations, faculty, staff and local affiliations. Ultimately, just by showing up and walking, jogging or running a mile, participants are expressing their commitment to fostering a community where everyone feels welcomed, valued and respected.

"We are delighted to collaborate with the Department of Athletics on the Inclusive Excellence Mile run," says Kevin McDonald, UM

System chief diversity officer and MU vice chancellor of Inclusion, Diversity & Equity. "The collaborative spirit and enthusiasm of our students, faculty, staff and community members are both overwhelming and incredibly exciting. I hope this run signifies that diversity and inclusion are not optional exercises but rather indispensable preconditions that enable us to capitalize on our diverse skills, perspectives and experiences so that we can better advance the fundamental mission of our respective organizations."

The Inclusive Excellence Mile supports a variety of charitable organizations in addition to raising awareness of inclusion, civility and mutual respect. They include the United Service Organization (proceeds to military assistance), Rally4Rhyan (pediatric cancer) and Circle of Sisterhood (removing barriers to education).

Awards were handed out to the top three finishers in 11 different age groups, and the fastest overall male and female times received an additional award. 🏆

(Above) Students, faculty, staff and Columbia community members came together to show their support for Inclusive Excellence on May 5, 2018.

System Hosts Title IX Conference



STORY AND PHOTOS BY RYAN GAVIN

The University of Missouri (UM) System hosted the Show Me Title IX Conference from June 4–5 in Columbia, Mo. In hosting the conference, the System shared its best practices and innovative programming; provided training for investigators and coordinators; and created a space for other experts across the state to share their knowledge.

Staff and faculty from across the UM campuses along with Title IX and related professionals from other Missouri colleges, universities and K–12 classrooms attended the event. Over 25 colleges, institutions and organizations were represented among the 130 attendees.

Attendees were able to mix and match from over 30 presentations to create the conference schedule that would best support their

(Above) Tiffany Hill delivers her keynote address at the Show Me Title IX Conference on June 5, 2018.

professional growth. Presentation topics included rape culture in black communities, accommodations for persons with disabilities in the investigation process, Title IX challenges for community colleges, report writing, purity culture for Christian survivors, coping with the stress of the field and human trafficking.

Keynote addresses were given by nationally renowned speakers Tiffany Hill and Kate Nash.

Feedback to the conference has been overwhelmingly positive, and in particular, attendees were grateful for the opportunity to hone their report-writing skills; network with others; and deepen their understanding of the intersections of law, public relations, trauma-informed practices and identities with Title IX work. 🌈



(Above) Participants in the Show Me Title IX Conference spent two days learning from each other and sharing best practices when it comes to Title IX.



The Fight for Fairness

STORY AND PHOTO BY MARISOL RAMIREZ

At nine years old, Ashley Westbrook generally knew life to be unfair — and it didn't sit well with her.

A daughter of two first-generation college graduates, she watched as her parents climbed out of disadvantaged childhood beginnings.

"They had hard lives, and they escaped it, so I didn't have to live it," Westbrook says. "It was their life goal to establish stability. They stressed education and that I could do anything I wanted if I put my mind to it."

With her early social awareness, she set her heart on becoming a lawyer.

"As I got older, I liked the idea of the law being able to change lives," says Westbrook, who grew up in Cape Girardeau, Mo.

She moved to St. Louis with her family after finishing high school and gaining acceptance to the University of Missouri–St. Louis (UMSL), where she took her first step toward law school in declaring a political science major.

(Above) Ashley Westbrook is headed to law school after graduating with a bachelor's degree in political science and pushing through the rare, incurable kidney disease that has challenged her health since freshman year at UMSL.

But Westbrook hadn't counted on the unfair twist of fate in her own life.

In the middle of her freshman year, doctors diagnosed her with a rare, chronic and incurable kidney disease, Focal Segmental Glomerulosclerosis. Essentially, her kidneys were shutting down.

"I was tired, but of course, I was a college student," says Westbrook of her initial symptoms, "and I had put on weight, but I just figured it was the freshman 15."

In actuality, she had an extra 40 pounds of water weight spread throughout her body.

Doctors began to treat Westbrook with medication to manage the disease with the long-term understanding that if/when treatment no longer worked, she would have to go on the kidney transplant list.

"I did not want to drop out of school," she says. "Education is one of the most important things in my life because I saw it bring my parents success."

Westbrook persisted through the symptoms and side effects of medication. She continued with classes, propping her feet up to keep the fluid in her body from collecting at her ankles. If she didn't take such precautions, she wouldn't be able to walk the few minutes necessary to return to her car and drive home. She also suffered with nausea, headaches and blurred vision. At one point, she began to lose her hair.

"That may have been the toughest part — being 19 years old and watching your hair fall out," she says.

After a round of steroids and two years of immunosuppressants, Westbrook went into remission.

"Whenever you go through something like that, you try not to think about it," she says. "You do what you have to do to survive. So when you get out of it and have a second to think, you're like, 'Alright, I almost died there.'"

That realization and the risk of the disease's return gave Westbrook a sense of urgency about life.

"There's a lot of anxiety about time and running out of it for me and spending it the right way," she says. "I'm still really young. It's really, really hard to think about your imminent death at 19."

Instead, Westbrook chooses to focus on enjoying life and using whatever time she has left to edge the needle toward a fair and just world.

During remission, Westbrook completed an internship at the Crime Victim Advocacy Center in St. Louis. She worked for the Court Order of Protection Assistance Projects, helping people through the legal process and documents necessary to be granted an order of protection by a judge.

She listened to stories of abuse of all types — emotional, physical and sexual — and documented the necessary details in legal form.

"The system is kind of against victims," she says. "They usually don't know how to fill these forms out or what evidence is needed, so these programs that bring people like me into courthouses really help."

Westbrook worked two days a week throughout the summer of 2017 and assisted about six people a day leading up to her senior year at UMSL. In the fall, she began applying to law school.

The first in her family to attempt such a process, Westbrook had no idea what she was doing. She used the portfolio experience the Pierre Laclède Honors College provides its students to craft her applications with the help of Teaching Professor Kimberly Baldus. Westbrook tackled 12 drafts of a personal statement.

By October 2017, Westbrook relapsed and the kidney disease resurfaced. She immediately went back on treatment, which again returned her to remission status.

"Whenever you go through something like that, you try not to think about it," she says. "You do what you have to do to survive. So when you get out of it and have a second to think, you're like, 'Alright, I almost died there.'"

ASHLEY WESTBROOK

"I'm lucky because I get to live out a fairly normal life," Westbrook says, "but it could go wrong at any moment. The drugs could just stop working."

In the spring, she learned of her acceptance to Saint Louis University School of Law. She was not only happy but grateful and relieved that her efforts resulted in realizing a goal.

She carried those same feelings with her during spring commencement as she walked across the stage and graduated from UMSL summa cum laude with a bachelor's degree in political science.

"Many of my friends are really happy to be done," she says. "I'm happy to have achieved this because graduation was never a guarantee — not only because of the kidney disease, but also because I'm only the fourth person in my family to have graduated from college. It was never a for-sure thing."

As Westbrook looks to her uncertain future, she wants to practice family or civil law and has aspirations of becoming a judge one day. She's also optimistic. She says she has to be.

"I know very well that everybody has their obstacles — be it poverty, family issues, health issues," Westbrook says. "The idea of having some struggle that you face is not unique. Nothing can be done to fix mine. I can be treated. It can be paused, but nothing can be done to fix it. But maybe with a law degree, I can help people, so they can go on and live out their dreams." 🌈



Photo by Amy Parris

Engineering Gets Boost from Inclusive Excellence Plan

STORY BY RYAN OWENS

The College of Engineering at the University of Missouri-Columbia recently received grants totaling \$355,770 as part of the University of Missouri (UM) System and MU Inclusive Excellence plan to support a variety of inclusivity efforts within the College.

"Inclusive Excellence is a framework designed to help the University of Missouri integrate diversity and quality efforts. As a model, Inclusive Excellence assimilates diversity efforts into the core of institutional functioning to realize the educational benefits of diversity is the description of Inclusive Excellence according to the UM System.

The model for Inclusive Excellence at the UM System has four primary dimensions: 1) Access and Success; 2) Institutional Climate and Intergroup Relations; 3) Education and Scholarship; and 4) Institutional Infrastructure. The funding the College received fits into these categories to support initiatives and programs of benefit to all of Mizzou Engineering's students, faculty and staff, including:

- Intercultural development assessments
- The Multicultural Engineering Program
- K-5 STEM Cubs Camp
- High School Summer Camp
- Graduate fellowships for students traditionally underrepresented in the physical sciences, technology, engineering and math (STEM)
- Army Ants High School Robotics Team Outreach Efforts
- A collaborative course on social justice
- Increasing and retaining diverse faculty
- The College of Engineering museum ZOUME

(Above) High School Summer Camp was one of several initiatives to receive support as part of the UM System and MU Inclusive Excellence Plan.

The College of Engineering is committed to, and actively pursuing, strategic initiatives that create a diverse and inclusive environment for all students, staff and faculty.

"Having the UM System and MU recognize the importance of this work by supporting and encouraging it provides us with the resources needed to expand and sustain these programs," says Tojan Rahhal, director of Diversity and Outreach Initiatives.

The funds support a wide array of programs that touch on a variety of different areas important to both MU and the College of Engineering. It will aid efforts to increase historically underrepresented populations in engineering both in terms of faculty and students; provide support for outreach initiatives aimed at elementary, middle and high school students of all backgrounds; and help the College train well-rounded, globally focused engineers.

The overarching goal of the College's diversity and outreach initiatives is to help foster community for all members, as well as encourage community outreach and professional interaction. Being able to support incoming students with scholarships and fellowships, as well as current students, faculty and staff with new and unique programming, is crucial to fostering the next generation of global engineers.

"Engineering comes from the word ingenuity, which means to innovate. To innovate you must have diverse perspectives. The programs we will establish with this funding will allow us to be more innovative and achieve inclusive excellence. We are excited to add to the current efforts we have at Mizzou Engineering!" Rahhal explained. 🌈



Graduates Headed to University of Pittsburgh to Make a Difference

STORY BY MARJI DATWYLER

Juliana Ayala and Allen Williams did not start out on career paths to higher education. Yet both of these 2018 UMKC graduates will be attending the University of Pittsburgh this fall to pursue master's degrees in higher education management. Why? Because they want to give back and support other first-generation, ethnic-minority students to succeed in college in much the same way UMKC has supported them.

As first-generation college students, the path was not easy for Ayala and Williams. Being connected to the right resources and getting involved on campus made all the difference in their college experience. Ayala became part of the Avanzando Program as a Hispanic Development Fund Scholarship recipient when she transferred to UMKC from Kansas City Kansas Community College. As a partnership with the Greater Kansas City Hispanic Development Fund, Avanzando is designed to support Latinx student success through mentoring and increased access to campus and community resources. Ayala also found support in the Latinx and Latin American Studies Program and the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs (MSA).

Williams first arrived on the UMKC campus to participate in Summer Bridge, a six-week program to help incoming first-year students transition smoothly from high school to college. A native

of St. Louis, Williams found himself unsure of whether college was the place for him. Fortunately, the Office of MSA provided him a safe space wherein he could find support and thrive. Williams participated in the MSA Show Me Success program, which provides individualized academic check-ins and connections to resources.

Both Ayala and Williams attribute their involvement in student organizations as key in helping them feel a sense of campus belonging, a key element in student retention. This involvement also helped them gain important leadership skills. Ayala took on leadership roles in the Association of Latin American Students, Omicron Delta Kappa Honor Society and the Union Programming Board. Williams served as a leader in the Student Government Association, the African American Student Union and the Men of Color Campus Initiative. In these roles, Ayala and Williams found themselves assisting and coaching other students and, as a result, discovered their career callings.

Both graduates received scholarships to attend the University of Pittsburgh, a top-ranked graduate program in higher education. Ayala will serve as the Graduate Intern for a new program titled ReStart, which serves first-generation/underrepresented students at Carnegie Mellon University (CMU). Williams will be interning this summer at the University of Pittsburgh Conference and Events Office and in the fall with the CMU Health Promotion Program.

"We are very proud of Allen and Juliana," says Keichanda Dees Burnett, Director of MSA. "Their passion and competencies around identity and multicultural awareness give me confidence that they will impact the success of hundreds of first-generation and underrepresented students." 🌈

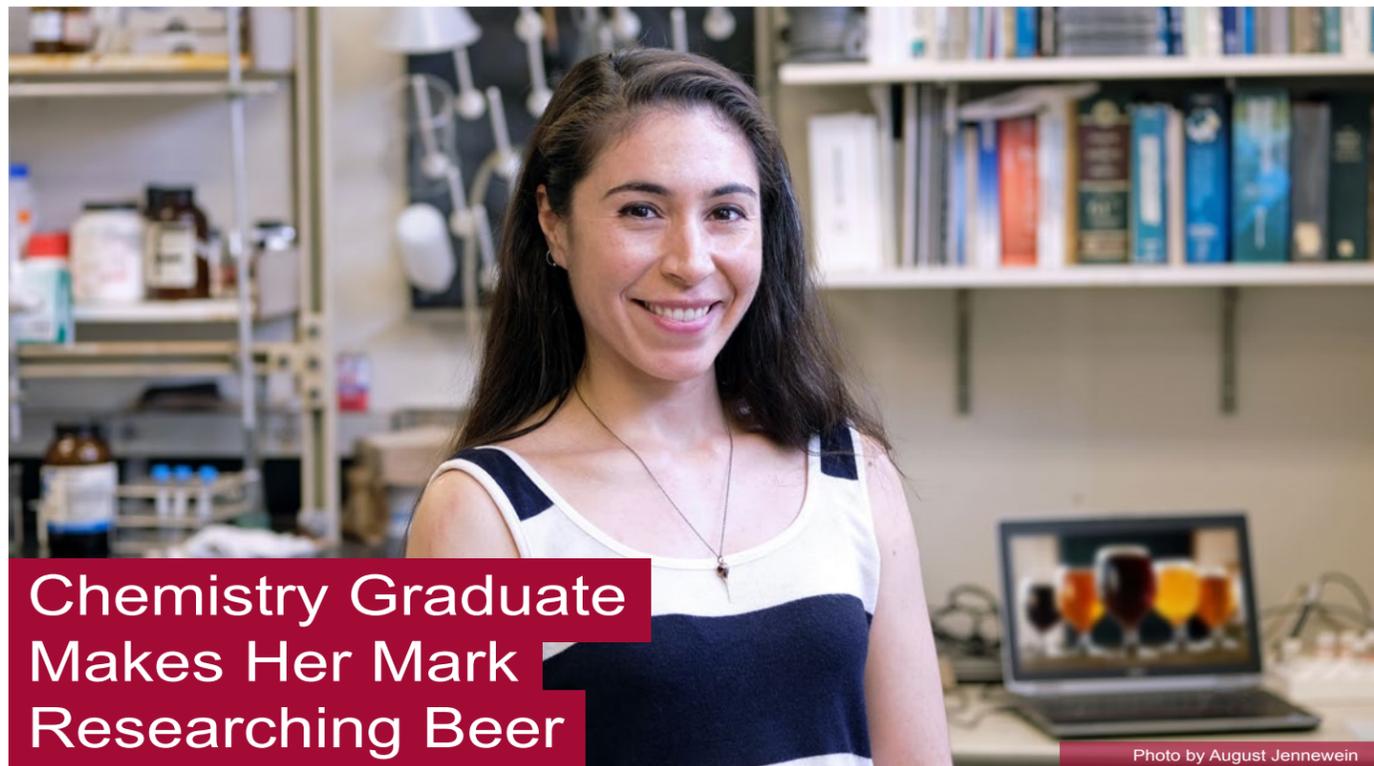


Photo by August Jennewein

Chemistry Graduate Makes Her Mark Researching Beer

STORY BY STEVE WALENTIK

Lorna Espinosa will be spending some time at Urban Chestnut Brewing Company after commencement — and not just for a celebratory beer.

The pending graduate in the Department of Chemistry and Biochemistry at the University of Missouri–St. Louis (UMSL) has a four-week internship lined up with the local craft brewery, working in its quality assurance laboratory. It will be a continuation of work Espinosa did last year under the supervision of quality assurance manager Kurt Driesner.

For six weeks last summer, she'd arrive at the company's Grove Brewery and Bierhall, put on her lab coat, pick up her clipboard and get to work.

"I would go around the facilities making sure that temperatures were right on, that the pressures were right on in the boiler and the glycol coolers were working," Espinosa says. "I would take samples of beers that were still undergoing the fermentation process, and I would do a yeast cell count. I would check pH. I would check the gravity, which is the density of the sugar content. Based on the change in sugars from day-to-day, you could monitor the yeast activity — how much they're converting sugar to alcohol — and you can predict what the final alcohol content will be."

Scientific methods have always been part of the brewing process, but Urban Chestnut is one of the craft brewers that employs scientific analysis in a constant quest to perfect its product.

(Above) Chemistry graduate Lorna Espinosa enrolled in Bruce Hamper's beer-brewing class looking for a break from physical chemistry. It helped open doors to an internship at Urban Chestnut Brewing Company, undergraduate research experience analyzing beer bitterness and a potential future career.

One reason is pragmatic. To sell its beer in stores spread around six states, it has to make sure each batch of a particular brew is consistent and will "keep" when transported over great distances.

But Urban Chestnut's commitment to the science of beer-making goes even further.

"Kurt Driesner and Florian Kuplent, the owner, in the past have laid out a desire to publish something in a scientific brewer's journal every year," Espinosa says.

That appealed to her.

A native of Los Angeles, Espinosa came to UMSL in 2014 looking to reinvent herself after moving to St. Louis from Phoenix when her husband accepted a job as an electrical engineer at Boeing.

She already owned one bachelor's degree in art history from Smith College, but Espinosa decided this time to study chemistry, inspired at least in part by her interest in baking and the science of what goes on in the mixing bowl or oven.

She was more than a year into the program and already had done some research under Professor James Chickos when she made the decision to enroll in Assistant Teaching Professor Bruce Hamper's Chemistry 1021 course "Beer Brewing: Chemical and Biochemical Principles" in the fall of 2016.

"I landed in Dr. Hamper's beer class just purely because I wanted to take a break, as it were, from the heavier scientific classes," Espinosa says. "I've always enjoyed beer, and I thought it would be a fun thing to do twice a week."

She had no idea the direction it would lead her.

The course covers the basics of the chemical and biochemical processes involved in brewing — enough to prepare interested students in doing their own homebrewing. It also includes student observation at local brewers around town — everywhere from beer giant Anheuser-Busch to much smaller operations such as Ferguson Brewing Company.

“I landed in Dr. Hamper's beer class just purely because I wanted to take a break, as it were, from the heavier scientific classes,” Espinosa says. “I've always enjoyed beer, and I thought it would be a fun thing to do twice a week.”

LORNA ESPINOSA

"She took it on Thursday evenings with us," Hamper says, "and I had more science majors and people with brilliant experience, so I upped the game a little bit on what we did. She did a really wonderful job of carrying out the lab exercises, and with her chemistry background and being a science major, she was able to partner with other students that were, say, business majors and really help them out. In that way, she served as an extra TA [teaching assistant]. Whether she knew it or not, that's the kind of talent that she brought."

That explains why Espinosa was among the students Hamper recommended for the internship at Urban Chestnut last summer, and she impressed enough on her interview to land the position.

She's been back at work with Hamper this semester examining hops flavorings in beer while earning research credit toward her degree. They've been using high-performance liquid chromatography (HPLC) to measure the level of isohumulones, the chemical compounds that account for the bitter taste in beer.

Hamper's team has developed a relatively fast analytical technique involving HPLC that gives a more accurate reading on the amount of isohumulones than the ultraviolet-visible spectroscopy method that most American brewers have been using to determine a beer's bitterness — measured on the International Bitterness Units scale — since the 1950s and '60s.

The UV-vis method might have worked fine for the standard American lagers that dominated the beer market for decades, but it has proved less reliable for measuring the wide range of styles — with their varied ingredients — produced by craft brewers.

With Espinosa's connections at Urban Chestnut, she was able to go behind the bar with a rack of centrifuge tubes and fill 25 of them with samples she brought back to campus. The team tested all 25 in an afternoon with a test that took only five minutes per sample.

"That's unheard of, even in the brewing industry," Hamper says. "I think we'll need to do a little bit more work on it, but in the future, we'll probably publish those results, and Lorna will be one of the contributors in that publication."

Espinosa already presented some of her findings last month at the Undergraduate Research Symposium.

Now, she's getting set to launch her career. Her training at UMSL — both in chromatography and ultraviolet-vis spectroscopy — would make her well-suited to work in many different kinds of labs.

"I really enjoy being on my feet, working with my hands and seeing the results," she says. "It's really exciting to have been working nose to the grindstone for a week and then finally see a graphic that kind of pulls it all together. It's a very satisfying sense of accomplishment, and I really enjoy the setting and the type of person that's drawn to a laboratory job. I can see myself alongside all sorts of people like that."

Hamper believes her experience has her well-positioned for opportunities within the competitive beer industry.

"I think she's going to be happily surprised when she sees what happens when she goes out there," Hamper says. "She has the internship with Urban Chestnut. She's carried out research in the area, and she completed the course at UMSL. It'd be hard to find a candidate with those three items under their belt, particularly the research piece. I think those three points will be to her advantage in looking for jobs." 🍀

Pride Month Lecture Emphasizes Uplifting Black and Brown Voices

BY UMKC STAFF

Every April, student leaders from the University of Missouri-Kansas City's LGBTQIA Programs plan and execute a monthlong calendar of events in celebration of Pride Month. For the past four years, the Pride Month lecture — the group's most featured event — has brought thought leaders to campus to engage in discussion about identity and equity, and social justice issues within the gay community. This year, civil rights activist and educator DeRay Mckesson served as the event's featured speaker, and his message emphasized the importance of uplifting black and brown voices in the fight for change.

Mckesson emerged on the national scene as a leading voice protesting police killings following the 2014 death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo. As a co-founder of JoinCampaignZero.org, MappingPoliceViolence.org, ResistanceManual.org and OurStates.org, Mckesson has strategically used social media to connect individuals with knowledge and tools, and to provide citizens and policy makers with commonsense policies to ensure equity. He delivered an empowering message of what it takes to do the work to obtain social justice to a diverse crowd in Pierson Auditorium on April 26.

Throughout his lecture, Mckesson broke down what he called "the four big buckets that are 'the work'" of social justice.

Programs and services

Mckesson paralleled the process of critiquing the system to the process of breaking bread — we take it, we bless it and we break it. In critiquing the system, he said we start by:



Taking inventory of the way the system is working in people's lives. Then,

We **bless it** — understand how the system is made up of choices that people make. Lastly,

We **break it**, or figure out what the laws and structures are that allow the outcomes of those choices to happen the way they do, and work to change them.

"We talk about systems and structures so much because we believe that shapes the way people interact in space and society," said Mckesson.

While he acknowledged that programs and services are important, Mckesson pointed out that most community-based programs only exist because the structure didn't get it right in the first place. Too many programs are not focused on addressing the right issues.

"What would it look like to provide solutions that aren't patronizing," said Mckesson, adding that the community needs programs that will teach people skills. "Skill is going to be what sets people up to make different choices and get out of poverty."



Imagination

As he retold the story about a dangerous experience he had while whitewater rafting, Mckesson said, much like the trauma of being marginalized, all he could think about was what was right in front of him.

"When you're trapped in trauma, you forget how to imagine and dream," said Mckesson. "You can't fight for what you can't imagine." His advice? Name the constraints, and then ignore those constraints as you start to imagine.

"I can imagine a world where people can be in community with each other, and can disagree and not attack one another's identities."

In a day when we are talking about the transgender community in ways we've never talked about, and talking about being gay and queer in ways we've never talked about, Mckesson said he is mindful that the conversation hasn't changed that much.

"The conversation has to open up space so that we actually change systems and structures in ways of being in community with one another."

Power

He went on to discuss the concept of power and how it fits into the work of social justice. Mckesson explained that there are two ways to think about power:

Power over — the idea that, simply, some people win and some lose, and

Power with — the idea that everybody wins.

"Power with' is one of the reasons why we say if we find solutions for the most marginalized, we can actually find solutions for everybody else — because we believe we can live in a world of equity, justice and joy," said Mckesson, adding that the work of justice is almost always about equity, where everyone gets what they need and deserve.

Mckesson explained that rather than switching places with the oppressor to have power over another group of people, we should find ways to work together so everybody wins. Following that point, he discussed the importance of understanding privilege and using that understanding to help dismantle it.

"Our goal is to get to a place of balance."

What type of people are you going to be versus what type of people there are.

Mckesson said he supports breaking and critiquing the system, but only if we are going to build something better. He also encourages finding beneficial solutions rather than losing one's identity in the battle.

"Our work can't always be about tearing things down. It has to be about creating something better that our lives deserve." The goal, he said, is to help people imagine a world of freedom, justice and equity.

"The only way to get justice is to do the work," he said, adding that justice is about always having a dream and a prayer that is bigger than ourselves.

As he wrapped up his lecture he took questions from the audience and ended with one piece of advice: "Dream as big as possible." 🌈



Photo by Aimee Whitmire

Conversation on Women in STEM

(Left) Summer Solutions for Girls campers participate in science activities.

STORY BY MARY HELEN STOLTZ

This is from a series of articles about issues that were brought to light by the university's campus climate survey.

In 1962, James Watson and Francis Crick won a Nobel Prize for determining the structure of DNA. But they couldn't have done it without Rosalind Franklin, a physical chemist who used X-ray crystallography to make images of DNA.

Marie Curie, a pioneer in radioactivity research, was the first woman to win a Nobel Prize, the first person (and only woman) to win it twice and the only person to win in two different sciences — chemistry and physics.

In the 1800s, astronomer Caroline Herschel became the first woman to discover a comet and the first to have her work published by the Royal Society.

Throughout history, women like these have made significant scientific breakthroughs. But their stories aren't always the ones that appear in K–12 textbooks. Has this lack of visibility of women scientists, engineers and mathematicians — and the lack of female role models in the physical sciences, technology, engineering and math (STEM) fields — contributed to the low numbers of women in STEM?

According to the National Science Foundation, women make up less than 25 percent of the workforce in STEM fields. And even though 56 percent of college students on U.S. campuses are female, only 25 percent of women earn bachelor's degrees in those areas.

It may seem that women are simply choosing not to pursue math-intensive STEM careers, but Dr. Jessica Cundiff, an assistant professor of psychological science at Missouri S&T, says these choices are influenced by implicit STEM-male stereotypes that may have been unconsciously ingrained since childhood.

In the recently published book *The War on Women in the United States: Beliefs, Tactics, and the Best Defenses*, Cundiff cites

several factors that limit women's involvement in STEM and suggests educators and practitioners could help break stereotypes by using diverse images to represent these fields — and providing mentorship through exposure to female role models in STEM.

"Female role models provide women with accessible models for achieving success in STEM, enabling women to imagine themselves in STEM roles and the pathways to get there," Cundiff writes. "Of course, role models will be most effective when they are perceived as similar to the women they aim to inspire and are fully integrated into the curriculum."

At Missouri S&T

Missouri S&T's enrollment reflects the national data, with an on-campus female enrollment of 24 percent. And S&T is working to provide them with female role models.

According to the most recent Missouri S&T Fact Book, 22 percent of S&T's tenured or tenure-track faculty are female.

As the recent campus climate survey indicates, many of those female faculty in male-dominated STEM fields have experienced challenges because of their gender. But this is not unique to S&T.

Associate professor of theater Jeanne Stanley interviewed more than 50 people — both men and women, students, faculty and administrators — at three Missouri universities and in North Carolina's Research Triangle Park.

She documented stories of what is known as "casual" discrimination, including demeaning remarks that continue to sting years later; diminished expectations by classmates, professors, coworkers and supervisors; and in the most severe cases, sexual harassment and sexual assault.

Stanley culled those conversations to 26 monologues and compiled them into an original play, *The STEM Monologues*, which was first performed on the Leach Theatre stage last fall.

"Everyone's story is different," says Stanley. "Sometimes they're funny, with a lot of laughter. Sometimes you just want to cry. Sometimes you learn things you would never have known, particularly as a male, about what women go through."

So what do women go through at Missouri S&T? And what do they think are the biggest challenges generally for women in STEM?

In their words

"Unconscious bias that women are less qualified than men to study or teach STEM disciplines still exists," says Dr. Francisca Oboh-Ikuenobe, professor of geology and biological sciences at Missouri S&T. "This leads to the lack of respect female instructors in STEM fields face from some students in and outside the classroom, and also from some colleagues."

"Over the years, I have counseled several young women who felt they were 'not good enough' to succeed," says Oboh-Ikuenobe. "I often find out that some of these students were not encouraged or advised to pursue STEM subjects in high school, or to consider careers in STEM fields."

Oboh-Ikuenobe points to research indicating that, "unlike their male colleagues, most female students and scientists lack the tenacity needed to succeed in STEM fields — they tend to give up easily if they fail at something."

"The women who persevere go on to achieve great successes in their STEM careers," she adds. "S&T has put many structures in place to ensure that women in STEM fields succeed."

Oboh-Ikuenobe has experienced similar challenges in her own career.

"I have been perceived sometimes as being too aggressive when doing my job — be it research, teaching, service or administrative duties," she says. "A male colleague would probably not be judged in the same light, and other women I know have experienced this."

"The perception that I have advanced in my career because of my gender and race is one that has also come to my attention," says Oboh-Ikuenobe. "Resilience has kept me going, in addition to the support I have received from several male and female colleagues, students and my bosses."

"I think the two biggest challenges women in STEM face are the dual-career problem, and the combination of career and family with all the associated child care issues," says Dr. Agnes Vojta, associate teaching professor of physics at Missouri S&T. "These are universal and not specific to S&T."

Vojta overcame those challenges in her own family by forgoing a tenure-track career.

"When the physics department at S&T hired my husband [Dr. Thomas Vojta, chair and professor of physics], they hired me as a part-time adjunct to teach recitations, a solution that was a good fit for our family situation at that time," Vojta says. "As my children got older, I was able to increase hours and responsibilities, and am now a non-tenure-track associate teaching professor."

When Dr. Susan Murray took her first engineering job, she was the first — and only — female engineer in her workplace.

"I constantly had to prove myself," says Murray, chair of psychological science at Missouri S&T. "Some of the barriers were sexist (assuming I was a secretary, saying that I only got the job because I was a woman or doubting I had a real degree), and some were simply good intentions (we can't cuss in front of her, or we can't give her that difficult job). Luckily, once I proved myself, these battles diminished."

Murray believes the barriers to females in STEM are more subtle today.

"When I started as an engineering faculty member in 1994, I had to constantly let people know I was a faculty member," Murray says. "The assumption was that I was a graduate student or a staff member."

Murray was often asked to serve on committees and perform other work that, while important to the university, doesn't help a junior faculty member progress in his or her career.

"Often the administrator asking me to do these things wanted diversity on the committee or wanted to make sure the concerns of female students were heard, but due to the very limited number of women faculty, these obligations fell disproportionately to me and the handful of other women," she says.

'Very lonely at times'

Faculty aren't the only ones who face these challenges. Female students also experience bias and discrimination.

"I would say that my biggest challenge as a woman in STEM at S&T has been that I'm usually the only one in a lot of classes and lab groups, so it can be very lonely at times," says Madison Moore, a senior in architectural engineering and incoming Student Council president. "Sometimes the men can kind of take over situations because they have so little experience with women being in charge. It is frustrating to deal with, but it has definitely made me stronger, and I take pride in the way I deal with those situations now."

"The biggest challenges I have faced at S&T were not being taken seriously in group design projects and being told that I could do the decoration at the end, rather than design the actual project," says Alyssa Nelson, a senior in chemical engineering at Missouri S&T and president of the Society of Women Engineers.

"I think the biggest challenge faced by women in STEM is being taken seriously or having their work taken seriously," Nelson says. "They often have to prove themselves in stronger ways than men do in the same field. I think that huge strides are being made, but there is always room for improvement."

"Here at S&T, we showcase strong women who thrive in the world of engineering and math, but without mentioning the gender discrimination that many of us will eventually face," says Elissa Rivers, a senior in engineering management and president of Panhellenic Council.

"Although all graduated students will feel the need to prove themselves in their career, I think the pressure women put on themselves is far greater due to the challenges we encounter as women in a largely male-dominated field," Rivers says. "I believe that if women truly understood their degree field and the hurdles that come with it, we could all be more prepared to begin life after graduation."

As Cundiff writes, we all have a responsibility to change the status quo.

"Even when bias is unconscious, that does not absolve us of responsibility; we have a responsibility to interrupt unconscious bias and minimize its effects on our behavior," asserts Cundiff. "By critically examining and rethinking business as usual, we can better recognize hidden barriers and work to interrupt the processes that prevent talented individuals from pursuing and succeeding in STEM." 🌈

Photos by August Jennewein



Korn-eak 'Pann' Thamrongwang Finds 'Life-Changing Experience' as UMSL MBA Student

STORY BY SARA BELL

Before he had even earned a high school diploma, Korn-eak "Pann" Thamrongwang knew a master's degree was in his future.

He didn't know when he would begin, what he would study or where he would attend, but he was certain that an advanced degree would put him on the career path he desired.

It's a goal inspired by his sister and brother-in-law, who graduated with MBAs from UMSL in 2004 and went on to build successful careers in their home country of Thailand.

"I knew growing up that I had to have a master's degree, especially when I was here seeing my sister cross the stage," Thamrongwang says. "I turned to my parents then and told them I wanted to be like her."

After that day, he charted out a plan: finish high school, earn a bachelor's degree in mechanical engineering, enter the workforce and then wait for the right opportunity.

Thamrongwang gradually checked each of these boxes. Then, after six years working as an engineer in Cincinnati, he knew he wanted to transition into business and believed the timing was finally right.

One question still remained: Where should he go?

After some thought and a few campus tours, Thamrongwang determined in 2016 that the answer had been in front of him for the last 12 years.

(Above) Korn-eak "Pann" Thamrongwang chose the University of Missouri–St. Louis (UMSL) to continue a tradition started by his sister and brother-in-law more than a decade ago. Thamrongwang and his wife, Wichuda, are now also alumni of the College of Business Administration.

"Back in Thailand, both my sister and brother-in-law have gone on to be quite successful," Thamrongwang says. "I knew UMSL had a really good education, so UMSL was always in the back of my mind. Then when I had the opportunity to visit campus, I met with Francesca Ferrari, who is the director of graduate business programs. She was very welcoming and showed me around. After that, I knew this was the right place for me."

That feeling has remained throughout his time in UMSL's MBA program.

Thamrongwang admits that the initial move away from family and friends in eastern Ohio and western Indiana was difficult, as he and his wife knew no one else in this part of the Midwest. However, a friendly and helpful graduate business staff — particularly Ferrari — eased the transition.

"Francesca is the one who has pushed, inspired and supported me," Thamrongwang says. "I am not only a student to her, but she's given me advice in my personal life."

His connection to Ferrari and the campus community deepened as he accepted an assistantship with the graduate business office. In the role, he advised prospective students, assisted current Tritons and completed administrative tasks for faculty and staff.

By having access to faculty through his role, he says he likely gained more from the position than anyone did from him.

"When I first started, I wanted to understand how business functions work, but I also spent the first year trying to figure out what I really wanted to specialize in," Thamrongwang says. "Luckily I was working in the graduate business office, so I had the opportunity to connect with many of the department chairs in ways I never had as an undergraduate."

During those early months, he contemplated finance, information systems and a few other industries before settling on supply chain and analytics after a conversation with Department Chair James Campbell.

The coursework in supply chain came naturally to Thamrongwang and provided the managerial training he was looking for as he transitioned out of an engineering career.

"Coming to UMSL has been a life-changing experience for me," Thamrongwang says. "It's not only the education I received but also the connections that I now have. The professors and faculty are great and were always there for me. To me, it's a family environment."

Thamrongwang has gone on to share these positive experiences with other international students. His wife, Wichuda, also a native of Thailand, was his first recruit, and the pair graduated alongside each other with MBAs in late June.

"Going through the program together had its ups and downs, of course," he says. "Some of the classes can be a bit challenging for her with the language, with the new country, the new culture, but I was there to support her with the experience that I have living here for the last 16 years. I think it's been the best time and a good place for us to go through the program together."

Thamrongwang's recruitment efforts have not stopped there.

He's been a welcoming face at student orientation, an active participant in international student activities and a knowledgeable ally in the graduate business office. These connections made him an obvious choice when UMSL's Office of International Studies and Programs started looking for students to participate in a recent webinar for recruitment partners in Southeast Asia.

"A lot of our recruitment partners want to hear student stories to be able to retell those to other students who are interested in coming to UMSL to help them see themselves at the campus," International Student Adviser Rebecca Kehe says. "Pann's ability to articulate his experiences of coming to St. Louis, beginning his

“Coming to UMSL has been a life-changing experience for me,” Thamrongwang says. “It’s not only the education I received but also the connections that I now have. The professors and faculty are great and were always there for me. To me, it’s a family environment.”

KORN-EAK “PANN” THAMRONGWANG

studies and working as a graduate assistant really helped paint that picture for these partners.”

Now that he's completed his long-awaited master's degree, Thamrongwang is taking an extended vacation with family members who've traveled both from Thailand and Indiana. When he returns, he'll once again look to follow the path his sister and brother-in-law blazed more than a decade ago.

"I feel like, with this education, I can go anywhere in the world and be successful," he says. "Really it depends on the opportunities." 🌍

Conversation on Race at S&T

STORY BY ANDREW CAREAGA



Photo by Sam O'Keefe

This is from a series of articles about issues that were brought to light by the university's campus climate survey.

Fifty years after the assassination of civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. and nearly a decade since the United States elected its first black president, racism continues to be a concern in America and on its college campuses.

A recent study by the Anti-Defamation League, released at the end of January, found that white-supremacist propaganda at colleges increased by 258 percent from the fall of 2016 to the fall of 2017 and affected 216 college campuses across the U.S.

Not all forms of racism are as extreme as white supremacist activity, however. For students of color at Missouri S&T, racism can take many forms, from a recent social media post by a Missouri S&T student that contained racist and homophobic slurs to more subtle customs, often called microaggressions, and even the nature of the university itself. At a PWI (predominantly white institution) like Missouri S&T, a black student may often be the only person of color in a class. If that student is also a woman, then she is often both the only black and only female in the class.

Then there are the seemingly trivial obstacles black students face.

"One of the biggest questions we hear" on a GroupMe frequented by S&T African American students "is, 'Where can I get my hair cut?'" says Ravon Lingard, a junior in engineering management from St. Louis.

Like many of her fellow black female students at S&T, Lingard travels to St. Louis for her hair appointments. Many black male students travel 30 minutes west to St. Robert, she adds.

And if students get a craving for soul food, there's no local restaurant that specializes in such dishes.

(Above) Anthony Yemitan, a sophomore double major in computer engineering and computer science from Houston, Texas, attends the 2018 Black History Month kickoff event in the Havener Center Atrium.

Dealing with microaggressions

Jimmie Washington, a sophomore chemical engineering major from Houston, Texas, has experienced more than a few microaggressions during his time at S&T. During his freshman year, Washington says his chemistry recitation partner would not speak to him or work with him on assignments, even though Washington tried to connect with the student. Even when his classmate asked for help from the teaching assistant, and the TA suggested he talk to Washington, the student refused.

So Washington withdrew.

"I just started wearing my headphones" to recitation, Washington says. "I would just put on some gospel music and do my work."

Lingard has also experienced her share of microaggressions, especially from students who assume she is at S&T as a student-athlete.

"I've had a lot of people ask me if I'm on the track team," says Lingard, who is president of the university's National Society for Black Engineers chapter. "I've never even been to the track here. I've never even been to the gym."

These types of situations are more pervasive than overt racist behavior, S&T students of color say.

Washington, a hurdler on the track team, says the transition from the big and diverse metropolis of Houston to the small town of Rolla, Mo., was "a culture shock, but it wasn't so much that I couldn't handle it," he says. "I came here because I wanted to try something new. So far, it's helped me more than hindered me."

Life at a PWI

Last fall, Missouri S&T's 279 black students made up 3.1 percent of the student body. Overall, underrepresented minorities make up 9.6 percent of the student body.

A study of the university's climate conducted in 2016 found that 18 percent of the campus community — students as well as faculty and staff — had experienced some sort of exclusionary behavior, whether related to race or ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, military status, faculty or staff status or other characteristics. That's an increase from 14 percent who reported similar experiences through a climate survey conducted in 2012, and that change is one indicator that Missouri S&T has room to improve in terms of creating a welcoming environment.

Missouri S&T is not alone in this regard. The latest climate survey findings "were consistent with those found in higher education institutions across the country," wrote Rankin & Associates, the firm that conducted the research.

Four overarching themes emerged from the survey. Topping the list was "inclusion-related concerns." In the final report, the research firm points out, "Disregard for current diversity-related initiatives was emphatically noted by student respondents who elaborated on their opinions of Missouri S&T's institutional initiatives."

The report findings date from 2016, when the university's diversity, inclusion and equity programs were organized differently. More recently, black student leaders spoke highly of the student diversity initiatives staff's timely and positive response to the recent racist social media post.

Being 'the Black ambassadors'

Lingard, Washington and other African American student leaders sometimes feel an obligation to, in Washington's words, "be the black ambassadors" to the S&T community. Washington sometimes feels as though he is supposed to articulate the views and perspectives of all African Americans to his fellow students — to be the spokesperson for black culture — and he doesn't think it's fair to expect a single black student to speak for all black people, any more than a white student should be expected to explain why country music is so popular or the appeal of Donald Trump.

Washington wants campus leaders to understand that not all black students want to take on that role. Most are here to get an outstanding education, but they want to do so in an environment that is inclusive and welcoming.

They also want an environment where they can discuss topical issues — even issues beyond race. Alyse Rogers, a senior chemical engineering major from Lake Saint Louis, Missouri, sees the Black Man's Think Tank (BMTT) organization as one that can stimulate thinking and conversation about difficult topics. Rogers is president of that organization, which hosts "intriguing and engaging discussions" on a wide range of topics, including gender issues, "colorism," technology's impact on students and society and the military's previous ban on transgender people.

"We want to encourage students to feel comfortable enough to have an intellectual conversation with people of diverse

“When someone attends a BMTT discussion, they can expect their thoughts and perspectives to be welcomed with respect and open minds, regardless of whether others agree or disagree.”

ALYSE ROGERS

backgrounds, experiences and viewpoints," she says. "When someone attends a BMTT discussion, they can expect their thoughts and perspectives to be welcomed with respect and open minds, regardless of whether others agree or disagree."

Such conversations in society can be difficult, "because someone may disagree and make it known in an unpleasant and unwelcoming way," Rogers says. Yet she, Lingard and Washington agree that these conversations are needed and important to help Missouri S&T become more welcoming and inclusive to all.

Ideally, Washington says, Missouri S&T would become a place where students "understand our differences and celebrate our differences at the same time."

How you can get involved

What can you do to help make Missouri S&T a more inclusive environment?

Learn from each other. Take advantage of the many cultural educational opportunities on campus, from BMTT discussions to International Students Day (March 4), Women's History Month (activities throughout March) and other events. Visit the [Missouri S&T Calendar of Events](#) for a listing of activities.

Visit 605 W. 11th St. That's the street address for the university's student diversity initiatives office, which supports diversity-related programming and provides space for many student organizations. Drop by to visit with the staff and fellow students.

Help shape the future of campus. Attend a meeting of the Chancellor's Committee for Diversity and Inclusion, which is a campuswide group committed to making Missouri S&T a more inclusive campus. To learn more, contact Neil Outar, interim chief diversity officer, at naoutar@mst.edu.

See something, say something. If you witness or experience any act that you believe may discriminate, stereotype, harass or exclude anyone based on some part of your or their identity, report it. 🚩

Sharing Lessons on the History That Helped Divide St. Louis

STORY BY STEVE VALENTIK



Photos by August Jennewein

Priscilla Dowden-White knows the fractures in her hometown of St. Louis have been hard to ignore in recent years. The whole country could see them in 2014 as images of civil unrest over the issue of police brutality in the aftermath of the shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson played nightly on cable news, and they were visible again last fall after a not guilty verdict in the trial of St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department Officer Jason Stockley for a 2011 shooting.

The divisions also have manifested themselves in the inability of the region to come together on big projects, as when city residents irked many in the metropolitan area when they voted against a measure to publicly fund a downtown stadium to attract a Major League Soccer team.

More recently, St. Louis found itself excluded from a list of 20 finalists trying to land Amazon's second headquarters, and some criticism of the region's bid pointed to the unwillingness of officials in St. Louis County to subsidize the project at a level on par with the City of St. Louis and St. Clair County, Ill.

"We can't hide it," says Dowden-White, a University of Missouri–St. Louis (UMSL) graduate and now associate professor of history at her alma mater. "We're talking about how a city and how a metropolitan area views itself and its vision, where it's going, its potential. We've got a long way to go in really working through those issues."

Dowden-White can clearly trace the origins of many divisions in the city's history — something her students come to learn well through taking her courses. Mending divisions in the present requires understanding and reckoning with that past.

"One of the larger issues that didn't create the fracturing but that I think exacerbates it is that our city is not a part of the county,"

(Above) Associate Professor Priscilla Dowden-White (third from left) leads former students (from left) Michelle Radin Seymour, Brian Weaver and Cassandra Carter on a brief tour down Cottage Avenue in the Ville Neighborhood, with the former Homer G. Phillips Hospital looming in the background.

Dowden-White says. "So some of the fracturing that major urban cities and surrounding counties experience across the country is magnified in our area."

Racial tension underlies many of the divisions in the St. Louis region, but it does not appear to have been the primary motivator for city residents who voted to withdraw from St. Louis County in 1876.

More likely, it had to do with taxes. The city and its 310,000 residents felt they were wasting money on about 27,000 people living in what at the time were far-flung communities such as Kirkwood and Florissant.

In a decision that continues to reverberate to this day, officials set the city's western border at Skinker Boulevard and severed governmental ties to parts beyond it.

"I think they had an outsized, inflated sense of themselves and the city," Dowden-White says of the officials behind that decision. "In some ways, it caused them to see themselves as an island unto themselves. And it hampered their ability to have vision and to look at this in the long term, and to look at St. Louis as being anything other than who they were."

Dowden-White's real expertise lies in the often-overlooked period beginning more than three decades later. Her book "Groping toward Democracy: African American Social Welfare Reform in St. Louis" spotlights actions and events that occurred between 1910 and 1949, with consequences stretching into the present day.

Chief among them were implementation of race-restrictive covenants — agreements entered into by a group of property owners not to sell, rent or lease property to blacks or other minorities.

Dowden-White is currently at work on a biography of attorney and civil rights leader Margaret Bush Wilson. It was Wilson's father, a real estate broker, who was the organizing force behind the 1948

U.S. Supreme Court case *Shelley v. Kraemer* that finally struck down the use of race-restrictive covenants.

The case originated in north St. Louis after J.D. Shelley and his family decided to fight for their right to live in housing of their choosing at 4600 Labadie Ave. The Court ruled the covenants aimed at preventing them from doing so were unenforceable under the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment.

Before then, the practice served to segregate city neighborhoods in a pattern that continues today and is visible in the so-called "Delmar Divide."

"If you do any research on race-restrictive covenants, you'll see that all of the race-restrictive covenants started in the first decade of the 20th century, and it started then because that's when the Great Migration became apparent," says Dowden-White, referring to the migration of African Americans in the South into urban areas in the North.



The nonwhite population of St. Louis increased 150 percent during that period.

The concept of separate space for people of different races had previously won formal approval in the landmark Supreme Court decision in the *Plessy v. Ferguson* case that established the constitutionality of racial segregation in public facilities as long as the segregated facilities were equal in quality. The doctrine came to be known as "separate but equal."

"St. Louis followed the patterns of the South in some ways in that our public schools were segregated," Dowden-White says. "Yet our public transportation was not segregated. Blacks could go to the public library here freely."

Dowden-White also noted that African Americans were not denied the right to vote in St. Louis the way they were throughout much of the South. That voting power could help explain why the city invested as much as it did in segregated institutions.

That was particularly noticeable in the historic Ville neighborhood of north St. Louis.

That's where Sumner High School — the second oldest black public high school with a comprehensive curriculum in the United States and the first west of the Mississippi River — settled in its third and current location.

It's also where the city established Homer G. Phillips Hospital, which was the city's public hospital designated for African Americans from its opening in 1937 until 1955, when the city's hospitals began desegregating. It was one of the few hospitals in the country where African Americans could train as doctors and nurses.

"There are a lot of buildings that before her class, [I] and my family would just drive past, and I didn't know anything about them," says UMSL sophomore Brian Weaver, who took Dowden-White's course on African American History: From Civil Rights to Black Power. "I didn't know the things that transpired."



Even after the *Shelley* case and other landmark decisions such as *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, which hammered away at the principle of "separate but equal," undoing the racial segregation created in the first half of the 20th century has proven challenging.

Race might not have been the driving force at the start of the city's split with the county, but it could be an impediment to reunification. More affluent and largely white communities in the county seem resistant to taking on the problems in the city, where predominantly African American neighborhoods suffer from issues such as crime and lack of resources.

The county, too, remains largely segregated.

The shooting of Michael Brown and ensuing unrest brought attention to how many municipalities in north St. Louis County used traffic tickets and other citations to profit at the expense of their poor, primarily African American residents — breeding mistrust between citizens and law enforcement in the process.

"We, of course, were surprised when Mike Brown's murder touched off the movement that it did," Dowden-White says. "But some of those who have studied Ferguson and our inner suburbs far more than I have, they've explained that we should not have been surprised that it happened."

That's a lesson that Dowden-White has tried to impart to all her students about the larger issue of segregation, in hopes that greater understanding might bring about change.

"It doesn't have to be that way," says alumna Michelle Radin Seymour, who became a history major after taking Dowden-White's African American History course in the fall of 2015 and who completed her degree last December. "That's why I think these classes are so important for everybody because we all need to realize that deliberate decisions were made, and this isn't an accident. And it's still so much a part of the fabric of St. Louis and how we view each other." 🌈

(Above Left) Priscilla Dowden-White.

(Above) Former students (from left) Cassandra Carter, Brian Weaver and Michelle Radin Seymour listen intently to Priscilla Dowden-White in front of Sumner High School. "There are a lot of buildings that, before her class, [I] and my family would just drive past, and I didn't know anything about them," Weaver says.

UMKC Community Checks Its Blind Spots



BY UMKC STAFF

The University of Missouri-Kansas City Division of Diversity and Inclusion, in partnership with CEO Action for Diversity and Inclusion, hosted the “Check Your Blind Spots” campus tour on Tuesday, March 13 on both the Volker and Health Sciences campuses. Members of the university community were invited to learn about one of those millions of unconscious bits of information the conscious mind tends to leave out — bias.

What are blind spots?

According to CEO Action, blind spots are our brains on autopilot. “Experts tell us that our unconscious mind makes the majority of our decisions. It creates blind spots — unconscious biases that can narrow our vision and potentially influence our behaviors.”

Visitors participated in an educational video experience, took short implicit association tests and were provided with educational content, which included lists of potential blind spots and actions to help address them.

It was an eye-opening experience for some as test results made new revelations regarding their own preexisting biases. The event also sparked motivation for students, faculty and staff to start the conversation on how to take steps toward promoting diversity and inclusion in their communities and future workplaces.

Interim Chancellor and Provost Barbara Bichelmeyer kicked off the event with welcome remarks and signed the CEO Action diversity pledge.

“This pledge signifies a commitment driven by a realization that diversity and inclusion is not a competitive issue,” said Bichelmeyer. “It is a societal issue that we must address.”

(Above) The diversity bus tour stops in Kansas City.

Action steps

The pledge commits to three initial efforts that CEO Action believes will catalyze further conversation and engagement around diversity and inclusion, and foster collaboration among organizations:

- Continue to cultivate workplaces that support open dialogue on complex, and sometimes difficult, conversations about diversity and inclusion;
- Implement and expand unconscious bias education; and
- Share our thinking as we establish programs and initiatives around diversity and inclusion.

“When we think about our mission as an urban-serving university, it calls us to include diversity, equity and inclusion as a part of that framework,” said Bichelmeyer.

CEO Action for Diversity and Inclusion is the largest CEO-driven business commitment to advance diversity and inclusion within the workplace. Since kicking off its “Check Your Blind Spot” campus tour in October 2017, the group has traveled to universities across the nation exposing students, faculty and staff to the nuances of unconscious bias. Visitors were empowered with the knowledge and resources needed to strip themselves of bias and better understand the role that they can play in diversity and inclusion.

If you missed the bus and still want to check your blind spots, take a short implicit association test. Conducted by Harvard University, the Implicit Association Test (IAT) measures attitudes and beliefs that people may be unwilling or unable to report. The IAT may be especially interesting if it shows that you have an implicit attitude that you did not know about. 🌈

Fact: The unconscious processing abilities of the human brain are approximately 11 million bits of information per second. Our conscious minds, however, only process 40 bits of information per second. So what exactly goes on in our unconscious minds that we aren’t aware of?

Lavender Ceremony Celebrates LGBTQ Graduates

STORY AND PHOTO BY DAVID MORRISON



(Above) UMSL Chancellor Tom George; degree candidates Tom Gaska Jr., Travonte Harris, Audrey Taylor, Judy Colson and Courtney Leonard; and Harry Hawkins, diversity and LGBTQ+ program and project support coordinator, took part in the university’s first public formal Lavender Graduation to celebrate the achievements of LGBTQ students.

Jessica Kehle stood at the front of Century Room C in the Millennium Student Center, wiping persistent tears from the corners of her eyes.

As president of PRIZM, the University of Missouri–St. Louis (UMSL) queer-trans-straight alliance, it was her duty to hand out the stoles to each of the five participants of the Lavender Graduation on April 30. Harry Hawkins, UMSL’s diversity and LGBTQ+ program and project support coordinator, called the graduates’ names and, one by one, they came to the front of the room and met Kehle, who draped the stoles around their necks.

Each time Kehle gave out a stole — black, adorned with patches of rainbow coloring and the words “Lavender Graduation” in all caps — she reflected on the journey that each of the graduates had taken to this point.

She knows it well.

“The message that you have to love all of yourself is really resonant with me,” Kehle said. “I’ve had to come out twice: I came out as gay three years ago, and now I’m coming out as pansexual, which is a whole other animal. It took me a long time to get to where I am.”

UMSL held a public, formal Lavender Graduation ceremony, which honors lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer students, for the first time this year. PRIZM put on informal Lavender Graduation events before, for members in a closed setting.

PRIZM sponsored the formal ceremony, along with the offices of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, and Sexuality and Gender Diversity. The university is one of more than 175 other higher education institutions around the country that offer this ceremony, according to the Human Rights Campaign.

“The focus that we have here on inclusion and diversity, that’s a value that we hold dear to our hearts at the University of Missouri–St. Louis,” Chancellor Tom George said. “The LGBTQ students are very important to us here at the university. We are very proud of you. Congratulations on the first Lavender Graduation — the first of many to come.”

Maria Theresa Balogh, associate teaching professor of Spanish, read an original poem to mark the occasion, and Director of Gender Studies Dr. Kathleen Nigro introduced speaker Sayer Johnson.

Johnson, who is executive director and co-founder of the St. Louis Metro Trans Umbrella Group, bought his first suit as a transgender man before he attended the inaugural Transgender Spectrum Conference at UMSL in 2014.

“I am proud our school was a turning point for this very brave, notable community activist, that we are a place where everyone can feel welcome and safe, and be a place for change and growth,” said Nigro, who presented Johnson with an honorary UMSL certificate in Gender Studies at the event.

In his speech, Johnson reminded the graduates to love all the parts of themselves that got them to this point. He said that it took him a long time to embrace “birth-name Sayer,” because she reminded him of times of sadness, struggle and self-loathing.

But, Johnson said, she also played a pivotal role in building the “aggressive-ego” Sayer that has allowed him to flourish.

“Maybe it was awkward to come out, maybe it was brutal,” Johnson said. “Maybe when you gained your identity, you lost everything. That part of you is resilient. That part of you deserves to feel that paper in your hand when you walk in your cap and gown. You have accomplished this with all your parts: all your wonderful, complicated parts.”

After the graduates heard their names called and received their applause and stoles, they had a chance to address the room. Those who spoke expressed gratitude to their fellow PRIZM members for helping create a community on campus, while acknowledging the obstacles they still face.

“I’m just thankful for this event and everybody here,” said Travonte Harris, who is graduating with a B.S. in Media Studies. “It’s been a real struggle. It’s not easy being an LGBT member. But I want you to know that it does get better. Every day, it’s a little bit better than the day before.”

Judy Colson, a BSW candidate, said the public Lavender Graduation at UMSL set a precedent that needs to be followed. Kehle, a second-year MFA graduate student, was already considering what her Lavender Graduation will be like in two years.

“I will just be bawling hysterically at that one,” Kehle said. 🌈

UMKC Institute for Human Development to Support Health Decision-Making by People with Disabilities

BY UMKC STAFF



A new initiative led by the University of Missouri-Kansas City Institute for Human Development is seeking to enhance the partnership among medical professionals, adults with intellectual/developmental disabilities (IDD), family members and disability providers that supports informed choice and supported decision-making (SDM) practices on health-care decisions. The initiative, Charting the LifeCourse (CtLC): Health Care Preferences and SDM for People with IDD, is one of four programs around the nation selected to receive \$50,000 grants from the WITH Foundation and the American Academy of Developmental Medicine and Dentistry.

"We received a number of strong proposals from all across the country. It is a privilege to support these efforts, as they work to expand the awareness and understanding of informed SDM, at both the local and national levels," says Ryan Easterly, Executive Director of the WITH Foundation.

Utilizing a multilevel approach that enhances knowledge and skills, CtLC will provide training and coaching on SDM and facilitate effective communication with the target groups in the St. Joseph, Mo., area. St. Joseph-based CtLC partners include:

- Progressive Community Services
- United Cerebral Palsy of Northwest Missouri and Easterseals Midwest
- Mosaic Life Care

CtLC will build upon existing initiatives and partnerships to result in the creation of a two-phase SDM training and coaching curriculum accessible across its life span. The Institute for Human Development is the lead developer of the CtLC framework and tools for families and professionals, used by 17 states in the National Community of Practice. CtLC resources and practices are being developed and tested by professionals and families within disability, education, employment, social services and health-care settings.

Other organizations selected for funding:

- The University of Kentucky's Human Development Institute
- The National Disability Rights Network
- The Arc™ California

About the UMKC Institute for Human Development

The University of Missouri-Kansas City Institute for Human Development (UMKC-IHD) houses the federally designated University Center for Excellence Developmental Disabilities (UCEDD) for the state of Missouri. Since 1977, UMKC-IHD has implemented projects that focus on building fully inclusive communities where people with disabilities have the capacity and freedom to choose the kind of life they want with the supports they select. UMKC-IHD's expertise in community applied research, culturally competent staff and polices, strong ability to partner for social change, experience with relevant curriculum and access to existing national dissemination structures makes UMKC-IHD highly qualified for this project. This project furthers our ongoing work to promote self-determination, supports to families and community capacity building.



Reflecting on a Year of Training

BY MARIA BUTAUSKI

The work it takes to create a campus and a University of Missouri (UM) System that fosters diversity and inclusion is never done, but with confidence, I say that we are taking strides in the right direction.

I have been afforded several opportunities through the Office of Inclusion, Diversity & Equity to learn and reflect upon issues surrounding social justice, diversity and inclusion.

It all began with the "Social Justice Mediation Training Student Workshop" led by the Social Justice Mediation Institute, held in January before classes started. In this workshop, I worked side by side with students from across the UM System to learn about the importance of getting people's "below-the-line" stories, or the stories less frequently heard. You know, those stories that are so often silenced because they do not follow the master narrative.

This workshop made me better equipped to facilitate vulnerable discussions with my students around culture, gender, sexuality and class as they relate to interpersonal communication. More importantly, it helped me reflect on my own experiences of discrimination as a queer individual and the experiences of other minority groups.

Later in the semester, I had the opportunity to participate in a two-day workshop on "Creating an Inclusive and Socially Just Campus" through the Social Justice Training Institute. This workshop was equally eye-opening. It gave me a chance to meet staff from across the UM System and thoughtfully discuss ideas for continuing to make our campus more inclusive.

In June, I was granted another opportunity to learn from Deepika Marya and Leah Wing, the trainers of the Social Justice Mediation Institute, for the full certification in social justice mediation alongside staff and faculty from the entire UM System. Like any 40-hour training, it was exhausting and challenging, but in all the right ways. During lunch breaks, I took time to reflect on our discussions and brainstorm ways to integrate a social justice perspective in my own classroom. In the evenings, my mind was still racing as I reflected upon my training and the deliberate, critical discussions I had with my peers throughout the day. This training reinvigorated the (very tired) social justice warrior in my heart.

It's a daunting experience to live in our polarized society, especially when you feel the need to constantly help people "check their privilege" or consider others' points of view on hot-button issues like immigration, gun control and discrimination. How can we understand each other if we are talking at, instead of with, one another? If we want to understand one another, we must be willing to get at people's stories "below the line." Although this certification was for mediation from a social justice perspective, what I learned throughout the training is applicable to so much more than conflict resolution.

Flash back to Fall 2015, my first year at Mizzou. As a first-generation college student, I was still in awe over the fact that I had been accepted to the Department of Communication's doctoral program. I was uncertain about what the following years would entail, but most importantly, I had no idea what was about to unfold on our campus or how it would impact me, my students and the campus community.

Fall 2015 is a time many of us will never forget. Tensions were high. Students of color were speaking up about the systematic oppression and racism they face on a regular basis. The Concerned Student 1950 student group organized. There were protests. Grad student Jonathan Butler went on a hunger strike. Football players, with the support of their coach, announced they would stand in solidarity. These efforts started a much larger conversation about diversity and inclusion on our campus and UM System-wide.

Whether one is mediating a dispute between two parties, or two parties are simply arguing different points of view, we cannot reach an adequate resolution or shared understanding without learning one another's stories. By this, I mean we need to take the time to learn the why. The why behind people's feelings. The why behind people's beliefs and values. The why behind people's behaviors. How do we learn the why (or people's stories below the line)?

We learn the why by being "multi-partial," as Wing and Marya would describe, and inviting people to share their stories openly and honestly. If we can create safe spaces for story gathering (and transmitting), and communicate in ways that help people share their stories openly and honestly, we can take the perspectives of others and help others take the perspectives of ourselves.

In doing so, we can reach more amicable and fair resolutions. We can reach a deeper, shared understanding of one another. We can develop a respect we may have previously lacked for one another. And, ultimately, we can become more socially just and inclusive as a community.

Maria Butauski is a doctoral student within the Department of Communication, University of Missouri-Columbia.