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UMKC Engages in New Initiatives

O n college campuses across the country, issues of tolerance and freedom of speech loom large. The upcoming political elections will only create more polarization on campuses.

For this reason, UMKC’s Division of Diversity and Inclusion launched a new program entitled “Agree to Disagree: Engaging our First Amendment Rights Through Civil Discourse.” The program is a year-long initiative designed to educate students, faculty and staff about the First Amendment and how to have constructive discourse. Without this education, campuses can be one step away from a major incident.

The “Agree to Disagree” program launched Nov. 5, 2019, with a panel discussion about the First Amendment. Missouri Representatives Dan Stacy (R), Barbara Washington (D), as well as a member of the ACLU were in attendance.

Law professors were utilized to do training throughout the university, including faculty, student groups and the chancellor’s Diversity Council. On Dec. 10, a 2020 Presidential Election: Prepare for Passionate Disagreement & Perceived Acts of Bias & Insensitivity on Campus webinaire was provided to prepare the campus for the upcoming political season. The Agree to Disagree program will be a year-long initiative.

On another note, UMKC also spearheaded the Faculty Institute for Teaching Inclusive Curricula (FITIC). Led by Makini King, PhD, the Institute focuses upon infusing diversity into the curriculum on a campuses-wide basis. Faculty enter into a structure program that provides guidance, resources and peer assistance. The benefit of the program is that it responds to the needs of an increasingly diverse student body and prepares all students to develop broader perspectives to operate in a global environment.

While having an inclusive excellence plan is a good first step, involving academic and administrative units is far more productive. The bottom line is making meaningful progress in diversity and inclusion is everyone’s job. We are proud that the UMKC campus has risen to the challenge.
Cecily Hicks serves as the UM System’s Deputy Title IX Coordinator and Equity Officer. Hicks collaborates with counterparts systemwide to provide support and resources that enhance the university’s mission of promoting diversity, equity and inclusion while also working to ensure a safe and secure university community. Prior to coming to the UM System, Hicks worked for almost 13 years as a Boone County Assistant Prosecuting Attorney with a primary focus on prosecuting domestic violence and sexual assault offenses.

A long line of well-wishers — colleagues, students and friends — queued up behind Deborah Burris in the Millennium Student Center Century Rooms to congratulate and celebrate the director of the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and chief diversity officer at the University of Missouri-St. Louis on 36 years of service to the University of Missouri System.

Burris, who retired on Nov. 1, has made her mark on each of the four UM System universities, in myriad roles including leadership positions in student admissions and financial aid, human resources, affirmative action, Title IX, diversity, equity and inclusive excellence. Establishing the Chancellor’s Cultural Diversity Council and the university receiving the Higher Education Excellence in Diversity Award from INSIGHT into Diversity magazine three times are among her many noteworthy achievements at UMSL.

Interim Chancellor and Provost Kirstin Sobolik served as MC during the event and spoke of Burris’ impact on UMSL.

“Most important, Deborah has helped us create a culture that encourages civil and constructive discourse, reason, thought and sustained dialogue and an environment of respect and appreciation,” Sobolik said. “I’m going to reiterate those last two words because I feel that that defines Deborah: respect and appreciation.”

Among the speakers were Ken Hutchinson, former UM System vice president for the Office of Human Resources; Alicia Turner Roberson, president of the St. Louis Industry Liaison Group; Catherine Wong from the St. Louis office of the U.S. Department of Labor; UMSL Chancellor Emeritus Blanche M. Touhill; Dorothea Scott, Compliance Manager, Equal Opportunity Programs in the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion; and Jerome Morris, the E. Desmond Lee Endowed Professor of Urban Education in the College of Education.

The group called out Burris’ attributes and achievements, which ranged from her vision, ethics and class to her contributions to the St. Louis ILG Disability and Veteran Vendor Fair and Black Writers Student Association to anecdotes about her relationships with colleagues and her handling of difficult work situations. In addition, Scott presented Burris with a scrapbook of memories from her UMSL career.

And she’s not done helping people. Sobolik announced that Burris will be working at Episcopal City Mission as an ordained minister aiding incarcerated, adolescent black males to navigate the system.

Finally, Burris took the microphone to talk about her time at UMSL and thank her colleagues and collaborators.

“Don’t think we transform lives,” Burris said. “Every single one of you have been a part of that, that process of helping to shape, transform the lives of students, as faculty and staff. I’ve been blessed to be on the journey with you. So, again, thank you all for being here. It’s been awesome. I want to challenge each and every one of you to support one another, to encourage one another, to love one another, and again, to continue to do the good work that goes on here.”

Layla Padgett

Layla Padgett serves as the UM System’s Senior Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Specialist. She completed her final practicum placement for a Master of Social Work through the UM System DEI office in 2019 and continued to work as a Program Support Coordinator at the system after graduation. Padgett works to design, develop, implement and support systemwide programs and initiatives to create and foster an open and inclusive environment.
Engineering Success

New program offers summer research for students from HBCUs

Tennessee State University students Ahmed Osmand (foreground) and Sam Wreh were among the students selected for Missouri S&T’s Summer Engineering Research Academy (SERA), sponsored by Missouri S&T’s College of Engineering and Computing (CEC).

“This was a new program, and it was a tremendous success,” says Dr. John Myers, CEC’s associate dean and a professor of civil, architectural and environmental engineering. “We wanted to introduce more undergraduate students from underrepresented groups to the exciting research going on here at Missouri S&T, in hopes of generating interest in going on to graduate school after they finish their bachelor’s degrees. We plan to continue to offer this program in the future.”

Myers credits much of the program’s success to the involvement and support of the Missouri S&T faculty research mentors and their research teams, along with the engineering dean at Tennessee State University and Tuskegee University, both historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). The dean is Dr. S. Keith Hargrove of Tennessee State, who earned a master of science degree in engineering management from Missouri S&T in 1987, and Dr. Hedcut Aglan of Tuskegee.

Dr. Kelley R. Wilkerson, assistant teaching professor of materials science and engineering at S&T and SERA program director, says, “Each of the students worked with an S&T research group based on their expressed interest areas of metallurgical engineering, automation or environmental engineering. “We wanted to introduce more undergraduate students from underrepresented groups to the exciting research going on here at Missouri S&T, in hopes of generating interest in going on to graduate school after they finish their bachelor’s degrees. We plan to continue to offer this program in the future.”

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Dr. Kelley R. Wilkerson, assistant teaching professor of materials science and engineering, is the program director.

“The two-month program concluded with a poster session, during which the students presented the results of their research. Dr. Richard W. Wrona, vice provost and dean of CEC, credits Myers with developing the program.

“John deserves a lot of credit for establishing connections with Tennessee State and Tuskegee University to get this program off the ground,” Wrona says. “This was a very successful first year for the program, and I see great opportunities for it in the future.”

Four IMSD Scholars receive Outstanding Poster Presentations at national ABRCMS Conference

STORY BY: HARSHE PAUL
PHOTO COURTESY OF: BRIAN BOOTON

E ater this year, 23 students who are part of the Initiative for Maximizing Student Diversity (IMSD) Scholars program participated in the Annual Biomedical Research Conference for Minority Students (ABRCMS) in Anaheim, California. Of those, 19 presented their research, which was a record-best for the acclaimed MU program.

For the ninth year in a row, at least one IMSD Scholar from MU has been selected as an Outstanding Research Presentation Award Recipient in their category. Few participating schools have been able to do so consistently each year.

Four of the MU student participants were selected by judges for recognition. The ABRCMS Conference included over 2,500 undergraduate research presentations with only 395 presentations selected for the award.

The conference concluded with an awards banquet with a 5,100 ABRCMS attendees, which was a record number in attendance.

Undergraduate Director of IMSD Scholars Brian Boston noted, “The camaraderie and scientific prowess exhibited was an omnipresent ground,” Wlezien says. “This was a very successful first year for the program, and I see great opportunities for it in the future.”

Learn more about IMSD by visiting imsd.missouri.edu.
Finding a Home

SREB helps minority doctoral students succeed

STORY BY: CHARLENE EMERSON

No matter your background, earning a doctoral degree is a daunting task. Many graduate students face challenges ranging from developing a productive relationship with their advisor to pioneering research in their chosen field. Beyond the usual challenges of graduate school, minority students often feel isolated by the absence of underrepresented groups in their field. Since 1994, the Southern Regional Education Board’s (SREB) Institute on Teaching and Mentoring has helped thousands of minority PhD candidates complete their doctorates and achieve success as faculty members.

The SREB Institute on Teaching and Mentoring is the nation’s largest gathering of PhD students from underrepresented groups and faculty of color. More than 1,000 scholars attend the Institute each year. Two-thirds of the participants are women, nearly two-thirds are black, one in four is Hispanic, seven percent are American Indian/Native Alaskan and four percent are Asian.

This year, 16 students from across the University of Missouri System attended: Precious Hardy, School of Education; LaChrisa Crenshaw, College of Social Work; Davelle Hutchison, LaShanna Kilgore, Dr. Dana Lane-Bonds, Rainford Piens, Cydith Robertson, Yanni Snowden-Bulllock, Dana Thompson and Dr. Jacqueline Valerius from MU; Annie Derrell and Salome Wilford from UMKC; Ondlaneet Mohlerlgi from Missouri S&T; and Esteka Calhés, LaChrisa Crenshaw and James Jordan from UMSL.

The program has made a major impact on the fellows. LaChrisa Crenshaw, who will complete her doctorate in Social Work in 2021, said, “The support SREB has provided through mentorship, as well as additional workshop training to prepare me for the research and dissertation phase of my journey, has helped me understand some best practices to utilize to help me complete my doctorate degree with success.”

Being a part of SREB is like finding your tribe when you’re lost in the wilderness. As a Black first-generation graduate student, the thought of a graduate education was so intimidating.

However, with the support, guidance, and connections I’ve gained being a part of this organization has made the journey so much easier.

Precious Hardy
Educational Psychology, MU

The SREB Doctoral Scholars Program hosts the annual conference to advance efforts to diversify the professoriate in universities and educational systems across the country. The program provides layers of support to underrepresented PhD candidates, including mentoring, funding and career services. Nakia Davis, MU interim vice chancellor for the Division of Inclusion, Diversity & Equity, Tyrone Douglas, MU associate professor for Educational Leadership & Policy, Analysis, Jiri Hart, MU dean and vice provost for Graduate Studies and Jenny Lundgren, UMKC dean of the School of Graduate Studies, served with others as mentors to provide an educational support system for scholars of color in their respective fields. Significantly, 2019’s fall semester was the first time that all four UM System institutions were represented by faculty and staff to recruit students, postdoctoral fellows and faculty to positions within the UM System.

Over the past 26 years, the SREB Doctoral Scholars Program has helped nearly 1,000 underrepresented students earn their PhD, and as of 2019, it is currently supporting 400 students pursuing doctorates. The program helps save both time and money for students, the university and the state. SREB scholars finish their PhD two to five years earlier than the national average, saving up to $120,000 per student.

In 2018, the National Science Foundation funded a study that confirmed the SREB’s impact. The study showed SREB alumni closing the pay gap between minorities and the overall population. Women who participated in the study were significantly more likely than other doctoral graduates to earn salaries between $80,000 and $150,000 per year. Black participants also earned higher salaries than other doctoral graduates.

Through the Missouri Compacts, the entire UM System works to achieve excellence through several principles. The compact for Inclusive Excellence aspires to increase access and success for all students and recruit, retain and promote faculty and staff from diverse backgrounds. By participating in the Southern Regional Education Board conference, the UM System can help minority students achieve excellence in their education and careers.

As a member of SREB, I now have support in the form of financial assistance, but more importantly in career counseling and preparation, networking opportunities, and accessibility to mentors and faculty members for support. These resources are invaluable as I work through my degree program and prepare for a career as a minority educator in the college/university environment. I am so thankful for this opportunity and to the yearly SREB Institute for Teaching and Mentoring for recharging me and providing me with the necessary tools complete this goal.

James E. Jordan Jr.
Business Administration, UMSL

Being an SREB Fellow was life-changing for me. I am one of the only people of color in my department, and to be accepted into a community of scholars who look like me and can relate to some of the hardships that come with being a person of color in what is still a predominately white Academy was such an inspiration, motivator, and truly a comfort.

The Institute on Teaching and Mentoring is like “coming home” every year.

Annie Derrell
History, UMKC
UMKC Recognized for Excellence in Diversity

Outstanding commitment to diversity and inclusion brings national recognition

The University of Missouri-Kansas City has received the 2019 Higher Education Excellence in Diversity (HEED) award from INSIGHT Into Diversity magazine, the oldest and largest publication focused on diversity and inclusion in higher education.

Each year INSIGHT Into Diversity evaluates universities’ practices relating to recruitment and retention of students, faculty and staff. The process also considers the universities’ leadership commitment and program support.

UMKC embraces a broad spectrum of diversities including race, ethnicity, culture, nationality, gender, age, sexual orientation, disability, linguistic ability, learning style, religion, socioeconomic and veteran status, life experiences, educational level and family structure.

Susan Wilson, Ph.D., vice chancellor of the division of diversity and inclusion, said, “This award is even more special as we remember how far we have come to create an inclusive environment for our students, faculty and staff,” Wilson said. “This award is an outstanding example of schools that are committed to making diversity and inclusion a top priority across their campuses.”

The HEED Award and the Health Professions HEED Award are the only national awards that honor individual institutions for being outstanding examples of colleges, universities or health professions schools that are committed to making diversity and inclusion a top priority across their campuses.

“The HEED Award process consists of a comprehensive and rigorous application that includes questions relating to the recruitment and retention of students and employees — and best practices for both — continued leadership support for diversity, and other aspects of campus diversity and inclusion,” said Lenore Pearlstein, publisher of INSIGHT Into Diversity magazine. “We take a detailed approach to reviewing each application in deciding who will be named a HEED Award recipient. Our standards are high, and we look for institutions relating to recruitment and retention of students and employees — and best practices for both — continued leadership support for diversity, and other aspects of campus diversity and inclusion.”

UMKC is featured in the November 2019 issue of INSIGHT Into Diversity magazine. It was the only college in Missouri to receive the recognition. The UMKC School of Medicine received a HEED award in 2018 and the School of Dentistry received the award in 2016.

Colorism’s Significance

To better understand racial trauma, MU expert says we must also acknowledge skin tone

A s the country continues to grapple with racism, one University of Missouri professor suggests that bias related to skin tone can lead to negative health and relationships for African Americans. Antoinette Landor, assistant professor of human development and family science, and a leading expert on colorism, says discrimination based on skin tone plays a significant role in the lives of African Americans.

“For a long time, colorism has been considered a ‘dirty little secret,’” Landor said. “Our recent research illustrates the need to unmask skin-tone wounds and promote healing for individuals, families and communities that suffer from skin-tone trauma.”

Landor’s study looked at the historical context of skin tone to create the first model for understanding skin-tone trauma. Through this model, she found that colorist incidents might directly and indirectly lead to negative effects on the health and interpersonal relationships of African Americans. This is due to colorist incidents eliciting traumatic stress reactions.

The model looks at both the historical and contemporary role of colorism and how it impacts African Americans. While colorism has roots in slavery and colonialism, it has carried over into mainstream popular culture as well. Landor points to several examples in popular culture that illustrate colorism such as; casting of fair-skinned Zoe Saldana to portray dark-skinned Nina Simone; and magazines photoshopping pictures of Beyonce, Kacey Washington and others to make them appear lighter.

“Skin-tone trauma: historical and contemporary influences on the health and interpersonal outcomes of African Americans,” was published in Perspectives on Psychological Science, a flagship journal of the Association of Psychological Science. It is one of the top five journals in psychology. Shardé McNeil Smith, assistant professor of African American studies at University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, served as co-author for the study.

Landor offers the following advice to help people heal from skin-tone trauma:

1. Acknowledge that colorism exists through individual, institutional and cultural encounters and that it occurs across races.
2. Have difficult conversations about the implications of colorism.
3. Identify and define words that might cause skin-tone trauma and be aware of how those words might affect others.
4. Believe others when they are open about trauma implications of colorism they are experiencing.

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Adult education takes place everywhere, and it is defined in different ways. But one of the definitions I’d like to share with people is simply that adult education is looking at those activities that adults engage in, whereby they are gaining knowledge or skills.

Isaac-Savage was a doctoral student at the University of Georgia when she first realized the African American church could be fertile ground for research. She was attending a large church in Atlanta that was extremely active in the community and provided numerous educational offerings.

“Our doors were open seven days a week,” she said. “There was something for everybody in the church, and as I was taking classes for my doctorate, I kept learning how African Americans were not participating in adult education. I kept saying, ‘Well, something is wrong with that because I’m seeing it take place every day at my church.’”

Her expertise grew organically from that personal connection and a desire to introduce a new perspective to the field. At the time, research was primarily focused on formal adult education and on white adult learners.

“I decided that I wanted to help tell the story of African Americans and also help tell the story of the church and this important educational role as it relates to African Americans,” Isaac-Savage said.

She noted that the church has historically been the center of the African American community. It was a place where people could go for the things they were denied in everyday society—education, respect and support—often at great personal risk.

While Isaac-Savage joins many notable peers, her CV is equally formative. She is well known for her research on adult education and learning experiences of African Americans in church-based education and was one of the first adult education scholars to study the subject extensively.

Her work has focused on African American churches’ contributions to the education, health and career development of congregants. In investigating these subjects, she has also highlighted the intersections of race and social justice in adult education.

In addition to her research, Isaac-Savage has actively contributed to academic publications, serving as co-editor of Adult Learning and as an editorial board member and reviewers for other journals such as Adult Education Quarterly and Education and Urban Society. She is also an executive board member for the American Association of Adult and Continuing Education.

At UMSL, Isaac-Savage was the first African American faculty member to be promoted to full professor in the College of Education. She has worked to expand the reach of the college by developing online curriculum for the adult education program and by increasing the number of African Americans admitted to the doctoral program.

Isaac-Savage’s tireless work is worthy of recognition, but to her, helping others—whether as an educator or a volunteer—is its own reward.

“My mother was always involved in our school and community activities where I was growing up and my maternal grandmother was a caring and giving person,” she said. “I think, in a way, it’s somewhat innate for me to give back.”
Computer Science Faculty Honored for Making a Difference for Women in STEM

Professor Yugi Lee receives Central Exchange award for her mentorship efforts

As an internationally-recognized expert in computer science, Yugi Lee, professor of computer science at the School of Computing and Engineering, says her motto is that teaching and research are not separate.

Throughout her 20-year tenure at the SCE, she’s continued to mentor and equip her students to survive in any work environment – teaching or industry – an experience she said also helps to inform her research and make a difference for women in STEM following her footsteps. It’s her

impact and engagement with students that landed Lee among Central Exchange’s 2019 STEMMy Award recipients.

Lee and mentee, PhD student Mayanka Chandra Shekar, sat down to discuss the importance of mentorship and its significance for women in STEM.

WHAT MAKES FACULTY MENTORSHIP CRITICAL TO THE SUCCESS OF STUDENTS?

LEE: Students have their own goals. Sometimes they know what their goal is and they need someone to help guide and sometimes we help them identify their goals. That’s why it’s critical to have the right advisor, especially for graduate students. Sometimes their research may not be accepted, sometimes a project they’re working on may not go right and they get down. Additionally, mentorship is really important for female students in engineering where there aren’t many female faculty.

HOW HAS YOUR MENTOR INSPIRED YOU?

SHEKAR: How I perceive research is how Dr. Lee has taught me. She’s the most approachable faculty I’ve ever encountered. Every time there’s a new technology Dr. Lee says “let’s teach it,” because you become an expert through teaching. I had limited exposure to research when I came to UMKC, but in my time here I’ve received a Google Lime scholarship, I’ve been selected to receive research funding from the School of Graduate Studies three times and has received the UMKC Women’s Council’s Graduate Assistance Fund scholarship five times.

LEE: Mayanka is one of the more popular students in our department. She’s got a lot of energy and fresh ideas. Her presentation is great and she can teach almost anything. She’s currently supervising 10 master’s degree students and mentors five project groups, and will apply to a faculty position when she graduates. She even received a scholarship to attend the Grace Hopper Celebration, which is one of the largest conferences for women in technology. She is applying to some faculty positions. I think she will land somewhere great.

WHAT LED YOU TO UMKC?

SHEKAR: When I came to UMKC in 2014, I had limited exposure to research. Where I’m from, in India, UMKC had positive reviews. I am only one of two students from my master’s program who came to the US. In the last five years I’ve been at UMKC, our number of female PhD students in computer science has significantly increased. When I joined the program there were three of us, now we have between 15 and 20.

SHEKAR: I received my bachelor’s and master’s degrees from a women’s college in India. We had 16 master’s students. Some are working, some got married and started families and two of us went on to pursue PhDs. There just aren’t a lot of women in computer science. In the last five years I’ve been at UMKC, one number of female PhD students in computer science has significantly increased. When I joined the program there were three of us, now we have between 15 and 20.

I’m getting married in December so I’ll be learning to juggle marriage and completing my program. I graduate in May.

WHAT QUALITIES MAKE A GOOD MENTOR?

LEE: Understanding. It’s important to understand the student’s abilities and family situations. You have to be able to adjust to what’s going on with them and work with them to persist. Build a relationship with your students and be a support system for them. Finally, it’s important to be a good trainer and equip your students to be able to survive in any work environment – industry or teaching.

ONE OF TWO? WOW! HOW MANY OF YOU WERE THERE?

SHEKAR: I received my bachelor’s and master’s degrees from a women’s college in India. We had 16 master’s students. Some are
Lee received the WISTEMM Educator Award for full-time faculty in Winter 2020. Sheppard joined Missouri S&T in 2011, and her main field of study is the history of women in the sciences. She says her goal is to amplify the voices of women and minorities in history and to change students’ perspectives on women in history.

Lee received the WISTEMM Educator Award for full-time faculty in Winter 2020. She received the CERTI Service Award, and in 2016, she earned a Faculty Teaching Award.

Sheppard earned the 2018 Faculty Experiential Learning Award at S&T for her semester-long student assignment to edit Wikipedia articles related to science and Latin America. By the end of the first semester, the 26 students in the class added 28,300 words to Wikipedia in 11 different articles, ranging from Aztec society to Spanish Missions in the Americas. Their edited articles have been viewed nearly 1 million times.

Sheppard earned her master’s degree in Egyptian Art and Archaeology at University College London in 2002, and she completed her bachelor’s degree in anthropology and sociology at Truman State University in 2001.
You’ve likely heard of impostor syndrome. There’s a 70% chance you’ve felt it. We asked five women engineers to tell us how they fight this feeling head-on and succeed in a male-dominated field.

Impostor phenomenon. Impostor syndrome. Impostor experience.

No matter what you call it, you’ve most likely felt it. The feeling that, no matter how much you have accomplished, you aren’t worthy of the success you’ve earned.

You’re not alone. The phenomenon was originally introduced as a feeling that affects only high-achieving women. Some recent research shows that men struggle with this feeling in the workplace as much as women. According to recent research, 70% of people experience impostor syndrome at some point in their lives. Almost everyone experiences it. But if you fight it? To find out, we asked five fearless women engineers at Mizzou.

TRUST THE EXPERT

When asked about impostor syndrome, Dr. Heather Hunt, associate professor in the Department of Biomedical, Biological & Chemical Engineering at Mizzou, is quick to point out that this popular name for the feeling is actually not the original name. Dr. Pauline Rose Clance coined the name “impostor phenomenon” in a 1978 research article, and has since written various publications on the subject.

“When I give seminars about impostor phenomenon, I always go back to the book The Impostor Phenomenon: Overcoming the Fear that Haunts Your Success by Dr. Clance,” said Hunt. “She’s the leading authority on this subject. The book is evidence-based. It’s practical. It’s practical.

BE EMPATHETIC

Hunt is part of the estimated 30% of people who haven’t experienced impostor phenomenon. Despite that, she is able to use the book’s suggestions when teaching and mentoring her students.

“Even if you don’t experience it, it’s really valuable to understand what your peers might be experiencing, because I think it helps us to build empathy,” she said. “Empathy is important to have in a field like engineering where everything we do leads toward this idea of making the world a better place.”

TALK ABOUT IT

In addition to soft skills like empathy, critical thinking, and creativity, an engineering education can help you find a global network. Tojan Rahhal, adjunct assistant professor, notes that the first step in overcoming impostor syndrome is reminding yourself of this network and realizing that you’re not alone—and then sharing your feelings with others.

“Numerous CEOs, professors and executives will tell you they have gone through impostor syndrome at different stages in their careers,” said Rahhal. “Talk about it, form a peer network or group you can talk through your doubts with because everyone deals with it.”

BE A LIFELONG LEARNER

Costello embraces this idea of diverse thought to its fullest. She has degrees and experience in civil and environmental engineering and has held academic appointments in industrial engineering and biological engineering. But she didn’t always know she would be an engineer.

“I started my college career as a fashion design and merchandising major,” she said. “I loved the art form of high fashion. But I realized I didn’t have the artistic flair for it. Through a process of soul searching, I realized that I really liked the field of environmental sustainability.”

When students feel the self-doubt, Costello encourages them to continue learning and realize that their path won’t always be clear.

“[You] don’t know what you want to do, and that’s okay! You can come here and figure it out with us. Or take an online class to explore a subject area on your schedule.”

Hunt, who leads a new online master’s program at Mizzou, agrees that learning new skills helps engineers with not only fighting impostor phenomenon, but with furthering their careers.

“The reason we encourage people to continue their education five years into your career, is because you recognize that the industry has shifted or you might need a different set of skills to move up or move into the area that you want. A master’s degree can help set you apart from your peers.”

BECOME YOUR OWN BIGGEST FAN

Kate Nolan, a materials and process engineer at Boeing, earned her undergraduate degree on campus at Mizzou. Despite having a successful career, Nolan experiences impostor syndrome. She fights it by reminding herself of her achievements.

“It’s so good to look back at everything you’ve accomplished,” she said. “I didn’t get all of this just by being lucky. You didn’t just get there by being lucky!”

Rahhal seconded this: “Own your accomplishments. If that means writing down a few accomplishments a month until you have an enormous list to look at when you are having a bad day, then do it.”

FIND YOUR PEOPLE

Even though looking within is instrumental to overcoming this feeling, you can’t do it alone. Elizabeth Loboa, the first female dean in the College of Engineering at Mizzou, encourages engineers to seek advice and guidance from those that inspire them. She welcomes students to reach out to her in times of frustration.

“You will be scared sometimes, you will question yourself sometimes,” said Loboa. “But the world will be your oyster when you’re done. Stay with it and contact me if you get scared.”

Nolan seeks advice from her fellow SWE members. “I’ve been able to become friends with people my age to people that have retired from their engineering careers. Finding that really supportive network has been so important to me. There aren’t that many things that have been a part of my life for 10 years, but SWE has.”

FIVE FEARLESS WOMEN ENGINEERS ON FIGHTING IMPOSTOR SYNDROME

University of Missouri

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“Numerous CEOs, professors and executives will tell you they have gone through impostor syndrome at different stages in their careers,” said Rahhal. “Talk about it, form a peer network or group you can talk through your doubts with because everyone deals with it.”

SEEK OUT DIVERSE THOUGHT

As Assistant Dean for Inclusive Excellence, Rahhal works to help engineering students from underrepresented populations to overcome barriers in their college experience and beyond.

Christine Costello, assistant professor in the Department of Industrial & Manufacturing Systems Engineering, is on the university’s Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) committee led by Rahhal. This committee helped establish the new Advocates and Allies (A&A) program at Mizzou. The program facilitates conversations among male faculty, staff and students about unconscious gender bias in STEM fields. The ultimate goal is to increase the recruitment and retention of female students, faculty and staff.

In addition to bringing A&A to campus, the committee hosts multiple events throughout the year to encourage a dialogue about shared experiences such as impostor syndrome.

Seeking diverse thought not only helps engineers learn more about the experiences of others—diversity can further the engineering industry as a whole. “The more we bring in different backgrounds into engineering, the better chance we’ll have of discovering something new,” said Hunt. “Diverse thought arises from diverse backgrounds.”

Kate Nolan, a materials and process engineer at Boeing, earned her undergraduate degree on campus at Mizzou. Despite having a successful career, Nolan experiences impostor syndrome. She fights it by reminding herself of her achievements.

“It’s so good to look back at everything you’ve accomplished,” she said. “I didn’t get all of this just by being lucky. You didn’t just get there by being lucky!”

Rahhal seconded this: “Own your accomplishments. If that means writing down a few accomplishments a month until you have an enormous list to look at when you are having a bad day, then do it.”

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New UMSL Women’s Hackathon organizers aim to increase participation in tech

Or of co-organizer Nicole Gaehle’s favorite parts of the second-annual Women’s Hackathon was acknowledging all the participants with certificates and announcing their names. However, when it came to time to call out the winners of the whole event, the University of Missouri-St. Louis alumna had the participants, mentors and judges beat out a drumroll and then she paused.

“The final winner is, and I know I’m going to say this wrong,” Gaehle said before a brief pause. “Team Balls.” Gaehle’s announcement was met with a celebratory hoot from one of the teammates, Alexandria “Alexis” Craine, who brought the humor of the moment to the next level and pleasantly shocked Gaehle.

“Team Balls,” which was actually Team Balss, was so named for the initials of its four participants: UMSL students Becky Liu, Gaehle, Lailani Kleim and Stephanie Weber and friend Skylar Mayas. They created a game that taught coding to K-12 girls.

For the companies, participating in the program also served as an opportunity to witness potential employees in action. For the hackathons it was a chance to get hands-on experience.

“Of course, you kind of learn what you want to do in the IT industry,” Gaehle said. “The first year I participated, I just helped building out the prototype that we actually showed in our presentation. The second year, I was actually the one that did the coding, and that told me that I didn’t want to be a coder.”

There were a few things that Craine and Gaehle changed up in their first year running the hackathon — a new icebreaker and adding more mentors who were women. They are looking forward to making more adjustments to next year’s program such as looking for sponsors earlier in the planning process.

One thing they were proud of was how smooth the planning went. Except for some last-minute food orders, they had no problems, and the feedback from participants was uniformly positive.

Those good experiences mean that the event is halfway to accomplishing its goal.

“My honest opinion is that it helps diversify the women in tech itself,” Gaehle said. “It’s about really wanting to support women getting into the IT workforce and wanting to help them be like, ‘Hey, we want to also support others getting into IT as well.’ There’s a higher number of women students in the IT department now than there was 10 years ago. That’s great. That’s why this is here.”

As part of the university’s Opportunities for Undergraduate Research Experience program, Davis studies how hyperspectral images of plants can be used to determine their chemical composition. The goal is to develop a technology that can be used in classrooms or even high school that’s both inexpensive and user-friendly.

“I learned much of the information that I would go on to learn in my classes at my internship, as well as things that can’t really be taught in a classroom,” she says.

Davis’s interest in infrastructure was sparked when she was a young girl living in Jamaica where tropical storms often caused damage to bridges and other infrastructure.

“I wanted to look into solutions,” she says. “I thought there had to be something better because it’s a recurring issue. Being in a developing country, a lot of times the real issue isn’t fixed — a hurricane just can’t be put on it.”

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Supporting Growth

FSP scholarships give faculty new opportunities

The UM System Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion supports scholarships for the National Center for Faculty Development and Diversity’s Faculty Success Program. This is an interactive virtual bootcamp where academics work directly with a coach and small group of other faculty to implement the skills and strategies to maximize their success. Provided through the NCFDD, the program is for advanced post-docs, tenure-track faculty and tenured faculty who are looking for coaching and peer support to propel their research productivity and work-life balance to new levels.

Two Mizzou recipients have shared what the experience has meant to them.

April Langley
Chair, Department of Black Studies
Associate Professor, English

When I started my Faculty Success Program plan a couple of semesters ago, I was hoping to revise a conference paper into an article. Following the FSP program — and learning so much about time management, prioritizing my writing and research time, creating a plan of action for achieving my professional goals, as well as the community of small groups of peers and coaches across the nation, and a couple new colleagues I met locally — has been challenging at times, especially during my first semester as chair.

By the end of the first FSP, I had reached out to new mentors and potential sponsors, taken the advice of FSP program and asked others to read my draft. The comments they offered were amazing. And, something incredible happened: I spent so much time writing and researching that the article became a few draft chapters. This summer, I was actually able to fine tune, and revise the article into an article. Following the FSP program, I was able to take the advice of FSP program and asked others to read my draft. The comments they offered were amazing.

The strategy plan was very helpful. With so many things to do, it helps you to see what is important. As a non-tenure tenure-track professor, you get so many resources. The website is great, and you can use the online tool to find a buddy to write and accountability buddies so you can get help you reach your goals of tenure? There was also one particular module that says it’s not only about work, it’s important to have balance with your personal life. Little things, but it makes a big difference because you can forget when you’re loaded with so many things.

I recommend in pursuing this program is to find a time that works well for you. You want some options. Once the group is formed, then you can’t change your time slots. I picked a day during the week and it was difficult with meetings, but find some time you can dedicate to it. Also have the time allocated for yourself is very helpful.

I wish there were more programs like this. I appreciate the vision to come up with this because there were no programs like this here. Experience it, it will be really good!

Kiruba Krishnaswamy
Assistant Professor (Sustainable Food Engineering), Department of Bioengineering and Department of Food Science

Just getting into the FSP made me feel like I’m not alone — there are so many people like me with all these questions. And I learned that there are no dumb questions because someone might have the same question as you. There are people who have overcome these struggles, and if they can do it, so can you.

Every week, there is an open module, and you can learn at your own pace — watch the videos and learn from that. The strategy plan was very helpful. With so many things to do, it helps you to see what is important. As a non-tenure tenure-track professor, you get so many things like research and teaching, how do you find time to allocate what is most important to help you reach your goals of tenure? There was also one particular module that says it’s not only about work, it’s important to have balance with your personal life. Little things, but it makes a big difference because you can forget when you’re loaded with so many things.

Connections with the group vary person to person. Unfortunately with my group, it was during summer and a lot of people were also traveling for things like conferences. But we know that we are connected with folks in different parts and that we can reach out to them.

Although, it’s not always easy to prioritize research as a woman of color tenured professor, FSP has taught me how to better manage those resources and time I have. I’ve also begun holding my junior faculty accountable to their strategic plans, and they have begun using strategic plans to work with their grad assistants.

The point I want to make here is that FSP has been an invaluable resource, one that I wish I had access to sooner, but one that I am extremely grateful to have been supported by the Division of Inclusion, Diversity & Equity and the College of Arts and Science. It has been important to me to actually network with other faculty across the U.S. who share some of my same concerns, women of color, white women, first generation, and others who have common experiences, and also to be in groups with other “long in the tooth” associate professors working toward promotion.

My recommendation in pursuing this program is to find a time that works well for you. You want some options. Once the group is formed, then you can’t change your time slots. I picked a day during the week and it was difficult with meetings, but find some time you can dedicate to it. Also having the time allocated for yourself is very helpful.

I would definitely recommend this program to anybody considering it. The modules are good and then they have good resources. The website is great, and you can use the online tool to find a buddy to write and accountability buddies so you can get help you reach your goals of tenure? There was also one particular module that says it’s not only about work, it’s important to have balance with your personal life. Little things, but it makes a big difference because you can forget when you’re loaded with so many things.

I wish there were more programs like this. I appreciate the vision to come up with this because there were no programs like this here. Experience it, it will be really good!
Triumphant Return

WHERE ARE SOME OF THE THINGS THAT HAVE SURPRISED YOU ABOUT THE WORK SO FAR?

I wouldn’t say I’ve had any great surprises. Mizzou is in a pretty great place at the moment in terms of wanting to be inclusive and affirming of LGBTQ+ people. My colleagues are wonderful, and that makes the job completely worth all of the stress that comes from working in higher ed sometimes.

I still say that it’s great to be back at Mizzou because the students are so passionate about social justice issues, and that’s something I have not seen at other universities. It’s just something very unique to Columbia, to Mizzou, and I am very grateful that this spirit is still here. I felt it when I was a student; just the fact that students are passionate about making the community a better place and fighting for social justice really empowers me to do my job and fight for their needs even harder.

WHAT DREW YOU TO HIGHER ED, BOTH AS A STUDENT AND A PROFESSIONAL?

It’s the impact you can have on future generations. Working for non-profits is great, working in politics is impactful in its own way, but there’s just something about knowing that no matter how long you stay in higher ed, you will be impacting the next generation and everyone they interact with. It’s very intriguing to me. As a trans person, the positive feedback I’ve received from students is gathered, wearing the chunky sweaters and high-waisted jeans fashionable at the time. But look closer and a small detail reveals a much larger story.

Two words of the text at the bottom of the poster are censored with Wite-Out. These words sound familiar. The purpose of the center was to give students and faculty a safe space to learn about LGBTQ issues.

WHAT ARE SOME OF YOUR GOALS AS THE NEW COORDINATOR?

I would really like to strengthen the connections that the resource center has with faculty. I think there’s a lot that can be done in terms of collaborating with them, working on how gender and sexuality are taught in our classes. I know a lot of departments have classes that talk about these topics, but at this point we’re not really sure how they’re being taught, whether they’re using best practices, whether they’re using the right terminology, so that’s something I would like to work toward.

At the same time, I want to work toward affirming policies. We have the preferred name policy; we have some good movement on gender-neutral bathrooms, but what else can we do to really provide an affirming and safe space for LGBTQ students moving forward?

I hope that faculty will be more willing to consider my expertise in terms of curriculum and creating courses that are affirming and welcoming. I hope we can have some strong collaborations and relationships where maybe there hasn’t been that before.

SO OUTSIDE OF THE ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT, HOW DO YOU LIKE TO SPEND YOUR TIME?

I love to be out in nature and consider myself to be an amateur nature photographer. I love taking photographs of trees and sunsets and flowers and whatever. [Note: You can give EL a follow on Instagram at @evreckay]. I like playing video games and just spending time with friends. Where time and money allow, I enjoy learning about new cultures and thinking about philosophical questions, just growing as a person and doing things that make me feel fulfilled in myself and my relationships with others is really important to me.

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I was doing it. I wake up one day and think, “is being involved in wrestling really giving back to the world? Is that what I want to be remembered for?” That led me to UMKC.

**DO YOU MISS WRESTLING?**

I do miss wrestling and I’ve been grappling with that for a couple of years. I miss the camaraderie of my teammates and my coaches, especially because they really gave me the faith and the strength to come out.

**YOU’VE SAID THAT YOU WERE INSPIRED BY MICHAEL SAM, WHO PLAYED AT MIZZOU AND WAS THE FIRST OPENLY GAY NFL PLAYER, WHEN YOU WERE CONSIDERING COMING OUT, WHILE IT’S IMPRESSIVE TO BE OPEN IN SUCH TRADITIONALLY MALE, HETEROSEXUAL ENVIRONMENTS, DO YOU EVER WISH THAT SOMEDAY SEXUAL ORIENTATION WOULD BE OF LITTLE CONSEQUENCE?**

I have been the first at a lot of things, but I’m aware of the shoulders that really makes it different from other schools. That’s why I’m happy to represent the university. There are so many examples of inclusion across campus.

**HOW DOES BEING BACK IN KANSAS CITY FEEL?**

It feels great, but also like a responsibility. I feel as if I need to set an example. I don’t want to compare myself to President Obama, but a lot of people have stereotypes about what a gay, lesbian or transgender person is like. It’s almost like being an ambassador for my community to break those old stigmas. That goes for me being in the LGBTQ community, but also being a pro-wrestler.

**SCROLLING THROUGH YOUR TWITTER AND INSTAGRAM FEEDS IT ALMOST LOOKS AS IF YOU WERE EMBEDDED IN THE KANSAS CITY MAYORAL ELECTION.**

Almost every day, there are men and women, students of different races and ethnic backgrounds, and there is this constant discussion about inclusion and diversity. I think that’s really inspiring.

**HOW DOES THE TRANSITION, AND HOW WAS BEING A TRANSFER STUDENT DIFFERENT THAN YOUR EXPERIENCE AS A FRESHMAN?**

I don’t feel as if I was treated differently when I came to UMKC even though I didn’t start as a freshman. I’m living proof that new people can really make a difference.

**ARE YOU A FIRST-GENERATION COLLEGE STUDENT?**

I am not a first-generation college student, but my mother is. She returned to college at UMKC to finish her undergraduate degree when I was in elementary school. I remember playing on the campus green with my dad and siblings while waiting for her to get out of class.

**YOUR MOTHER WAS THE SOLE FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR YOUR FAMILY BECAUSE OF YOUR FATHER’S SELF-IMPOSED DEBT. HOW DID GROWING UP WITH THE UNCERTAINTY OF HIS HEALTH AFFECT YOU?**

It was a really interesting environment. There was always some anxiety about what would happen next, or if this seizure would be the last one. But it gave me a constant feeling of understanding that you never know what people are going through. It made me aware of the need to always be kind.

**DO YOU THINK UMKC IS A COMPETENT FOR YOU?**

I think UMKC is a good fit for me. I have a lot of friends here and I feel like I’ve become a part of the community. I do miss wrestling and I’ve been grappling with that for a couple of years. I miss the camaraderie of my teammates and my coaches, especially because they really gave me the faith and the strength to come out.

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I t seems appropriate that a GEM University Fellow would choose to study mining engineering. After all, gems must be mined. Jose L. Corchado-Albelo joined Missouri S&T this fall as the first GEM University Fellow in over a decade.

As a member of the National GEM Consortium, Missouri S&T is working to encourage students like Corchado-Albelo and others from underrepresented groups to pursue master’s or Ph.D. degrees in engineering or science disciplines.

Corchado-Albelo is a first-year master’s degree in mining engineering at S&T. He earned a bachelor’s degree in geology from the University of Puerto Rico at Mayaguez (UPRM) in July 2018 following an internship at the University of Texas-Austin, where he studied in the Jackson School of Geosciences’ UT Chron Geo-Thermochronometry Laboratory. The lab’s internship program provides students with experience in geochemistry, geochronology (studying the age of rocks) and thermochronology (the study of when and how rocks solidified).

“My attention to Missouri S&T began when I was looking at my graduate-school options and observed the great laboratory equipment and research options in mining engineering,” says Corchado-Albelo, who and research options in mining engineering. “For the GEM University Fellowship, however, all credit goes to a person who introduced me to the GEM Fellowship and encouraged me to apply for the program. He highlighted all the great opportunities that come with becoming a GEM Fellow and how these could benefit my career.”

Over 1,000 students apply for various GEM fellowships every year. Those selected have an average grade point average of 3.5 across a wide variety of majors. At S&T, Corchado-Albelo plans to focus on mining recreation – the process of restoring land that has been mined. He’s also interested in rock mechanics, mineral characterization and mine planning.

“I look forward to gaining great research experience through evaluating and characterizing critical minerals from base metal processing streams,” he says.
An App For That

Campus mental health and well-being a priority for UM System

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

A student’s well-being is closely linked to student success both academically and professionally. Recent news stories about student mental health awareness have become prominent across the country. Stories like the suicide of a graduate student at UW-Madison serve as a cautionary tale that the university environment can be a challenging and difficult place where students may suffer instead of thriving.

During the June 2019 Board of Curators meeting, the Intercampus Faculty Council (IFC) Roundtable discussed what faculty members are seeing in their classrooms when it comes to student mental health. This meeting featured a Critical Issues discussion on the topic, which included a panel, breakout sessions and a presentation on a possible new resource for students.

By working with mental health professionals at the four universities, the UM System Office of Academic Affairs, IFC and the Board of Curators identified strategies that would make a positive impact. Because of this focus on mental well-being, the UM System is expanding resources to address these issues. The newest resource available includes a systemswide app called Sanvello, available for any student, faculty or staff member with a university email address.

Created by psychologists, Sanvello helps users with mild to moderate stress, anxiety and depression by providing real techniques to relieve these symptoms. The app checks in with the user by asking questions to capture mood, identify patterns and self-assess progress. Sanvello takes the user’s answers to create a roadmap for improvement by setting weekly goals and tracking progress on their mental health journey.

Sanvello also has special tools to help students cope with common stressful situations, like test-taking, public speaking or even morning dread—when a person wakes up with large amounts of anxiety about facing their day. There are even community support forums where users can post their feelings on different topics and categories, allowing them to interact with users who have similar experiences. These forums focus on a range of topics, from school stress and relationships to books, movies and mantras to help improve mood.

The Sanvello app, which launched systemwide on Nov. 1, is the newest resource the UM System provides for its students, faculty and staff. But this app is not the only resource available for students and staff in the UM System.

In addition to the app, professors and other academic leaders from all four UM System campuses are invited to sign up for RESPOND: Partners for Campus Mental Health. This free course provides a basic overview of symptoms associated with mental health problems and offers an action plan to help people to RESPOND effectively, empowering them to offer effective support to students and colleagues.

Williams On Board

Meet the UM System’s new curator

STORY BY: TARA PRINDLE
PHOTOS BY: CLAIRE HASSLER

Michael Williams, the University of Missouri System’s newest curator, is just getting acquainted with his new position, but he already has many goals and plans.

Appointed by Gov. Mike Parson in August, Williams was confirmed by the Missouri Senate in September to represent the Kansas City-based 5th Congressional District on the Board of Curators for the next six years. There is currently an open vacancy on the nine-member board, which just elected Julia Brune as its 2020 chair.

A double MU alumus he graduated with his bachelor’s degree in 1995 and his Juris Doctor in 1998, Williams has returned to MU twice as an adjunct professor for the School of Law.

“I loved Mizzou. I’ve been eight years here, and it’s the longest I’ve ever lived anywhere,” he said. “My undergrad was fantastic. I had my fraternity, my other friends and my professors were people I’ve known since I went to Missouri Scholars Academy. There was always a community for me here at Mizzou, and I truly enjoyed it. Hopefully, we’re going to make sure that people are enjoying it for decades.”

So far, Williams has been getting familiar with the four-campus system. He still plans on making a visit to Missouri S&T for his orientation.

“I started by doing my orientation at the system, learning all my responsibilities,” Williams said. “And then we go to each campus and spend a day getting oriented by that campus. I hear what the student population is, how it recruits its students, the graduation rates and how the curators can help the university.”

An alumus, Williams understands the importance of keeping open communication with students, especially when it comes to diversity issues.

“One of the most important things is involving the students to find out what the real issues are,” he said. “My goal, and what I think our focus is, is if there’s a problem, students have to be comfortable reporting it. The only way we can make sure that students feel safe and want to be here is to make sure they have an outlet. So, if there is a problem, let’s nip it in the bud. Whether it’s something with a professor, other students or something happens in the community, we want to know, and we want to address it.”

Williams currently lives and works in Kansas City. A founding partner of law firm Williams Bricks Damron LLC, he specializes in labor law. His training influences the way he assesses issues.

“There’s an old phrase that everybody hates, and it’s, ‘think like a lawyer,’” Williams said. “I get to know what the factual issues are. My first question always has to be, ‘What are we trying to do? What is our end goal?’ Then I gather the facts so that I can make a competent decision about the process I’m going to do to get that end goal.”

After being at MU for many years and participating in the community, Williams said he wants to understand students’ wants, faculty needs, how the administration is meeting those needs and what he can do to help them move forward.

“I’ve been involved in different committees for the university, and I’m always around town,” he said. “So for me, it’s people understanding that I want to do the best I can for the system. My goal is to make sure that we’re in a better place when I leave than when I started this six-year term.”

This story originally appeared in the Columbia Missourian.
Wilson had no idea the honor was coming. Dwight did not reveal the names of honorees in advance of the unveiling.

“A friend texted me from the unveiling,” Wilson recalled. “I was shocked. It is very flattering to be on a plaque with some of the great leaders of Kansas City. With the kind of work I do, people don’t often know what kind of impact I make.”

Wilson said her post at UMKC is just one example of the university’s close ties to the metro Kansas City community.

“Some universities can be like ivory towers on a high hill above their community,” Wilson said. “UMKC’s practice of hiring people with community connections is a real plus.”

A UMKC vice chancellor since 2014, Wilson implemented a comprehensive, campuswide plan for diversity and inclusion, built diversity and inclusion training programs and led efforts to conduct a climate survey. She has also worked with numerous school districts and community organizations to advance diversity and inclusion.

Wilson has a long history as a diversity advocate, psychologist and educator. In her work as a community mental health director, she sought to bringing culturally competent care to central city African Americans. She led the implementation of Jackson County’s first-ever mental health court, working with municipal court to divert non-violent individuals with mental health issues to treatment, not jail. She has served as a treating clinician for the Kansas City Chiefs and the National Football League.

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