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GUIDING GREATNESS

Empowering success stories from Oakland University students, faculty, alumni and donors



JEREMY GEIST discovered that faculty mentors inspired his drive. They pushed him to keep looking for answers. Now he's earning his Ph.D. and researching invasive species in Michigan rivers. His work is his passion, and this motivation is helping to protect the Great Lakes.

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ON THE COVER

Urban beekeeper Nicole Lindsay, CAS '14, is making an impact in Detroit by leveraging health and promoting social empowerment. Pg. 24

Photo by Garrett MacLean

OU Magazine reflects the University's goals, revealing articles that explore the fostering of student success and value of an OU degree, the discovery and utilization of knowledge through research, the efforts in expanding community relationships, and the advancement in diversity, equity and inclusion. Each issue will focus on one of these vital initiatives and the strides being made as the university of choice.

PRESIDENT'S PERSPECTIVE



We are here for our students. When they succeed, we succeed. To borrow and slightly modify a phrase from a long-ago slogan of an investment firm: We measure success one student at a time.

The fall edition of OU Magazine presents a range of compelling stories that highlight extraordinary students rising to the challenge of making their dreams become reality, an achievement even more impressive in the face of the pandemic.

While the students you will meet share a deep passion to succeed, they are not alone in their pursuit of their ambitions. Indeed, these students' efforts have been fostered and inspired by mentors who teach in a learning community that places the highest value on compassion, diversity, equity and inclusion.

Unlocking each student's potential is at the heart of Oakland University's mission, and it is the calling of our talented and dedicated faculty. It's my most sincere wish that you feel connected to the OU community, and have a strong sense of engagement in our mission. The proof of the significance of our work is reflected in how higher education opens doors, creates possibilities and changes lives and society for the better.

May this fall bring a sense of hope and a renewed faith in the possibilities of the future. If you're looking for inspiration, you'll find it in the pages ahead.

Wishing you good health,

Ora Hirsch Pescovitz, M.D.
Oakland University, President

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Oakland University is an equal opportunity and affirmative action institution.

MISSION

Oakland University cultivates the full potential of a diverse and inclusive community. As a public doctoral institution, we impact Michigan and the world through education, research, scholarship and creative activity.

VISION

Oakland University will unlock the potential of individuals and leave a lasting impact on the world through the transformative power of education and research.

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Oakland University is a nationally recognized public, doctoral research university located on 1,443 acres of scenic land in the cities of Rochester Hills and Auburn Hills in Oakland County, Michigan. The University enrolls more than 19,000 students and offers more than 275 bachelor's and graduate degree and certificate programs.

STUDENT SUCCESS IN A CHANGING WORLD



© Robert Hall

Universities are built to educate and ensure the success of their students. But what does it mean to be successful? Oakland University measures success on several levels, from getting students to graduate and finding careers, to connecting with like-minded students and enhancing diversity and inclusion opportunities. That's why goal one of the Oakland University Strategic Plan is to "foster student success through a robust teaching and learning environment and comprehensive student services." And with today's ever-changing environment, it's pivotal that universities adapt in order to meet the evolving needs of students.

"Defining success is tricky as it's so unique to each person," says Krista Malley, Ph.D., director for student success. "In the Office of Student Success, success is offering resources that can lead to academic achievement for the students we serve."

"Faculty also play a very important role in student success at Oakland University," says C. Michelle Piskulich, Ph.D., interim executive vice president, Academic Affairs, and provost. "You can see their

commitment by their participation in professional development through the Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning and eLearning and Instructional Support, where they engage in discussions of best practices in student engagement and learn new tools to enhance course accessibility to students of all abilities and backgrounds. We have seen entire departments embrace these best practices and it is inspiring to see what an impact this has on both faculty and students."

Career Services focuses on ensuring students meet their career goals. This includes providing virtual and in-person appointments, as well as developing innovative virtual programming that connects students to employers and alumni, while educating them on career-oriented topics.

"Empowering students to make strides toward lifelong success in their careers is paramount at Career Services," says Wayne Thibodeau, senior director of OU's Career Services. "These shining milestones appear in landing their first interview, getting an internship offer, securing a full-time job, and being accepted into graduate school, to name a few."

"We are also placing more focus on Academic Advising, which is a key component of academic success," says Anne Hitt, Ph.D., associate provost for student success and quality assurance. "Over the past few years OU has hired additional professional advisers allowing us to be closer to the recommended 300:1 student-to-adviser ratio."

The Office of Student Involvement (OSI) provides experiences that complement what students learn in the classroom through student organizations, sororities and fraternities, service projects and more. "These student groups enhance their professional and personal development, to help them be productive and caring citizens in society after graduating," explains Jean Ann Miller, senior director, OSI.

From academic, to career, to personal achievements, the way universities define success continues to evolve. Nevertheless, OU is adapting to these changing times. Students and alumni are being equipped with the knowledge they need to become leaders and impact change. "We are making a difference in their lives so they will make a difference in the lives of others — locally, nationally and globally," Miller says. 🐾

IN THE GOLD SEAT

with Wesley Wright



© Robert Hall

MAJOR: Clinical and Diagnostic Sciences,
Medical Laboratory Science

CLASS STANDING: Senior

TYPE OF CLASSES THIS YEAR: Hybrid

BEST BUILDING TO HAVE CLASSES IN:
Human Health Building (HHB)

FAVORITE STUDY SPOT: The Oakland Center,
in the new upstairs area where you can look
out to the clock tower

FAVORITE EVENT ON CAMPUS:
Student Program Board's Casino Night

BEST OU MOMENT: When I was preparing
for an exam with a few of my friends. We
ordered Panera, which meant a lot of
macaroni, cookies, and bread, and studied
for what felt like an entire day in HHB

FAVORITE PROFESSOR: Dale Telgenhoff

SONGS TO STUDY TO: I tend to listen to
more chilled music when I study. For
example, a few artists I listen to are
JP Cooper, Emawk, Shoffy, and Kevin Garrett.

Legacy of SUPPORT

By Catherine Ticer 📷 Robert Hall



A generous gift from longtime friends of Oakland University, Walter "Walt" and Retha Douglas, is helping to further the University's mission to foster student success and advance diversity, equity and inclusion across campus.

A portion of the gift will provide furnishings and other enhancements for the Overlook Lounge, a popular study and gathering space for students in the recently renovated Oakland Center. Enrichments made to the space will create opportunities for student groups and Greek organizations to come together, collaborate and make decisions that benefit all students. In recognition of this generous gift, OU has named the Overlook Lounge in honor of the Walter and Retha Douglas family.

The gift also benefits the Keeper of the Dream Endowed Fund, a keystone of OU's diversity efforts and a program the Douglas' have supported for many years. The Keeper of the Dream Endowment supports the annual Keeper of the Dream celebration event to honor Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., and provides scholarship support to students who demonstrate strong citizenship, scholarship and leadership in breaking

down cultural stereotypes and in promoting interracial understanding and goodwill.

Walt Douglas served multiple terms as a director of the OU Foundation between 1987 and 2006. The couple's daughter, Petra Douglas Hurt, graduated from OU with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing in 1984. Petra was instrumental in starting the OU chapter of Delta Sigma Theta, the first predominantly black sorority at OU, and has remained involved on campus as a volunteer.

Glenn McIntosh, senior vice president for student affairs and chief diversity officer, has known Walt and Retha for many years and is deeply thankful for their longstanding support of OU. "We are grateful to the Douglas family for their unwavering commitment to our University and the success of our students," says McIntosh. ➤

Learn how you can support Oakland University students at oakland.edu/giving.



Musical theatre student pursues his passion for design

By Joan Carleton  Robert Hall

Matthew Carlsen's, CAS '20, love for costume design was evident from a young age. Sketches of dresses can be found in his childhood books. Friends' dolls donned handmade clothes. A fifth-grade history report focused on Victorian hat stores. His younger brother became the unfortunate subject of attempts at makeup artistry.

CONSTRUCTING A SKILLSET

But it wasn't until he joined Oakland University's musical theatre program that he realized these childhood fantasies were not only his passion, but could become his reality.


OU's School of Music, Theatre and Dance offers study options in both front of theatre and behind the scenes. With a Bachelor of Fine Arts in musical theatre, Carlsen was able to work with faculty for flexible curriculum options that allowed him to explore these passions in costuming and theatrical design. "The faculty welcome mistakes, viewing them as growth opportunities — thus creating a supportive and friendly environment. My self-confidence has substantially risen," says Carlsen.

Carlsen's in-depth process might surprise you, with fine attention to detail that makes his work stand out. By thoroughly reading the script, he understands the important relationships and major themes in order to conceptualize ideas. He then researches the time period for cultural, social and economic characteristics, resulting in a mood board with thorough character definition.

Only then does Carlsen move on to the design itself, sharing approximately 15–25 rough sketches per character with the director to achieve a unified vision. Finally, he conducts fabric research, fleshes out the final designs, and launches into the construction.

Carlsen has designed costumes for several student-directed works and dance pieces, as well as mainstage OU productions including *Urinetown* (2019) and *Cabaret* (2020). His role as lead costumer for *Blue Stockings* (2019) allowed him the opportunity to oversee the build process and assist students on their individual assignments. His favorite show to date was Chekhov's *Seagull* (2019) due to the complex characters set in his favorite fashion decade of the 1890s.

The pandemic has paused Carlsen's plans due to the shutdown of the theatre industry — but he's not letting this stop him. With visions of New York, London or Chicago, he aspires to work as an assistant designer until he applies for Master of Fine Arts costume design programs.

Long-term, Carlsen has set his sights on his own costume design firm, with a specialization in historical and period films. 

Carlsen's work can be seen at matthewcarlensdesign.com. Learn more about the opportunities with the School of Music, Theatre and Dance at oakland.edu/smtd.



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Plus, from cash back credit cards to low-rate mortgage loans, we have the financial resources you need to make your dreams a reality.

Be a part of our commitment to the OU community and open your account today!

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Distinguished ALUMNI

By Eric Reikowski

Oakland University has announced the recipients of the 2020 Alumni Awards, which recognize alumni and supporters who have achieved success in business, community services, volunteerism and other areas.

Congratulations to this year's honorees:

DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI SERVICE AWARD

Bryan Barnett, SBA '98

Mayor, City of Rochester Hills
President, U.S. Conference of Mayors
Immediate Past Chair, OUAA Board of Directors

The Distinguished Alumni Service Award is Oakland's highest alumni honor. It recognizes peerless volunteer leadership in service to OU or its alumni association.



DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI ACHIEVEMENT AWARD

Joanne Gerstner, CAS '93

Journalist
Sports Journalist in Residence,
Michigan State University
Commissioner, State of Michigan
Women's Task Force on Women in Sports

Honoree, U.S. Department of State
J. William Fulbright Media and Journalism Specialist

The Distinguished Alumni Achievement Award recognizes outstanding professional achievement or contribution to the community.



ODYSSEY AWARD

Avinash Konkani, Ph.D., SECS '14

Interdisciplinary/Biomedical Engineer
Food and Drug Administration

The Odyssey Award honors alumni whose lives exemplify Oakland University's motto to "seek virtue and knowledge."



SPIRIT AWARD

Gary and Elspeth Coats, SBA '95 and SBA '91

Senior Tax Analyst, American Axle and Manufacturing and Senior Business Systems Analyst, NetSol Technologies
Members, Black & Gold Loyalty Society
Member, Honors College Board of Visitors (Elspeth)

Founders, OU Student Life Endowed Scholarship and Gary and Elspeth Coats Student Involvement Scholarship
Mentor, Leadership OU (Elspeth)

The Spirit Award recognizes exemplary volunteer service to the university.



ALUMNI COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD

Nicole Lindsey, CAS '09

Executive Director, Detroit Hives

The Alumni Community Service Award recognizes distinctive service of a humanitarian nature or citizenship through community, public or OU service activities.



OUTSTANDING YOUNG ALUMNI AWARD

Holly Franson, MSN, SON '09

Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist,
Department Lead and Clinical Site and Educational Coordinator, John D. Dingell VA Medical Center

The Outstanding Young Alumni Award recognizes alumni who have demonstrated the worth of their education through their post-college achievements and, generally, have graduated within the last 10 years.



HONORARY ALUMNI AWARD

Allen Gough (pictured with his wife, Barbara)

Chair, School of Education and Human Services Resource Development Board
Member, OU Campaign Planning Committee
Chair, OU Foundation

Founder, Barbara and Allen Gough Human Resource Scholarship and Allen Gough III Memorial Scholarship

The Honorary Alumni Awards are given to individuals who have not graduated from OU, but who have given outstanding service to the university. ➤



Learn more about the Oakland University Alumni Association at oakland.edu/alumni.

EDUCATIONAL ESCAPE

Father and son have a unique, friendly competition in their educational endeavors *By Michael Downes*  *Robert Hall*

One of Mouhamad Hammami's favorite places to study on campus is the Oakland Center (OC). Mouhamad, who is in the process of earning his Ph.D. in medical physics, meets up with his study buddy, Abdul, who is pursuing a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and happens to be Mouhamad's father.

The two get together there regularly for coffee and to catch up on their work. While the OC can be a bustling area, it's a calming escape for Abdul and Mouhamad, who got a new lease on life after retreating from their turbulent home country.

"We came to the United States in late 2012 to flee the war in Syria," says Abdul.

Abdul and his wife, Manal Alnouri, escaped Syria with their one daughter and four sons. Mouhamad, who was 17 at the time of the move, is the second oldest child. He attended Port Huron High School and earned his associate's degree at St. Clair County Community College.

Mouhamad had some friends that attended OU, and heard nothing but good things about the university. It sparked his interest enough to visit the campus and eventually apply. The atmosphere was what attracted Mouhamad to OU and the professors are what kept him here.

"The way the professors taught the subjects," explains Mouhamad, "their passion, and how much I was able to learn was very influential for me."

His passion for OU didn't go unnoticed.

"When Mouhamad joined Oakland, he spoke so highly of it," says Abdul. "All the years he attended, he'd wake up early, be very active and couldn't wait to get to campus. So, I was wondering, what's the magic?"

Abdul studied law in Syria right out of high school and traveled to the states in the early 90's to earn a bachelor's degree in political science. When they moved to the U.S., he earned a master's degree from Central Michigan University.

Abdul's drive and passion for education stems from the war in Syria. "There is a whole generation that grew up that doesn't know anything other than war," he explains. He is currently the CEO for a non-profit organization that focuses on providing education to those that are deprived of it in turbulent areas. "I know that when I further my education that it will reflect on those refugees that are unable to do it."

Abdul enrolled for the Ph.D. program right around the time as Mouhamad. The two have worked together, ensuring each are successful, with a little friendly competition. "I was really impressed by my dad's college degrees on the wall," says Mouhamad. "I wanted to be the first in my family to earn a Ph.D. and be the first scientist and I was the first to ..."

"You can't say that yet, you have to wait," Abdul interjects, who could potentially earn his Ph.D. before Mouhamad.

"There's obviously a competition with my dad," says Mouhamad, "and I just want to be a good scientist in the future ..."

"By the way, he has an unfair advantage over me, he has a full scholarship, I don't," jokes Abdul.

"I got my first publication before you," Mouhamad says through their laughter.

In fact, Mouhamad was the first to earn a co-author publication in the Hammami family, and credits Dr. Wei Zhang for getting him involved in the research field. The two worked with the Michigan Space Grant Consortium and Mouhamad's research earned him several grants and scholarships. But his work isn't done yet.

"Long-term, I want to be in the academic world," Mouhamad explains. "My goal is to become a developer in my field. I've been influenced by the great minds, Einstein, Rutherford, Bohr, Planck. I want to understand and change the universe like they did. I became really passionate about medical physics by taking my first course in the field by Brad Roth, Ph.D., at Oakland University."

Seeing their children not only striving to become educated, but truly enjoying it is all that matters to Abdul and Manal. However, their children wouldn't have been able to reach these heights, without them being incredible role models.

"I want to encourage my children," says Abdul. "I want them to see that nothing is too difficult. We try to create a motivational environment. I want to prove to my children that you can achieve anything, at any age, as long as you are determined and motivated." 🍷

Learn how you can earn an advanced degree at oakland.edu/grad.



NEXT GENERATION *of Computer Innovation*

By Catherine Ticer  Rana Tierney




Amy (Kwiecinski) McGowan's decision to attend Oakland University continued a family legacy. But, what sets McGowan's story apart from most is that the educational tradition was started by her mother, Carol Kwiecinski, who graduated at the age of 57 — only one semester before her daughter.

"She inspired and encouraged me to be individualistic, and attending Oakland University was one of the results from that support," says McGowan, who graduated in 1980 with a Bachelor of Science in computer science. "The expectation was that I was always going to go to school and get a degree."

McGowan says her decision to major in computer science was an economic one, influenced by the career opportunities available in the field. "My parents did not pay for my tuition and I did not have a scholarship. I knew I needed to be gainfully employed following graduation," she says. "Oakland University and the computer science program, in particular, opened up a whole new world for me."

Although McGowan now lives in Sarasota, Florida, she says visiting campus is like coming home. She is inspired by what is happening in the School of Engineering and Computer Science and wants to find a meaningful way to help students pursue degrees in computer science.

McGowan established the Amy Kwiecinski McGowan Scholarship for Excellence in Computer Science. Recipients of the renewable four-year scholarship will be incoming freshman with a declared major in computer science and a minimum 3.2 GPA.

"It gives me great joy to fund this scholarship and help aspiring computer scientists start their journey in this rewarding field." 

Learn the impact of your gift at oakland.edu/giving.



From THEORY to PRACTICE


By Patrick Dunn  Robert Hall

Paola Nkwuzor says she "fell in love" with the hands-on community work involved in public health, and she found a similarly hands-on approach to studying it in OU's Master of Public Health (MPH) program.

Nkwuzor, 24, discovered her passion for public health while taking an introductory course in the subject for her undergraduate studies in health administration. She was drawn to OU's MPH program because of its emphasis on practical experiences working with nonprofits, health care agencies and corporations.


"I thought this would be a good opportunity for me to study a subject I was interested in, but also get real-life experience while doing so," Nkwuzor says.

She's found that experience in abundance since she started the MPH program in 2018, with the bulk of it coming from her graduate assistantship with the OU Pontiac Initiative (OUP). She says her favorite part of the assistantship has been working as a tutor lead in the Pontiac School District (PSD), where she supervises OU students who serve as tutors to Pontiac school kids.

"We had to teach them with patience and grace. We had to teach them through modeling, not just talking," she says. "And I was very, very proud of our Oakland University students because they did a great job of building relationships, even though maybe they never stepped into an urban community or never spoke to people of color before. It takes a lot to admit that." 

Article continues at oakland.edu/oumagazine.


WEALTH of VALUE

By Claudette Zolkowski  Robert Hall

Successfully transitioning from college student to polished professional takes practice. By integrating professional and career development skills into the business curriculum, that's exactly what Oakland University's ACHIEVE program delivers for its undergraduate business students.

"ACHIEVE provides students with critical career support through all the stages of their undergraduate business experience," says Andrea Mill, MBA '19, program manager of ACHIEVE. "ACHIEVE courses prepare students with tools while experiences allow them to practice skills in realistic settings backed by coaching, feedback and support."

Since 2008, undergraduate business students have completed more than 10,000 ACHIEVE courses that foster professional skills, such as networking, interviewing, resume writing, ethics, etiquette and money management. The ACHIEVE courses, which are offered free of charge, are required for graduation. Students graduate from the program marketable and ready for the professional world — a fact employers notice and appreciate.

Ann Mansour, SBA '18, system analyst with Blue Cross Blue Shield (BCBS) Michigan, says the program was key in helping her land her first internship at BCBS, leading to her first professional position. "It's amazing how much I learned about networking and interviewing," Mansour adds. "Everything done in ACHIEVE has a primary purpose — help students throughout their journey at OU and beyond." 



Ann Mansour

Article continues at oakland.edu/oumagazine.

A LIFE AMONG FISH



Biology alumna pursues her dream career caring for the wildlife at Belle Isle Aquarium

By Kelli M. Warshefski  Robert Hall

The gallery is quiet, with just a faint hum of lights warming up. The morning sun streams in from antique skylights across green opalite glass tiles that adorn an arched ceiling. The aquarist makes her rounds, peering through the glass of each tank, silently greeting her gill-bearing coworkers, and breathing in the peace of the morning.

Amanda Murray, CAS '06 and '11, is living her best life.

As an aquarist at Belle Isle Aquarium, Murray spends her days in the historical Detroit building, caring for a number of creatures from piranhas to hissing cockroaches; a career the alumna was made for, with her lifelong devotion toward animals and conservation.

“Biology is basically one of the first sciences you experience as a young kid; it’s the life around you,” Murray says. “That’s what drew me to it. I loved animals and I grew up spending a lot of time up north, fishing and collecting bugs. It’s just always something I wanted to do.”

One of Murray’s fondest childhood memories took place in her family’s cottage in Traverse City, where as a child she would pull along a small red wagon, stopping only to pick up, examine and place bugs in her wagon. A trait that Murray’s mother who, although was not a fan of “creepy crawlies,” encouraged. This became a benchmark and source of empowerment for the aspiring biologist’s compassion for all living creatures.

“I think it’s really important, especially for little girls in biology, to have a positive female role model. When they see something like a bug or a spider they’re going to look at their mom’s reaction and if their reaction is ‘ew that’s gross’ they might adopt that. My mom never discouraged me because I enjoyed them and I think that’s really what influenced me strongly in loving all animals,” Murray explains.

Murray would grow up to further explore this passion at Oakland University, where she earned her bachelor’s in biology and immediately went on to pursue her master’s with a focus in ecology and animal behavior. While at OU, her passion for conservation was fostered by faculty and through research, including her work on wasp behavior and how it affects the productivity of a colony. Murray found herself in her element, examining and caring for these underappreciated creatures.

“My research experience gave me confidence in putting forth my own ideas and experiments,” says Murray. “It allowed me to explore not only how to properly conduct a scientific study, but also how to analyze the data and present it to peers. I think the research I did at OU was a valuable experience in my career.”

After receiving her master’s, Murray began work at the Michigan Science Center. But, although she enjoyed the work there, she yearned to work with animals. So in 2018, when a position opened up at the Belle Isle Aquarium, Murray jumped at the chance to apply and shortly thereafter began her new career path.

As an aquarist, Murray utilizes her training in biology, but notes that the job requires more than just knowledge in the life sciences – from understanding physics and the mechanics of tank plumbing, to chemistry and the composition of elements in proper water filtration systems, an aquarist needs to know “a little bit of everything.” In her day-to-day tasks, for example, Murray conducts behavioral analyses, checks and maintains the water quality, temperature and pumps on the tanks, ensures all vital equipment is properly functioning, cleans the tanks and feeds the animals. Additionally, Murray provides enrichment for the fish — a crucial component of their health.

“Fish have big personalities, even within the same species,” Murray explains. “They need interactions, which have been lacking lately [due to the building’s closure during the COVID-19 pandemic]. So, I have to make sure they stay mentally stimulated by changing around the things inside their tank, hiding food, and interacting with them through the glass.”

“I want to make sure my fish are content and that I take the best care of them that I can,” she says.

Gertie, a tropical gar, plays peek-a-boo while Murray wipes down the outside of her tank. A school of crappies, native of Michigan and one of Murray’s favorite types of fish, follow Murray’s hand as she slides it along the glass. The stingrays are fed by hand, and frequently squirt Murray with water while they impatiently wait to be fed. To provide additional interactions, Murray also enlists the help of her pet hissing cockroaches, which she sticks to the outside of the tank.

“I love my job. I love my coworkers — and not just the human ones,” Murray says. “The fish are my coworkers as well, and I love that I can share my passion with others and help people learn about and fall in love with all animals.”

“We share this planet not just with each other but with other species,” she continues. “That’s why conservation is so vital to me because I want these resources, these habitats, these animals to be around for the future. It’s really important to us at the Belle Isle Aquarium and our mission to help with conservation.”

Discover more about the role biology plays in conservation at oakland.edu/biology.

“It’s a great program,” Murray explains. “Sturgeons were almost gone from Michigan, and now they’re coming back, even in the Detroit river nearby. That’s something that aquariums do that’s really important, is to continue species and help them when they are endangered or extinct in the wild.”

The **Belle Isle Aquarium** is the oldest aquarium in the country, opening its doors in 1904. The building has undergone several renovations, replacing tanks and updating water filtration systems, but the architectural integrity of famed Detroit architect, Albert Kahn, remains intact. While the majority of aquatic life is found inside, there is also a large Koi pond and garden outside. While the building is currently closed for safety precautions during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Belle Isle Aquarium continues to promote conservation efforts in the community and provide crucial aid in local projects, including a contract with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) in the rehabilitation of local sturgeon. The aquarium receives young sturgeon from local fisheries, raises them, and sends them back once they are grown to be released into the wild, increasing the sturgeon’s likelihood of survival.



Text2StayOnTrack

By Andrew Dietderich

Second-year medical student Jody Esguerra was one of 17 medical students across the U.S. selected as 2020 Gold Student Summer Fellows by the Arnold P. Gold Foundation. The Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine (OUWB) student was awarded the grant for a pilot study to determine if text messages can help low-socioeconomic patients with diabetes improve drug compliance and lifestyle choices.

Each participant received a grant of up to \$4,000 for a summer project designed to directly aid underserved communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Projects were chosen for their focus on populations who are facing health care disparities and are particularly vulnerable during this crisis. Esguerra's program is called Text2StayOnTrack.

The idea is to use text messages to help patients with type 2 diabetes get a better handle on how they manage medication adherence, diet, physical activity and blood sugar management.

Esguerra says the hope is to not only help patients make better lifestyle choices, but also adhere to social distancing guidelines in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I'm excited to be able to do a project that serves a population that I'm passionate about," says Esguerra. "I'm also excited that it incorporates a platform that a lot of people are already familiar with — and interact with on a daily basis — to address chronic conditions that people struggle with."

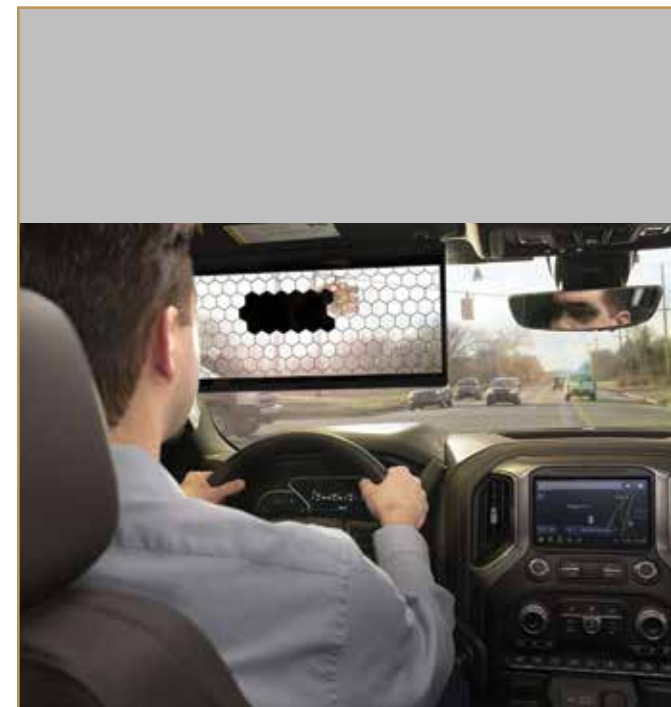
According to the project proposal, type 2 diabetes is a growing problem across the U.S. that disproportionately affects people who are minorities and underserved. In the U.S., it's estimated that 29.1 million people are affected by the disease.

Further, as one of the most common chronic illnesses, it imposes a substantial burden of disease due to lifelong multi-organ complications that can lead to increased disability and premature death.

The proposal also notes that many people with type 2 diabetes struggle to adhere to behavioral modifications that have been shown to play an important role in glycemic control. According to the proposal, "living with diabetes requires consistent, active engagement of the patient in order to prevent acute complications and minimize long-term adverse effects of the disease."

Esguerra's interest in the project can be traced to when she was an undergrad at St. Louis University. That's where she worked with what she calls "under-resourced populations" as a volunteer at area health care clinics. Her commitment to the population continued when she was pursuing her master's degree at Loyola University in Chicago, and as a first-year medical student at OUWB. Esguerra is focusing on Text2StayOnTrack for her Embark project — a required scholarly concentration program at OUWB that provides a mentored introduction to research and scholarship. ➤

Article continues at oakland.edu/oumagazine.



Innovative SHADE

By Michael Downes Courtesy of Bosch

Jason Zink, SECS '17, technology expert at Bosch, is overseeing the development of the mechanical, electrical and software aspects of an innovative automotive visor.

"When we started working on the Virtual Visor," explains Zink, "we set out to find a solution that would be able to block out the sun, but allow the most transparency to be able to see street lights and other cars."

The idea came from Zink's colleague, Ryan Todd, who was driving to Bosch's weekly innovation meeting, when the sun shone directly into his eyes. Todd found that pulling down the standard, bulky visor impeded his vision, so he pitched the idea for a virtual solution. "We are replacing the traditional sun visor with a transparent LCD screen that allows us to selectively block out any part of the visor while keeping the rest transparent," says Zink.

The screen works in tandem with a camera inside the car. It allows the screen to identify where the driver is located and will continuously analyze important landmarks on their face, eyes, nose, etc., and identify where shadows are being cast.

"By understanding where the shadows are," says Zink, "we can work backwards and figure out where the light is coming into the vehicle. Knowing those two things, we can intelligently select a minimum portion of the visor to block out and leave roughly 90 percent of the visor transparent."

The Virtual Visor's screen is broken up into a grid of hexagons. Depending on where the shadows are cast, light blocking crystals would fill the corresponding hexagons, making them opaque to provide the driver with shade needed to drive unimpaired, but still have optimal sight on the road.

Virtual Visor's initial pitch happened in July of 2016. Four years later, the team has developed several prototypes. It has gone through several phases, from Zink's team pulling an LCD screen from a computer monitor, to putting self-darkening welding mask LCDs into a more advanced prototype that Zink and his team were able to present at the Consumer Electronic Show (CES). ➤

Discover more innovative opportunities offered with a degree from the School of Engineering and Computer Science at oakland.edu/secs.



Theresa Finck Photography

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Holiday Walk OU Day | December 6, 11 a.m.-4 p.m.

Winter Wonder Lights OU Night | December 17, 5:30-10 p.m.

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HOLIDAY WALK

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Wonder Lights

Experience the estate grounds decorated with immersive, animated lightscape environments to see, hear and explore.

All OU staff, faculty, alumni and their guest will receive a discounted admission for both holiday events!

For ticket information visit meadowbrookhall.org/wonderlights

OPEN SPACES *Enhanced by Data*

By Kristina Lindberg 📷 Robert Hall

In Matthew Fails' data analysis course, the political science professor proves that quantitative methods are useful for public policy.

"The number one complaint we receive is that students don't want to learn quantitative methodology because it's a math- and statistics-based course," says Fails. "Rather than trying to convince them on my own, I decided to try something more hands-on."

In an effort to show his students the impact of data analysis in real life, Fails partnered with Oakland County Parks and Recreation in a service learning project to examine the results of a community needs assessment survey. The survey uncovered how the parks are meeting departmental goals of accessibility, equity and inclusion and supports the development of its five-year master plan.

"The survey was the first time that the Parks explored this data on a deeper level in order to identify gaps in service and underserved communities," says Donna Folland, senior planner at Oakland County Parks and Recreation. "The technical aspects of analyzing the data were challenging and the partnership with Oakland University presented an excellent opportunity to meet this challenge." ➤



Oakland County Parks and Recreation building

Article continues at oakland.edu/oumagazine.

OU alumna makes an impact in Metro Detroit with urban beekeeping

By Laura Phillips  Garrett MacLean

It began with a common cold. But Nicole Lindsey, CAS '14, says it was really a desperate need that drove her to create Detroit Hives.

The urban beekeeping venture run by Lindsey and her partner, Timothy Paule, started when Paule unsuccessfully battled a cold. He ultimately found a remedy when he turned to local, raw honey. The couple was amazed and began to research local honey, uncovering not only incredible healing powers, but also a way to leverage this to empower communities.

"After learning about the importance of consuming local raw honey, there arose a need to provide a service," Lindsey says. "By transforming vacant lots into educational apiaries and pollinator-friendly spaces, we now can reimagine our communities to help eliminate blight, food insecurity and crime."

The couple learned the craft of beekeeping and bought their first lot in


2017. Today, they manage 45 beehives in Detroit, and have expanded to Kansas City, Missouri as MO Hives KC.

"This work allows me to serve as a leader in my community," says Lindsey. "As women-of-color, it's imperative that we change the narrative and be an example to the next generation. We service the Metro Detroit community, and with target-populations over 80 percent Black, it's imperative that change comes from someone who they can identify with."

Leveraging health, social empowerment and environmental sustainability, Detroit Hives is Lindsey's way to impact Detroit. But this impact has resonated beyond the city borders. "It wasn't until our story went viral through social media, that we realized the impact that we had internationally," she said. In 2019, Detroit Hives grabbed the attention of National Geographic's Short Film Showcase, putting the organization on a

global platform. But Lindsey reminds others that beekeeping is more than a fad. "This 'trend' can also be credited to the need for food security in local communities, and people wanting to grow their own food."

Lindsey and Paule are currently working to make National Urban Beekeeping Day, a day founded by Detroit Hives, a global initiative. They hope to build an educational center to teach local students about bee conservation and want to expand to provide jobs to the community.

It was an unintended journey, but an unmatched destination. "What started as an idea has led me to a life full of passion and purpose," Lindsey says. 

Learn more about Detroit Hives at detroitives.org.

BEE-LIEVING IN CHANGE

DRIVING *Student-Athlete* SUCCESS

By Catherine Ticer  Jose Juarez

A generous gift from former OU men's golf team member Chad Elliott, parents R. Hugh and Nancy Elliott, and the R. Hugh and Nancy Elliott Foundation will fund the design process for a state-of-the-art indoor practice and locker room facility for OU's men's and women's golf teams.

Chad Elliott played for the Golden Grizzlies from 2004 to 2007. His score of 219, recorded in 2007, is ranked sixth all-time in program history for the lowest conference championship score. He was also an All-conference selection in 2007.

"Designing this new structure is the first step towards meeting an important need for OU's golf teams," says Chad Elliott. "We are excited to get the project started." Currently, student golfers utilize public practice facilities located off campus, which can be challenging to access around class schedules. An indoor facility would allow student golfers to practice and perfect their game on campus, year-round, regardless of weather conditions.

The proposed facility would also elevate OU's golf program among other Division I schools in recruiting prospective student-athletes and competing on a national level.

The Elliott family has a longstanding legacy of support at OU. Hugh and Nancy Elliott have generously funded scholarships and other initiatives benefiting students and student-athletes. Elliott Tower, Elliott Hall, and the Hugh and Nancy Elliott Room in the O'rena are named in their honor.

Steve Waterfield, director of athletics, is grateful to the Elliott family for their commitment to the success of student-athletes. "Funding the design of an indoor practice facility brings us closer to meeting the unique needs of OU's golf teams," says Waterfield. "We thank the Elliott family for their dedication to our student-athletes and the winning future of Oakland University Athletics." 

Learn more about the indoor golf facility or pledge your support by contacting Mike Westfall, vice president for university advancement, at mwestfall@oakland.edu.

Sydney Martens



Street MEDICINE

By Catherine Ticer  John McTaggart

Students in the Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine (OUWB) are bringing health care to the streets of Pontiac — thanks, in part, to a generous grant from the Detroit Medical Center (DMC) Foundation.


DMC Foundation has provided funding for the expansion of Street Medicine Pontiac, a program developed by OUWB. The program, where students and physicians deliver medical care to homeless residents in Pontiac, operates in partnership with the Gary Burnstein Community Health Clinic.

Street Medicine is a collaboration of health and social services that address the unique needs and circumstances of

the unsheltered homeless. Today, programs exist in more than 85 cities and 15 countries across five continents. OUWB's Street Medicine program is the first of its kind in Oakland County.

Since beginning last year, Street Medicine Pontiac has proven very effective in servicing the needs of a most vulnerable population. The grant from the DMC Foundation will help the program increase services and reach more patients in the coming months.

Michael Westfall, vice president of university advancement, is grateful to the DMC Foundation for their leadership in expanding opportunities for OUWB students to serve the community.

"This grant will bring much-needed health care to the homeless population of Pontiac while also training OUWB students to effectively respond to the needs of marginalized populations," says Westfall. "The lessons learned will serve our students throughout their professional careers." 

For more information about supporting Street Medicine Pontiac, contact Claus Weimann at cweimann@oakland.edu.

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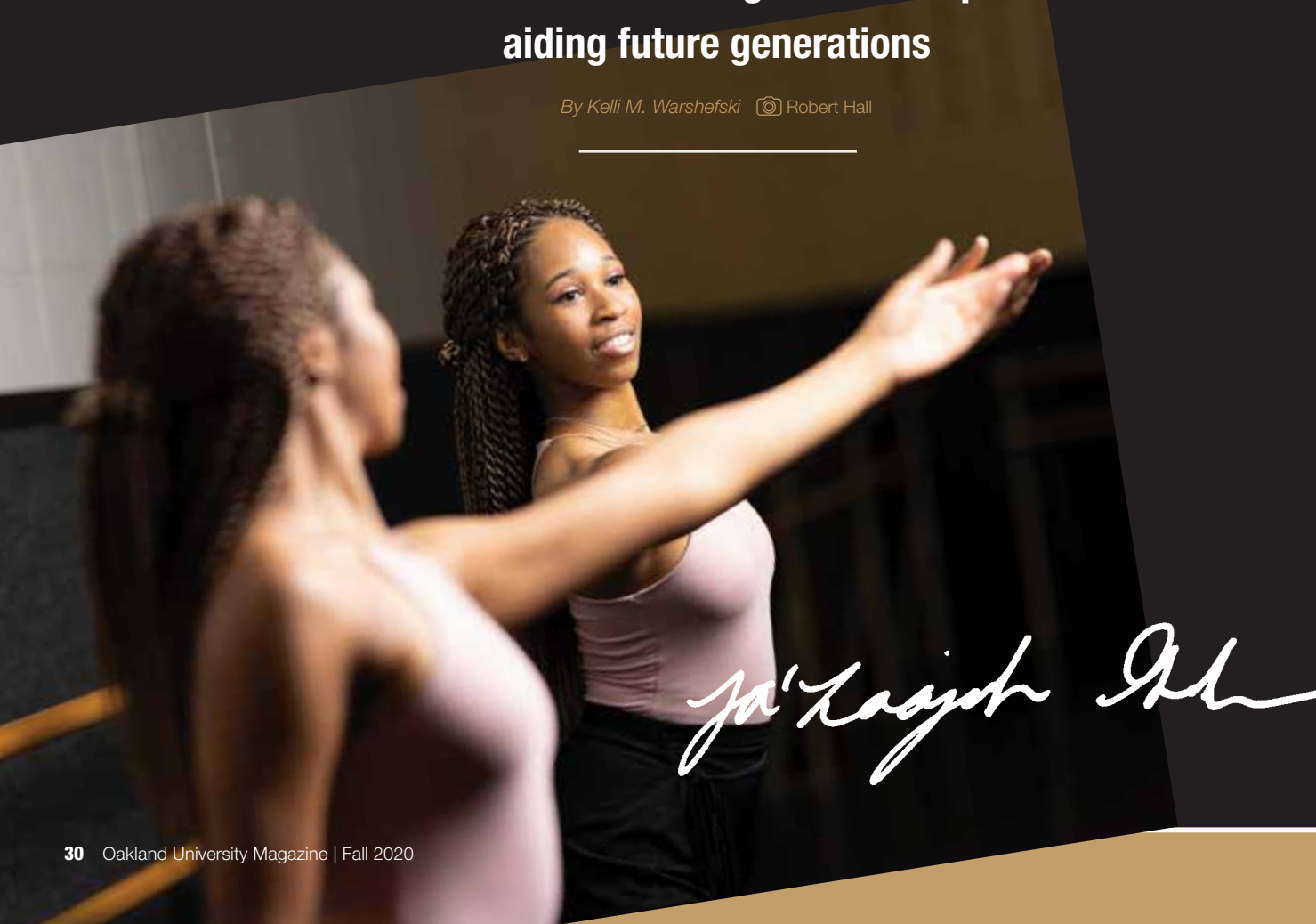
COMING HOME

This year, Oakland University's homecoming saw big changes — from expanding to a weeklong celebration to being nearly 90 percent virtual. OU redefined HOMEcoming this year with a number of programs and events to engage alumni with faculty, staff, students and, of course, one another. Events included Faculty After 5 sessions, Adventures with Grizz for the future Golden Grizzlies out there, comedian Nicole Byer from the Emmy-nominated Netflix series Nailed It, the Golden Celebration Reunion for alumni from the classes of 1970 and earlier, and a number of social media contests. Learn more at oakland.edu/homecoming.

VOICES THAT MATTER

University students of color endure and overcome challenges in the hopes of aiding future generations

By Kelli M. Warshefski  Robert Hall



Ja'Laayah Gordon

Racism is real. During this challenging time in our world, it is vital to set aside biases, acknowledge privilege, and simply listen to those who feel the weight of oppression in order to create change.

"I want my voice to be heard. I want to contribute to the change I want to see," says Ja'Laayah Gordon, marketing major with a minor in dance.

Gordon uses her voice alongside her peers in the university's Center for Multicultural Initiatives (CMI) as an advocate for equality and speaking out against systemic racism. These students are devoted to helping future generations focus on their academic and future goals while also contributing to social change.

"The issue does not start on the surface level. The issue is deep rooted," explains Mariama Toure, industrial and systems engineering major and an ambassador for CMI's CORE (Collectively Oakland Retains Everyone) program.

"It's institutionalized racism," adds Jai Carrero, acting major in OU's bachelor of fine arts program. "At the end of the day, that's what [the issue] is and no one is talking about it because it's so embedded into the system. But we experience it."

Upon arriving at Oakland, Carrero felt the need for better representation of black students, and founded Kaleidoscope — an organization that gives underrepresented students a platform to showcase their artistic work — as well as the Oakland University Black Lives Matter student organization. "If you want to see the change, be the change," says Carrero. "It doesn't have to be big. That very small thing could change someone's life drastically. It'll be something that they will remember when they go through a similar struggle."

Greater representation of underrepresented groups is just one way to impact change. Another way for institutions to help reduce barriers is to be more flexible with their expectations of incoming students. "Professors have this tendency of acting like we all come from the same background," Toure says. "[Students] don't come from the same experiences. I want professors to acknowledge this on the first day of classes."



Mariama Toure



Jai Carrero



Jennifer Medrano Delacruz

“Being a student of color, there is also a pressure to really represent your entire race,” Gordon says. “You have to be successful, because there’s not a lot of you in this field.”

In high school, Gordon, like many other students, felt that grades defined her success. But upon entering college, her priorities shifted, as did her role as a student. “I used to be a tutor in high school and then I became the one that needed tutoring,” she says. “You have to be able to let go of that pride. I can now feel successful in what I’ve done as long as I am giving it my all.”

“Reaching your goals is a lot more challenging [as a student of color] because you have to work harder for the same thing as the person next to you who doesn’t look like you,” says Jennifer Medrano Delacruz, psychology major and peer mentor with CMI. “It’s very real to be the only person of color in class and that to be normal.”

“When you think about an average black student: nine times out of 10 they come from predominantly black institutions,” Carrero explains. “But then, they get into college and into their program and they’re not seeing their people, they’re not hearing anything about their people in this field. But they’re

expected to apply themselves even harder to get over those barriers.”

“We know how discouraging it feels sometimes and how overwhelming [college] can be,” says Dana Cogshell, human

resources development major and fellow peer mentor with CMI. “To be successful means to help someone through the transition that is college and what it’s like to be a minority student in that setting. “

Cogshell, Carrero, Delacruz, Gordon and Toure find that the best way to overcome these and similar challenges is by getting involved on campus, helping others and finding like-minded students that encourage one another.

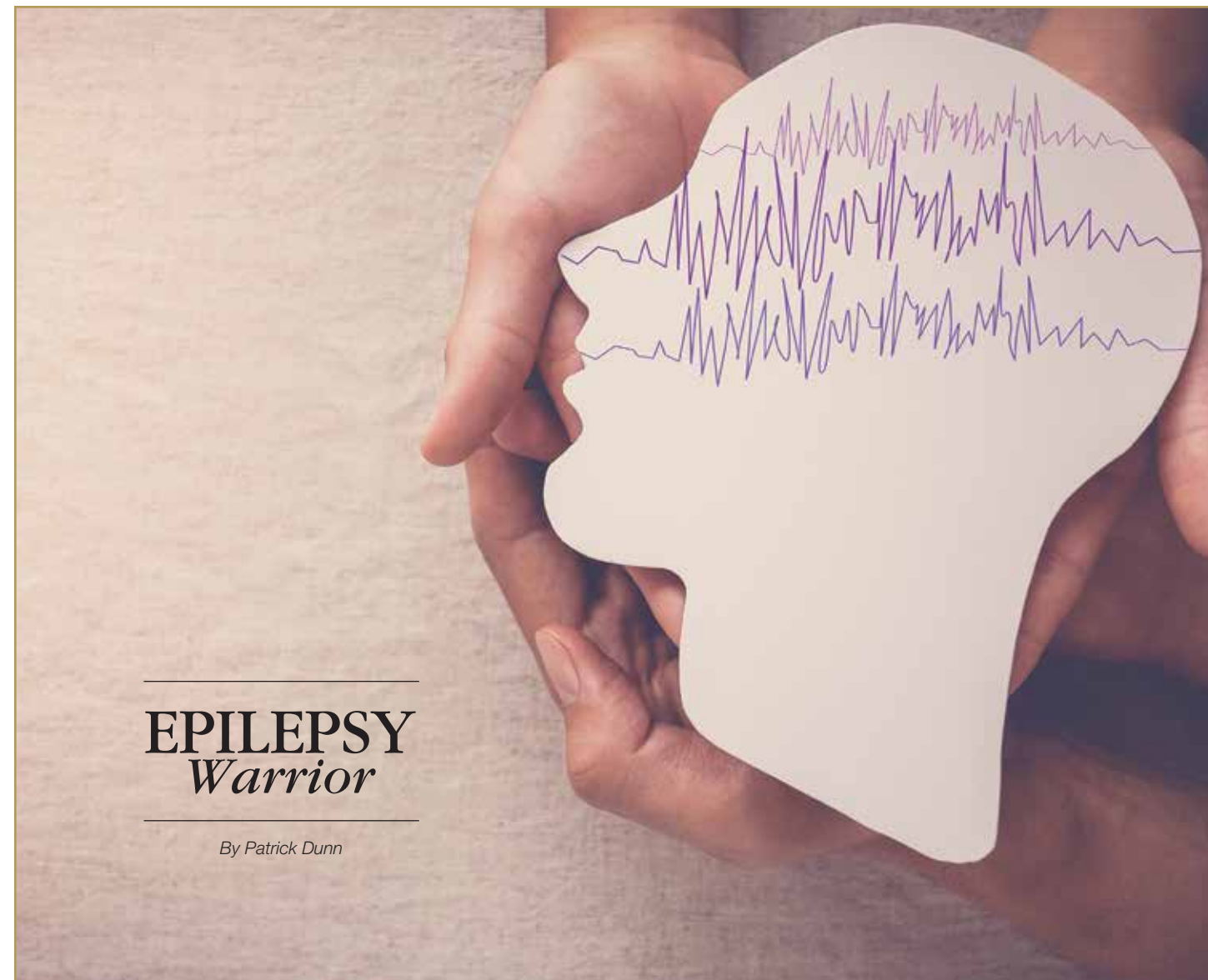
“I have learned that you will always find your crowd — people like you — once you make a conscious decision to be a part of the community,” says Toure. “I love being in a space where I am consistently growing intellectually, mentally, emotionally, physically and financially.”

“What matters most is helping one person who needs guidance and then helping them to impact others,” Cogshell explains. “It’s really about creating a legacy and creating a change for an environment where other students can enter and hopefully not struggle as much.”

Find your voice. Learn more at the Center for Multicultural Initiatives at oakland.edu/cmi.



D. Cogshell



EPILEPSY *Warrior*

By Patrick Dunn

When Andrea Lawassani, SON '19, had her first grand mal seizure at age 17, her neurologist warned her that she might experience depression as she grappled with being diagnosed with epilepsy. However, Lawassani says she “did the opposite” and has tried to turn her condition into a positive experience.

Now a 26-year-old nursing school grad who works with other epileptic patients in a neurology unit at St. Joseph Mercy Oakland, Lawassani’s family calls her the “epilepsy warrior.” But her journey hasn’t been easy. Lawassani started at OU when she was 18, still newly diagnosed. A steady slew of neurological tests and side effects from new medications made it difficult for her to focus in school. She decided to seek help from OU’s Disability Support Services (DSS) office, where she says the staff was “absolutely amazing.”

“Just accepting that this was labeled as a disability was a little bit rough for me,” Lawassani says. “But at the same time I’m like, ‘You know what, Andrea? These situations can’t happen again.’”

Lawassani says she wanted to be “treated like an everyday student” as much as possible, so she made use of DSS

services, such as private rooms for exams and time extensions for test-taking, only as needed. But she says it was good to know that DSS staff “always had my back.”

Starting as a nurse aide at St. Joe’s in 2017, Lawassani was hired as a nurse at the hospital as soon as she finished her nursing degree in 2019. She says she’s had a lot of “heartfelt conversations” with her patients, offering insights from her own experience with epilepsy and working to provide the same level of care she would want to receive.

Lawassani’s own journey with epilepsy remains challenging. Her doctors have struggled to treat her condition, and one major surgical procedure intended to mitigate her seizures instead exacerbated them. But, she says, “I count my blessings every single day.”

“I know as a nurse, I’m making a huge impact on people’s lives, and that’s all I’ve really wanted to do since this started,” she says.

Pursue your passion at oakland.edu/nursing.

EXPERIENCES IN ESL

**‘English homework’
translates to
everyday successes for
OU’s ESL students**

By Mary Gunderson-Switzer

With 1.4 billion English speakers spread throughout the world, the usefulness of English language skills is undeniable.

Oakland’s English as a Second Language (ESL) Center offers an extensive program to enhance reading, writing, listening and speaking skills for international OU students, scholars, business professionals and the general public. International students Boyu Wang, Jiaan Cao, Selin Senturk and Hassan Almohammedsaleh are now among 20 percent of the world’s population who can communicate in English.



Boyu Wang

A Coke and a smile

“When I first came to America, I was barely able to speak English well enough to buy a Coke,” says senior Boyu Wang, an industrial and systems engineering major enrolled in OU’s 2+2 program. Students in OU’s 2+2 program study two years at their home university and two years at OU. They then receive a master’s in engineering or computer science from both universities.

After ESL classes, Wang not only knows enough English to request a beverage, he can also more freely converse with OU professors and peers. Class assignments were instrumental to his newfound confidence.

“In one ESL class, we were asked to work as a team, which was stressful at first,” he admits. “But I adapted and enjoyed it.”

Wang, whose home university is China’s Changchun University of Technology, says the library is his favorite “relaxing” spot on campus. He appreciates all he’s gained from ESL. “I’ve learned a lot – not only English skills – but about American culture,” Wang says. “My classmates encourage me that my English is enough for normal life, but I need to keep studying.”



Jiaan Cao

Face time with Dad

Jiaan Cao, an industrial engineering junior, is also enrolled in the 2+2 program and attends Changchun University of Technology. Others have noticed her English improvement.

“Talking to my Dad [in China] on video, I sometimes speak English with him,” Cao says. “He tells me I’ve made great progress.”

Cao finds OU’s faculty and students “very friendly” and says ESL instructors are indispensable to international students. “When we first begin academic classes, we have confusions, and ESL instructors always help us solve our problems,” she says.

Cao especially enjoyed ESL cultural experiences. “My classroom conversation partner taught me English, and I taught her Chinese, and we exchanged little gifts,” she says. “Students share their culture, even bringing in delicious [homeland] food to class. I was happy every day in ESL.”



Selin Senturk

Mastering chemistry

Selin Senturk, a Turkey native in her fourth semester for a master’s in chemistry, calls the ESL program among her “best, most memorable days” at OU. Senturk was excited to see her English abilities increase and to receive good grades.

For Senturk, the most difficult part of English is writing. “Creativity is needed,” says Senturk. “My writing instructor, Mr. Coleman, was the best. He gave me lots of helpful tips in writing essays. This is extremely beneficial now, in writing chemistry research papers.”

She credits reading/writing instructor, “wise Ms. Essenburg,” in aiding Senturk’s difficulty in reading long paragraphs. “Nowadays, her tips help me to read lengthy chemistry articles,” Senturk says.



Hassan Almohammedsaleh

Successful mistakes

“The ESL instructors understand how difficult living far from family is, and they were like family to me,” says Saudi Arabia native Hassan Almohammedsaleh, a freshman in mechanical engineering.

Almohammedsaleh values the practical life skills he acquired in ESL, such as how to give presentations and talk to strangers while standing in line.

“Learning English wasn’t easy for me,” Almohammedsaleh says. “I’m shy, so I fought with myself to share stories with my ESL teachers...but I overcame that.”

Almohammedsaleh sums up what’s perhaps the key to ESL program success. “The instructors encourage us to speak, even if we fear making mistakes,” he says. “Making many mistakes leads to lots of improvement.”

Learn more at oakland.edu/geo.





OU MOMENT

Changing Technologies

University librarian Floyd Cammack (left) demonstrates Kresge Library's newly installed computerized circulation system in 1966. Chancellor Woody Varner and sophomore Janis McLeod watch as Cammack operates the IBM 357 card reader that records checked out books. ➤

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Small Business Saturday..... November 27

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Kris Kringle Market December 4 & 5

New location — East Parking Deck



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