

Fall 2021

econnection

The Magazine for Southern Illinois University Edwardsville Alumni Association & Friends



***Cynthia Chapple, '15, and SIUE are
Advocating for Change***



“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it’s the only thing that ever has.”

— Margaret Mead

On the cover



Cynthia Chapple, '15, founded Black Girls Do STEM in 2019. Black Girls Do STEM empowers Black Girls through scholarship, training, empowerment and mentorship to build curiosity, 21st century skills, confidence and the future STEM workforce. Read more on page 15.



AWARD-WINNING PUBLICATION!

The 2020 eConnection was honored with the following awards

- 2021 Educational Advertising Awards
Silver Award, COVID Response Materials
- 2020 Collegiate Advertising Awards
Silver Award, External Publications



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We welcome your comments and suggestions. Contact Director of Constituent Relations
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The following alumni have contributed to the production of this magazine: Heather Kniffel, '95, '13
 Megan Wieser, '17 • Amanda Cooper, '19, '20
 Nick Niemerg, '15 • Cathy Taylor, '15



Dear Alumni and Friends of SIUE,

If you have heard or read one of my speeches while chancellor at Southern Illinois University Edwardsville, you know how I emphasize that SIUE is “shaping a changing world.” Since March 2020, SIUE has definitely helped shape a changing world in many ways, including pivoting quickly with a concern for COVID-19 safety while maintaining our academic excellence. But, in reality, SIUE and our nation faced two pandemics in the last year—COVID and the debilitating, continuing effects of racism in our institutions.

This issue of the *eConnection* specifically focuses on our efforts to address that topic and to provide information on the steps SIUE has taken in the last year to create a different environment which provides access and support for students and faculty/staff of color, LGBTQIA+ individuals, first-generation students (particularly those with low incomes), students with disabilities and individuals with military backgrounds. We also highlight the efforts of our alumni who are working to promote equity, diversity and inclusion in their respective companies, organizations and communities.

SIUE has committed to its values of inclusion, citizenship, integrity, excellence and wisdom over the past year, particularly because racial unrest has required us to take a much-needed look at ourselves and our spheres of influence. The University has made two significant advances to ensure a more diverse, equitable and inclusive institution: the promotion of Dr. Jessica Harris as SIUE’s inaugural vice chancellor for equity, diversity and inclusion and the development of a University-wide Anti-Racism Task Force, which led to 78 subcommittee recommendations. You can check the progress of these recommendations on our Anti-Racism dashboard at siue.edu/artf-dashboard. SIUE also developed a Quality Initiative project relating to our ongoing accreditation efforts centered on becoming an anti-racist institution. Additional details on this critical initiative can be found on page 5.

This is a very special *eConnection* for me for two reasons: the importance of the topic being addressed and, with my recent announcement about 2021-22 being my last year as chancellor, it underscores an urgent commitment in my remaining months to address change. I look forward to hearing from you and working with you in the months to come.

Stay safe and well and know that we value your support of SIUE.



SHAPING THE FUTURE, TODAY,
Randall G. Pembroke, '78, '79, '80
Alumnus and SIUE Chancellor

COMMITTED TO DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

2020 HIGHER EDUCATION EXCELLENCE IN DIVERSITY AWARD

ONE OF ONLY 33 SCHOOLS IN THE NATION TO BE AWARDED SEVEN OR MORE CONSECUTIVE YEARS

INSIGHT Into Diversity

2020 ASPIRING AFFINITY GROUP

SIUE BLACK FACULTY AND STAFF ASSOCIATION

INSIGHT Into Diversity

ILLINOIS 2020 STUDENT VETERAN OF THE YEAR

AMANDA DEPEW, MASTER’S CANDIDATE, SOCIAL WORK

U.S. Air Force Veteran

PILOT PROGRAM, CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING AND LEADING STANDARDS

SCHOOL OF EDUCATION, HEALTH AND HUMAN BEHAVIOR

Illinois State Board of Education

2021 TRANSFER HONOR ROLL

SUPPORTING COMMUNITY COLLEGE TRANSFER STUDENTS

Phi Theta Kappa

2020 BEST COLLEGES FOR STUDENT VOTING HONOR ROLL

Washington Monthly

2021 CLASS OF LEADING WOMEN IN HIGHER EDUCATION

VENESSA A. BROWN, PHD, ASSOCIATE ATHLETIC DIRECTOR FOR DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

Diverse: Issues In Higher Education



Our Commitment to Dismantling Racism

SIUE's values of inclusion, citizenship, integrity, excellence and wisdom have served as the backbone for its work to become a more diverse, equitable and inclusive institution over the past year. Two significant advances in this work include the appointment of Jessica Harris, PhD, as SIUE's first vice chancellor for equity, diversity and inclusion (see page 6), and the development of a University-wide Anti-Racism Task Force.


"The deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and others, coupled with the racial disparities laid bare by the COVID-19 pandemic ... will embolden our commitment to equity and anti-racism at SIUE."

— Chancellor Randy Pembroke, PhD, and the SIUE Diversity Council wrote in a letter to the SIUE community

ANTI-RACISM TASK FORCE PROGRESS DASHBOARD

SIUE launched its Anti-Racism Task Force (ARTF) in June 2020 to recommend swift, meaningful actions to dismantle racism at SIUE. The task force presented administration with 78 recommendations for initiatives that support and amplify SIUE's commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion and anti-racism in the areas of:

- Access and Success
- Curriculum
- Faculty and Staff Hiring, Retention and Promotion
- Sustained and Effective Communication

Track the status of each recommendation at siue.edu/artf-dashboard. 

QUALITY INITIATIVE FOCUSES ON COMBATING RACISM

As part of its accreditation process with the Higher Learning Commission, SIUE has developed a Quality Initiative (QI) centered on becoming an anti-racist institution. A major focus of this initiative is to establish a comprehensively supportive academic community to promote Black student retention and success. The QI goals and objectives were developed in tandem with the work of the University's Anti-Racism Task Force.

"We must critically examine our policies, practices and campus climate, and do the work necessary to ensure this is a university that Black students not only want to attend, but also a place where they will thrive."

— Jessica Harris, PhD

Vice Chancellor for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

Learn more about the QI at siue.edu/hlc-quality-initiative. 

SIU SYSTEM HIRES VICE PRESIDENT OF ANTIRACISM, DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

Sheila Caldwell, PhD, joined the SIU System in July as its inaugural vice president for antiracism, diversity, equity and inclusion and chief diversity officer. Caldwell will work closely with SIU System President Dan Mahony and the System leadership team; SIUE Chancellor Randy Pembroke; Vice Chancellor for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Jessica Harris; and their counterparts across the System to fight racism and create visionary change on every campus.

Getting to know Jessica Harris, PhD Vice Chancellor for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

Before she began serving as SIUE's first vice chancellor for equity, diversity and inclusion (VCEDI) on March 1, Jessica Harris, PhD, had already established herself as a servant leader committed to student success and inclusive excellence on campus. Harris joined SIUE in 2011 as an assistant professor in the Department of History, became director of the Black Studies program in 2016, and was promoted to associate professor in 2017. She was named interim assistant provost in 2018 and assistant provost for academic equity and inclusive excellence in 2020.

Harris aims to cultivate the University's national reputation by establishing SIUE as an exemplar of equity and inclusive excellence in higher education.

Q WHAT IS YOUR VISION FOR EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION WORK AT SIUE?

My vision for SIUE is that we will operationalize inclusive excellence through the intentional integration of diversity, inclusion and equity into our educational quality efforts, mission and infrastructure.

In order to realize this vision, the University will:

1. Increase demographic diversity across all stakeholder groups and equity in outcomes and opportunities for all faculty, staff and students
2. Nurture a campus climate where all feel a strong sense of belonging and are valued
3. Take an active role in addressing racism and other systems of oppression in surrounding communities

Q WHAT INITIATIVES ARE YOU WORKING TO LAUNCH OR STRENGTHEN IN THE SHORT-TERM?

I plan to improve SIUE's capacity and ability to deliver a wide-range of diversity, equity and inclusion training and education opportunities campus-wide. I also plan to grow academic and social programming and support services available to students from historically underserved populations—first-generation students, low-income students and students of color.

Q WHAT PROPELLED YOU TO WORK WITH CAMPUS LEADERS TO ESTABLISH THE UNIVERSITY ANTI-RACISM TASK FORCE IN JUNE 2020?

The idea to convene an Anti-Racism Task Force came in the immediate aftermath of George Floyd's murder. As the protests demanding justice for George Floyd reverberated across the nation, I thought SIUE was being called to unequivocally embrace its role in confronting racism. As a higher education institution, I felt the times warranted that we engage in our own institutional reckoning with race and respond accordingly through the implementation of a set of actions to address systemic racism on our campus.

Q WHAT WILL IT TAKE TO ACHIEVE TRUE AND NECESSARY INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE?

All members of the SIUE community—students, faculty, staff, administrators, alumni—have a role to play in driving institutional change. Among the factors that are most critical will be clarity of vision and the ability to translate a vision for change that community members support and will buy into. We must also establish accountability processes as a check for decisions and actions and for whether the work being done aligns with our goals and commitments. Ongoing support from senior leaders and the allocation of sufficient resources to support change are also essential.



“As we take this giant leap toward SIUE’s future, I invite each of you to seek out what is possible; to dream and think bigger and bolder than you ever have; and to not focus on what isn’t, but put your energy into building what can be.”

— Jessica Harris, PhD
Vice Chancellor for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion



Focusing on Diversity Recruitment, Retention and Training

Attracting and retaining underrepresented students, faculty and staff is a key focus of SIUE’s Diversity and Inclusion Strategic Plan enacted for 2018-2025. Robin Hughes, PhD, dean of the School of Education, Health and Human Behavior, is working in a deliberate and calculated way to make her University better, stronger and more equitable by hiring a group of faculty members of color, known as cluster hires.

“Faculty of color support students’ growth and social well-being in myriad ways,” Hughes said. “They are role models. They increase students’ sense of belonging. They support student retention overall, and retention of students of color specifically.”

SIUE has several structures in place to engage and support faculty and staff in the University’s work to create a more equitable campus environment. The Immersive Meaningful Practices for Accountable Campus Transformation (IMPACT) Academy is one such initiative. Launched in October 2020, the IMPACT Academy utilizes faculty as leaders in providing diversity and inclusion training and resources for their colleagues.

“Trainers provide faculty and staff with tools and resources to build the awareness and competencies needed to foster cultural humility as the standard of interaction and practice at SIUE,” said Kathryn Bentley, MFA, IMPACT Academy director, associate professor in the Department of Theater and Dance, and Black Studies program director.



Gateway Graduation Celebrates Triumphs of Diverse Learners

To acknowledge the hard work and achievements of diverse learners and students with disabilities, the Office for Accessible Campus Community and Equitable Student Support (ACCESS) created its Gateway Graduation ceremony in 2019. This event is held in conjunction with the spring and fall commencement ceremonies to celebrate the graduates' triumphs in the face of societal obstacles and to encourage them on the next phase of their journey.

“This celebration symbolizes a fair passage with no one deciding who does or does not have access or rights, and who does or does not belong either by exclusion or by design.”

— Dominic Dorsey
ACCESS Director



A Place for Military-Connected Students to Call Home

The Military and Veteran Resource Center opened in the Morris University Center in January to provide military-connected students and veterans with support and the opportunity to develop a deeper sense of belonging at SIUE. The military student population at SIUE is among the largest in the state, with Military and Veteran Services supporting more than 800 military-connected students and their families.

“The resource center is a place where military-connected and veteran students can meet their peers to talk and be themselves. They can also access services to assist them in reintegrating into civilian life.”

— Telisha Reinhardt
Coordinator of Military and Veteran Services



Shaw Shares Insights at LGBTQ+ STEM Conference

Michael Shaw, PhD, distinguished research professor in the Department of Chemistry, was among the featured speakers at the virtual 2020 LGBTQ+ STEM Conference. The international conference celebrated the contributions of the LGBTQ+ community while highlighting issues pertaining to equity, diversity and inclusion. In his presentation, Shaw recounted his career and 30-year relationship, and discussed his research and experiences from various institutions.

“The more points of view at the table, the better chance we have to catch biases in the interpretation of data. Experts with diverse experiences can come together to build stronger science.”

— Michael Shaw, PhD
Distinguished Research Professor, Department of Chemistry

Safe Zone Growing a Network of Allies Across Campus



Since 2000, the SIUE Safe Zone committee has trained hundreds of SIUE faculty, staff and students on ways to support lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, intersex and asexual (LGBTQIA+) members of the campus community.

These ally training sessions support Safe Zone's mission to develop a campus community of allies and provide support to SIUE's LGBTQIA+ community. Training participants gain:

- Listening and helping skills
- Inclusive habits in the classroom, the office and on larger scales
- A common base of understanding with respect to the LGBTQIA+ community
- Knowledge and information regarding
 - Sexual orientation and gender identity terminology
 - The complexity of sexuality and gender
 - Campus and community contacts

More than 100 faculty, staff and students received Safe Zone certification through virtual ally training this past year. The committee is chaired by Jennifer Hernandez, '00, PhD, assistant professor in the School of Education, Health and Human Behavior, and Nick Niemerg, '15, assistant director of constituent relations in University Advancement.

Learn more about SIUE Safe Zone and donate to its scholarship fund at siue.edu/give/safe-zone. 

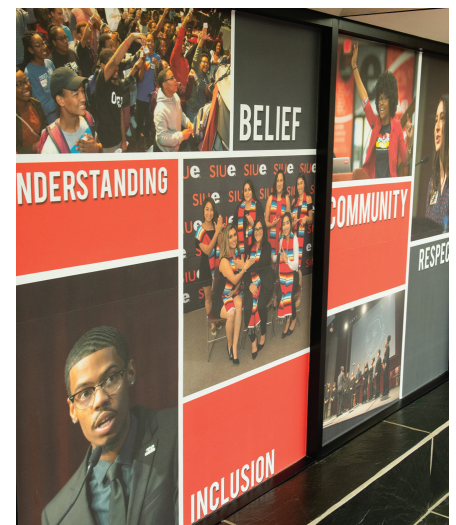
ESTL Film Series Highlights Stories of East St. Louisans

Presented by the Black Theatre Workshop, "ESTL" offers a look at the East St. Louis community through a series of recorded performances based on stories from those who call East St. Louis home. Directed by Kathryn Bentley, associate professor of theater performance, and Michael Watkins '20, the film series was a collaboration with the SIUE Truth, Racial Healing and Transformation Campus Center's E-Stories Project and the Department of Sociology. Check out the films on the SIUE Theater and Dance YouTube channel.

Celebrating Diversity and Inclusion Year-Round

The Inclusive Excellence, Education and Development Hub (The Hub), formally the Center for Student Diversity and Inclusion, is dedicated to achieving and supporting SIUE's institutional goal of inclusion which is central to the learning, development and success of our campus community through educational opportunities that encourage dialogue and critical reflection. History and Heritage Months honor and acknowledge the continued contributions of the historically minoritized communities who impact SIUE in so many positive ways.

- Black Heritage (February)
- Women's History (March)
- Arab American Heritage (April)
- Celebrate Diversity (April)
- Jewish American Heritage (April)
- Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage (May)
- Hispanic/Latinx Heritage (September 15-October 15)
- LGBTQIA+ History (October)
- Native American Heritage (November)



“We recognize the importance of honoring and acknowledging the continued contributions of the historically marginalized communities that impact SIUE in a positive way and help us to fulfill our commitment to being an equitable and inclusive campus community.”

— Tarsha Moore, '13, '16
Assistant Director, The Hub



Venessa Brown Joins Intercollegiate Athletics Staff

Venessa Brown, PhD, has joined SIUE's Intercollegiate Athletics staff as its first associate athletic director for diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) and chief diversity officer.

“I look forward to leading DEI efforts with an athletics family that is diverse, embraces inclusion, strives for equity and is committed to being antiracist.”

— Venessa Brown, PhD

Associate Athletic Director for DEI and Chief Diversity Officer

Brown joined SIUE in 1995 and most recently served as associate chancellor for the Office of Institutional Diversity and Inclusion, chief diversity officer and ethics officer. She was recognized by *Diverse: Issues In Higher Education* magazine in February 2020 as one of 25 women who have made a difference in higher education.



Cougars As One Task Force Focuses on Building a More Inclusive Culture

“Each day, we will strive to provide a more inclusive environment where all individuals feel heard, seen and valued.”

These words from Director of Athletics Tim Hall describe the impetus behind the creation of the Cougars As One Task Force. This collaborative effort between student-athletes, coaches and staff is dedicated to ensuring Cougar Athletics remains a safe and inclusive environment for all stakeholders.

Over the past year, the task force has taken several steps to address inequities and create positive change across the department and throughout the community, including working to identify and eliminate bias and discrimination within the department, providing resources and training to staff, and initiating outreach efforts in East St. Louis and the surrounding communities.

Cougars As One Scholarship

Northwestern Mutual has donated \$25,000 to endow a Cougars As One scholarship. This scholarship will be awarded to a student-athlete committed to being an active participant in SIUE's anti-racism, diversity, equity and inclusion work.



Hall Commits to Diversity in Hiring

Tim Hall was among 33 NCAA Division I Directors of Athletics to sign the Collegiate Coaching Diversity Pledge. By signing the pledge, Hall affirmed SIUE's commitment to ensuring equal opportunity in the hiring of head coaches and addressing the barriers that have prevented full participation of underrepresented minority groups.

“This initiative is a tangible first step to eliminating unconscious bias and systemic racism that, in my opinion, is part of many, if not all, institutions of higher learning,” Hall said.

Alumni Couple Dedicated to Making an Impact in Higher Education

After meeting at SIUE and becoming two-time alumni, Chris and Brittany Wright both pursued careers in higher education. Brittany is an assistant clinical professor in the College of Optometry at the University of Missouri-St. Louis (UMSL). Chris returned to his alma mater in 2018 as assistant athletic director for annual fund and ticketing.

The couple also shares a passion for equity, diversity and inclusion efforts in higher education. “One evening [in summer 2020], Brittany and I decided we could no longer talk about helping our community,” said Chris, ’09, ’10. “It was time to put our words into action, starting by making an impact on our campuses and in our industries.”

Chris took on the role of co-chair for the Cougars As One Task Force, and Brittany was named the first coordinator of diversity, equity and inclusion for UMSL’s College of Optometry.

“Looking back, the abundance of support and advice I received from the SIUE SOAR office and the upperclass students within the Black student body helped shape my college experience,” said Brittany, ’09, ’11. “Their intentional push was barrier-breaking, and my hope is to provide that same access to my current and future students.”



Brittany Wright, OD, MS Biological Sciences ’11, BS Biological Sciences ’09; Chris Wright, BS Exercise Science ’09, MS Kinesiology ’10

“The March for Racial Justice showed it is possible for people who are different from one another to come together peacefully and make a small step toward change. Silence speaks volumes, and I decided to use my platform to make some noise.”

— Mikia Keith
Senior, Exercise Science
Women’s Basketball



Student-Athletes March for Racial Justice

The Student-Athlete Advisory Committee hosted a March for Racial Justice at SIUE in September 2020 in support of the Black Lives Matter movement. In addition to marching across campus, the event included speeches, performances and a showcase of SIUE’s Black student organizations. The event raised more than \$2,000 for the SIUE Racial and Social Justice Scholarship.

Victory SIUE

Victory SIUE is a fundraising campaign to support SIUE’s 16 Division I teams. Each sport offers its own unique opportunity for alumni and fans to support our Cougars in meaningful ways by enhancing the student-athlete experience and helping them compete at the highest level.

Visit siuecougars.com/victory to make your gift today! 

University Advancement



Dear Alumni and Friends,

This issue of the *eConnection* celebrates the diversity of our community and marks a return to traditional and non-traditional educational experiences at SIUE. Thank you to everyone who has reached out to help the University over the past year. Your outpouring of support for those who have been negatively impacted by the pandemic, particularly our international and DACA students, has been remarkable.

We are deeply grateful for all of our donors and volunteers. I especially appreciate those who have continued to lift up SIUE by

making donations and pledges, attending Zoom events, and staying connected with your alma mater. Our campus will continue to evolve and grow thanks to YOU!

The future of SIUE is robust, and we remain committed to excellence in education and a strong community. Scholarships are of critical importance at this time—thanks to those of you who have already contributed, including those who have helped us build an endowment for our Racial and Social Justice Scholarship and scholarships for our international students. If you are interested in creating an endowed scholarship, please reach out to me at rstack@siue.edu.

Best regards,

Rachel C. Stack

Vice Chancellor for Advancement; CEO, SIUE Foundation

Donation Supports School of Pharmacy's Commitment to Diversity



An \$8,000 Diversity Donation from Walgreens has enhanced the School of Pharmacy's strong commitment to diversity and inclusion. The funding will create a Walgreens Diversity and Inclusion Excellence Award and a Walgreens Multilingual Scholarship, while enhancing pipeline programs targeted at increasing diversity among its student pharmacists.

"This wonderful financial commitment by Walgreens provides additional scholarship support for students to more fully engage in the professional program by lessening their economic burden and allowing them to focus on their academic success," said Mark Luer, PharmD, Dean, School of Pharmacy.

Conversations Spark New Perspectives, Forward Momentum

The SIUE community has participated in numerous opportunities to engage in learning and discussion centered on equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) over the past year.

• CONVERSATIONS OF UNDERSTANDING

A discussion series hosted by the SIU System through which students, faculty, staff and alumni across the system share their experiences and thoughts on a variety of EDI themes.

bit.ly/SIUConversation

• BLACKTIVISM IN THE ACADEMY PODCAST

A podcast launched by the DREAM (Dismantling Racism through Education, Advocacy and Mobilization) Collective at SIUE to facilitate learning, activism and anti-racist action. Listeners learn from a variety of scholars and enjoy a blend of informative and engaging episodes on a range of topics.

Available on Spotify, Stitcher and Apple Podcasts

• INCLUSIVE CONVERSATIONS

A bi-weekly dialogue series hosted by the Inclusive Excellence, Education and Development Hub (formerly the Center for Student Diversity and Inclusion) for students, faculty, staff and alumni to discuss relevant cultural matters within the University.

siue.edu/csdi/events/Inclusive-Conversations-SIUE



In Memory

Bev George, '75, '79

The SIUE community is mourning the loss of Bev George, who passed away July 10. A member of the SIUE Alumni Hall of Fame and former president of both the Alumni Association Board and the Foundation Board, her commitment to SIUE over the years was second to none. We will miss her entrepreneurial spirit, intelligent leadership and passion for life.

Supporting Our Student Changemakers

SIUE offers numerous scholarship opportunities for students who are actively working to make positive changes on campus and throughout the community.



RACIAL AND SOCIAL JUSTICE SCHOLARSHIP ENDOWMENT

As part of SIUE's commitment to end racism and promote social justice, this scholarship will be awarded for the first time in fall 2021 to one or more recipients who demonstrate a commitment to anti-racism and a desire to deepen and enrich their dedication to this cause at SIUE and beyond.



JOHNETTA HALEY SCHOLARSHIP

Created in honor of the late Johnetta Haley, former Department of Music professor emeritus and East St. Louis Center director, this scholarship supports the enrollment of students who are underrepresented in their anticipated fields of study. Haley Scholars are required to complete 12 hours of community service each semester.



MICHAEL E. YANCEY SPHINX-MAN SCHOLARSHIP

This scholarship celebrates the life of the late Michael E. Yancey, BS Mass Communications '93, alumnus and prominent Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity member, by supporting the financial needs of a first-generation college student. Preference will be given to a Black or Native American sophomore. This scholarship will be awarded for the first time in spring 2022.




SAFE ZONE SCHOLARSHIP

This scholarship provides financial support to students who serve as advocates for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex and ally/ asexual (LGBTQIA+) community at SIUE.



ACCESS SCHOLARSHIPS

The Office for Accessible Campus Community and Equitable Student Support (ACCESS) awards numerous scholarships each year to recognize students with disabilities for their academic excellence and contributions on campus.

Support the deserving recipients of these scholarship funds by making your tax deductible gift today at siue.edu/give-now. 

First-Generation Mentor Program Seeking Alumni Volunteers

Were you a first-generation college student? If so, the Student Opportunities for Academic Results (SOAR) Program needs you! Consider becoming an alumni mentor to current SIUE first-generation college students through the First-Generation Mentor Program launching this fall. For more information, contact Darryl Cherry, SOAR coordinator of student retention, at dacherr@siue.edu.



The Parade of Nations was introduced in 2019 to celebrate the global diversity and rich cultural heritage of SIUE's international students, who hail from more than 50 countries.

Diversity Day: Celebrating Differences, Challenging Barriers

Hundreds of students, faculty, staff and alumni took part in SIUE's inaugural Diversity Day in October 2018. Since then, Diversity Day has become an annual celebration of the University's advances in equity, diversity and inclusion, while also serving as an important opportunity to discuss the work that still needs to be done.

"I am so proud of Diversity Day and how it was one institutional initiative that was able to bring the campus community together during a time of national unrest," said Venessa Brown, PhD, associate athletic director for diversity, equity and inclusion and Intercollegiate Athletics' chief diversity officer, who founded the event.

Diversity Day has grown from more than 400 in-person participants in 2018 to nearly 1,000 who attended the virtual event in 2020.

"Diversity Day is an opportunity for the campus community to pause, reflect and take stock of where we stand relative to diversity and equity goals," said Jessica Harris, PhD, vice chancellor for equity, diversity and inclusion. "It is a time to celebrate our accomplishments but to also renew our commitment to inclusive excellence as a University."

"I am so proud of Diversity Day and how it was able to bring the campus community together during a time of national unrest."

— Venessa Brown, PhD

Associate Athletic Director for DEI and Chief Diversity Officer
Intercollegiate Athletics



Diversity Day sponsors a mobile Little Free Library to ride aboard the Goshen Market Foundation's traveling market truck, providing young readers with books that celebrate diversity, promote inclusion and emphasize social justice.



Diversity Day has followed a different format every year and has included discussions, guest speakers and cuisine representing the ethnic roots of SIUE students.

Save the date for the fourth annual Diversity Day to be held virtually on October 21!

Visit siue.edu/diversity-day for event details as they become available. 

ALUMNI ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE

SIUE is proud to have countless alumni doing the work of promoting equity, diversity and inclusion in their respective companies and organizations. Several of these Cougars shared with us the importance of this work and how SIUE helped prepare them for their careers.

Alumna Dedicated to Changing the Face of the STEM Industry

Throughout both her educational and professional experiences in chemistry, Cynthia Chapple has been and continues to be one of the only Black women in the room. This experience can feel both isolating and, in her case, motivating.

"As I reflect on my college years and upbringing, I am faced with the harsh reality that lack of exposure and encouragement may be the reason for my often-solo appearance in the STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) industry," said Chapple.

While earning her master's degree at SIUE, Chapple often felt disrespected by her mostly white male students, and she lacked a mentor with whom she could share these feelings and be understood. She believes these experiences are common for people of color at the university level.

"In the university culture, there is a lack of people willing to tell the truth and share power," Chapple said. "Equity work cannot and will not happen in universities and other spaces that aren't ready to look at their past and tell the truth—a truth that Black, Indigenous and people of color have had grossly different experiences in classrooms, faculty meetings and sometimes even in the boardroom."

"We're creating a sacred space where Black girls feel empowered to learn alongside other Black girls."

— Cynthia Chapple, '15
Founding Director, Black Girls Do STEM

The negative moments Chapple experienced at SIUE were also coupled with moments of joy and success, such as earning second place in the Science Slam, receiving a Graduate Research Grant and presenting her research at the Graduate Research Symposium.

"All of these instances prepared me for public speaking, teaching, learning, and to be confident in my voice and what I had to say," said Chapple, who was named to the *St. Louis Business Journal's* 30 under 30 class in 2018.

Chapple founded Black Girls Do STEM in 2019 to provide Black girls in grades six through nine in the St. Louis area with the opportunity to learn, create and build confidence in their abilities. Today, Chapple utilizes this opportunity to build curiosity, 21st century skills and the future STEM workforce.

Through its STEM workshops and Saturday Academy program, Black Girls Do STEM is showing Black girls that becoming a scientist or engineer is not only fun, but also an attainable goal. Chapple hopes her organization will make strides in changing the face of the STEM industry.

"We're creating a sacred space where Black girls feel empowered to learn alongside other Black girls," Chapple said. "We set high expectations but trigger their own curiosity by first believing in them and their uniqueness as valuable."

Want to get involved? Visit bgdstem.com for more information.



Cynthia Chapple, MS Chemistry '15



Ronda Smith, BS Mass Communications '04

Supporting the Next Generation of Culturally-Conscious Leaders

As the director of human resources, diversity and inclusion for the Greater St. Louis Area Council of the Boy Scouts of America, Ronda Smith is an advocate for change.

"I work hard to cultivate a more diverse and inclusive environment," Smith said. "My role is to help build effective and culturally-conscious leaders in the communities we serve."

Smith was deeply involved in campus life during her time as an SIUE student, from joining academic programs and student-led committees to providing service and leadership through her sorority.

"SIUE helped prepare me for the real world," Smith said. "I was equipped with the tools and resources to excel both personally and professionally."



Jason Frazier, BS Mass Communications '11

Creating New Opportunities for the Visually Impaired

Jason Frazier is utilizing his mass communications degree to assist the visually impaired. As the CEO of MindsEye, he leads a team that offers a variety of services to those with visual disabilities throughout the St. Louis region.

The company's mission hits close to home as Frazier's beloved grandmother was blind.

"Seeing someone attend an audio-described show and be completely immersed in the experience as our describers paint a picture of the visual elements they would otherwise miss is special," said Frazier, who was honored in the *St. Louis Business Journal's* 2020 class of Diverse Business Leaders.

Frazier credits his success to taking advantage of hands-on experiences at SIUE, including writing for *The Alestle*, hosting a web-based radio show and working for WSIE FM.



Maserati Swanagan, BS Sociology '12, MA Sociology '14

Following a Passion for Diversity and Inclusion Work

During her time as a sociology student at SIUE, Maserati Swanagan focused much of her work on the topics most important to her. This autonomy allowed her to follow her passion for diversity and inclusion work and build a foundation she uses today as the diversity and inclusion officer and human resources coordinator for the St. Louis-based nonprofit, Places for People.

"We strive to foster an environment for staff and the people we serve that is both trauma-informed and culturally-responsive," Swanagan said. "We believe that by creating a more welcoming environment for staff and the people we serve, we can improve our overall outcomes."



Mark "Brad" Skertich, MS Education '01, EdD '19

Prioritizing Diversity and Equity as Collinsville Superintendent

Mark "Brad" Skertich, EdD, hit the ground running when he joined the Collinsville Community Unit School District #10 as its superintendent in July 2019. Over the past two years, Skertich has launched numerous equity and diversity initiatives across the district, while also working to develop valuable community partnerships to enhance students' college and career development opportunities. For these efforts, Skertich was named the 2021 School Administrator of the Year by the Illinois Association of School Counselors.

According to Skertich, his time at SIUE taught him the importance of listening to other points of view.

"Collectively, if we are going to be successful and make a difference in our students' lives, we must listen to each person's perspective, find common ground and make decisions that will benefit all students as a group—a true team effort," he said.



Angela Gray, BSW '97, MSW '02, EdS '14

Using a Multifaceted Approach to Support Students

As a social worker at Alton High School, Angela Gray is constantly coming up with new ways to support her students. Not only does the three-time alumna put into practice the skills and concepts she learned at SIUE, but she has also written two books and developed numerous programs to help her students achieve success. Among those programs is the Pipeline to Success, on which she collaborated with her colleagues to help students counter the school-to-prison pipeline trend.

As Gray continues to develop new ways of reaching her students, she still falls back on the knowledge and skills she gained at SIUE.

"I received a rich foundation of learning within the Social Work Department, especially from Dr. Venessa Brown," said Gray. "I learned many strategies from her, such as how to become an effective social worker and strong advocate for my clients."



Lori Patton Davis, BS Speech Communication '95

Leading with an Equity-Minded Lens

Fueled by a mission to make higher education more equitable for all, Lori Patton Davis, PhD, is using her role as the chair of the Department of Educational Studies and a professor of higher education and student affairs at The Ohio State University to strengthen academic programs, enhance the student experience and ensure faculty are supported in all responsibilities.

Patton Davis' goal in higher education is to lead with an equity-minded lens and cultivate a campus environment where all students can thrive. She advises current students at SIUE to remain involved in campus activities while getting to know students from different backgrounds.

"My time at SIUE was integral to my current work," Patton Davis said. "My undergraduate years prepared me to become engaged and to be of service. Most importantly, SIUE reaffirmed the sense of community that every student needs to be successful in college."



Beth Gombos, BA Anthropology and BA English Language and Literature, '16

Revolutionizing Healthcare for the Transgender Community

Beth Gombos is acutely aware of the challenges facing the transgender community when seeking healthcare and gender affirming services. When Gombos, who is polyamorous, genderqueer and pansexual, asked their doctor about hormone replacement therapy, the doctor suggested they find a new provider.

“There are so many barriers when seeking healthcare as a transgender individual,” said Gombos. Last May, the Metro Trans Umbrella Group (MTUG), where Gombos serves as the outreach coordinator, launched a partnership with Planned Parenthood and the Missouri Foundation for Health to revolutionize healthcare for the transgender community.

TRANSforming Community, TRANSforming Care is expanding healthcare services to Planned Parenthood locations across Missouri and in Fairview Heights, Ill. Gombos, who credits SIUE for preparing them to be successful at MTUG, is working with Planned Parenthood staff to ensure the program is meeting the needs of transgender patients.

“We hope that by beginning with healthcare, we can work to end the various cycles of oppression that plague our community,” Gombos said.



Rodney Coates, BA Sociology '75
Photo credit: Miami University

Creating Positive Change through Sociology, Social Justice

Since graduating from SIUE in 1975, Rodney Coates, PhD, has dedicated his career to social justice and policy as a public sociologist. The East St. Louis native is a professor of critical race and ethnic studies at Miami University in Ohio, where he has taught for more than 30 years.

Coates has conducted countless bias trainings, and he works with community partners to establish pathways to progress for underrepresented students in STEM, business and law.

In February, Coates presented “The Matrix of Race-Fostering Social Change and Justice” as part of SIUE’s *Arts & Issues* series. According to Coates, his time at SIUE provided the foundation for his career in education.

“I am indebted to SIUE, particularly its faculty in sociology, for opening up the world of scholarship and academia,” he said. “Their mentoring, attention to excellence and commitment to teaching are the essence of what I continually strive for.”





Ronald Moore, MPM, PMP
BS Construction Engineering '84

Empowering the STEM Professionals of the Future

Ronald Moore is passionate about serving students in underserved populations. This passion was the impetus behind his work to found the Pre-Collegiate Initiative (PCI) of the National Society of Black Engineers St. Louis Gateway chapter more than 25 years ago. The PCI engages middle and high school students in hands-on science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) learning opportunities.

"We function as a think tank and as advocates for our youth seeking STEM careers," said Moore.

As president of Synergy Construction Group, Moore values the opportunities he had at SIUE to engage with other students from different countries and cultures. Many of the people he works with on a daily basis are located in offices around the world.

"The world is flat, and you never know where your business opportunities will come from," he said.



Brian Richardson Jr., MS Kinesiology '13

Bringing Fresh Perspective to the NFL

"The best advice I could give to current students is to make the most out of their opportunities. It doesn't matter where you start, but where you end up."

Brian Richardson Jr. believes in this advice because he has lived it throughout his career, from working as a residence hall director at SIUE to his current role as the diversity, equity and inclusion director for the NFL's Indianapolis Colts. Richardson works to develop and implement strategies on social responsibility, inclusive hiring, supplier diversity and training.

Looking back on his time at SIUE, Richardson is thankful for the opportunities he had to learn and grow alongside his mentors in Campus Recreation, where he served as a graduate assistant.

"The hands-on experience I obtained, as well as the coaching and support along the way, are all things I utilize when mentoring students and young professionals who are trying to navigate their next stage of life," Richardson said.

SIUE Connect to Launch This Fall!

The SIUE Alumni Association is excited to announce the upcoming launch of SIUE Connect, a newly designed online experience for our alumni and friends! In addition to all of your favorite benefits, including webinars, workshops and discount codes, SIUE Connect will feature:

- A searchable alumni directory and class notes section
- Customizable profile with giving history
- Volunteer opportunities and event details

Watch for more information about SIUE Connect this fall!

A Night Among the Stars

VIRTUAL EVENT

2021 Alumni Hall of Fame Ceremony | September 23, 2021

As part of Homecoming Week, SIUE will honor nine remarkable alumni during the virtual 2021 Alumni Hall of Fame Ceremony, *A Night Among The Stars*. Through their leadership, character and hard work, these impressive alumni have made exceptional contributions in their chosen fields, in their communities and at SIUE. Watch your email and the Alumni Association's social media sites or visit siue.edu/alumni for more details about joining us for *A Night Among the Stars*.



College of Arts and Sciences

Jessica McCaskill
BA Mass Communications '06

Jessica "CasKILLA" McCaskill made her professional boxing debut in 2015. In the lightweight division, she earned the rank of number one female in the U.S. and number three in the world. Based in Chicago, Jessica was the first female to headline in the state of Illinois, making history. She has achieved

numerous accolades, including being named *Ring Magazine's* 2018 Most Inspirational Fighter after winning her first World Boxing Council title, and *World Boxing News's* 2020 Women's Fighter of the Year. Jessica was featured in the 2018 Amazon Prime documentary, "Making McCaskill." After moving to the welterweight division, she became the unified and undisputed welterweight champion in 2020. Jessica is one of only three female fighters holding the undisputed title.



College of Arts and Sciences

Bill Land
BA Mass Communications '73

Bill is the television play-by-play announcer for the San Antonio Spurs, where he has spent 18 years and earned three NBA titles. Bill's announcing career spans 17 sports, from basketball and baseball to water polo and power tumbling. From 1988-2016, Bill served as the television

sports announcer and program host for Fox Sports Net, where he covered play-by-play in the Big XII Conference, Major League Soccer and Texas Rangers baseball. Other notable accomplishments from his more than 40-year career include serving as sports director at radio and TV stations in Wichita, Kansas and Tulsa, Oklahoma. During those years, Bill was the play-by-play voice of Wichita State University, Oral Roberts University and the University of Tulsa. Bill credits his SIUE education and the live radio experience he gained at WSIE for providing him with a great foundation to enter the real world.



School of Business

Kelly Malson
BSA Accountancy '93

Kelly began her accounting career in 1994 with KPMG LLP before moving to Andersen LLP. In 2004, she became finance compliance manager for ITRON Inc.'s IEM Unit before joining World Acceptance Corporation in 2005 as vice president of internal audit. She became vice president and chief financial officer in 2006, a position she held until becoming senior vice president, chief financial officer and treasurer in 2009. Kelly retired from World Acceptance Corporation in 2014. From 2012-20, she also served on the Conn's Inc. Board of Directors as a Board member, Audit Committee member, and Nominating and Corporate Governance Committee member. Before retiring for a second time, Kelly served as chief financial officer of Nicholas Financial Inc. from 2018-19. Kelly enjoys spending time on the beach, traveling and spending time with her dachshunds.



School of Dental Medicine

Dr. Terry Barnfield
BS Biological Sciences '82, DMD '86

Terry has held a private dental practice in Salem, Ill., since his graduation. On the national level, he has been a member of the American Dental Association's (ADA) House of Delegates for more than 10 years and currently serves as the ADA Political Action Committee director for the 8th District.

Terry is a fellow in the American College of Dentists, International College of Dentists and Pierre Fauchard Academy. At the state level, he is a past president of the Illinois State Dental Society (ISDS) and continues to serve as a clinic section lead for the ISDS Foundation's Mission of Mercy events. He also served the ISDS as a trustee and in the House of Delegates. Locally, Terry is a past president of the Wabash River Dental Society and of the Salem District 111 Board of Education.



School of Education, Health and Human Behavior

Kim Gidley
BS Physical Education '89

Kim is the winningest coach in women's tennis history at the U.S. Air Force Academy (USAFA). She begins her 24th season as head coach of the women's tennis team in 2021-22 with 309 career wins. Since 2003, Kim has recorded 12 winning seasons, including leading the

USAFA to its first 20-win season at the Division I level in 2017. She has earned numerous awards for her work on and off the court, including the U.S. Professional Tennis Association's 2020 Intermountain Region College Coach of the Year. As a student-athlete, Kim earned All-American honors while helping the Cougars win the 1989 NCAA Division II national championship. She was also invited to the 1984 U.S. Olympic Trials for tennis. In 2008, Kim was inducted into the SIUE Athletics Hall of Fame.



School of Engineering

Michael Marchal
BS Construction '94

Mike is the president of Holland Construction Services, a position he has held since 2011. He began at Holland Construction as a project manager in 1997 and has 27 years of experience in the construction industry. Mike is a leader who is passionate about nurturing the growth and development of Holland

Construction, his family and his community. He has been involved with many professional organizations, including Leadership Council of Southwestern Illinois, Associated General Contractors of America Board of Directors, Big Brothers Big Sisters and the SIUE School of Engineering Construction Management Advisory Board. Mike serves as a mentor for high school and college students, and he has held active fundraising roles for the United Way of Greater St. Louis, the Greater St. Louis Area Council of the Boy Scouts of America and his church.



School of Nursing

Christina Moore, MPH, BSN, RN
BS Nursing '14

Christina is a Public Health Institute/CDC Global Strategic Information Fellow with the Center for Global Health, Division of Global HIV/AIDS and TB, at the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Country Office in Nairobi, Kenya. She conducts monitoring, evaluation, data management, reporting

and technical support for the national HIV program in Kenya. Christina has served on the International COVID-19 Task Force as a technical assistance epidemiologist. She earned a master's in public health specializing in global health from the Brown School at Washington University in St. Louis. In addition to her SIUE degree, Christina earned a bachelor's in health and society and a bachelor's in health and society with a minor in Spanish from Beloit College. Christina has completed numerous internships, community-based research and testing/treatment programs in Australia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Nicaragua and Tanzania.



School of Pharmacy

Dr. J. Cody Sandusky
PharmD '12

Cody is the president of the Illinois Pharmacists Association (IPhA) and director of pharmacy at Harrisburg Medical Center in Harrisburg, Ill. In addition to his role with IPhA, Cody serves on the American Pharmacists Association (APhA) House of Delegates, Harrisburg Medical Center Foundation

Board of Directors, and the One Shawnee Tourism Collaboration Task Force. Cody is a past member of the SIUE Pharmacy Advisory Board and Illinois Pharmacists Association Foundation Board. His career has spanned multiple arenas of pharmacy, including retail and independent community pharmacy, pharmaceutical industry consulting and health-systems pharmacy. Cody has been a featured guest speaker for the APhA, developed guidance statements for the American Society of Health-Systems Pharmacists, and been recognized by the APhA for excellence in COVID-19 vaccine education and promotion.



Graduate School

Sherri Wu
MSA Accountancy '97,
MS Computing & Information Systems '99

Sherri currently manages strategy, key accounts and revenue for VoyageOne Group. Before joining VoyageOne, she was the chief strategy officer and head of international business development of Alitrip at Alibaba Group, where she led a team in building growth opportunities

for businesses around the world. Sherri also served as head of international development for Americas at Tmall Global, as well as vice president and general manager for product and technology at Orbitz Worldwide. While serving as chief technology officer of PEAK6 Retail, Sherri built the company's e-commerce development team and designed and developed e-commerce and financial social networking websites. In addition to her master's degrees from SIUE, she also holds a bachelor's degree in economics from Nanjing University in China.

From Your Alumni Association Board President



What a year it has been.

As society grapples with systemic racism, representation and unconscious bias, the Alumni Association is no exception. To foster a more inclusive and equitable environment for all alumni, we have created a Diverse Alumni Engagement Task Force to identify areas where we can improve. This task force has implemented a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion policy and developed an Inclusive Engagement Guide for our events and programs as we strive to be more equitable and intentionally connect with diverse alumni.

Thank you to the SIUE alumni who, throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, continue to put their education and training to use on the front lines of healthcare. I am also deeply grateful for our immediate past president, Eileen Martindale, whose leadership, ability to ask the tough questions, and willingness to listen helped the Alumni Association maintain its momentum throughout the pandemic.

One positive outcome of the pandemic has been our ability to connect with alumni around the world through our virtual events, including happy hours, the Cougars Unleashed Homecoming Run, the Golden Graduation Reunion and more. Looking forward, I hope you take a moment to reach out to your friends, classmates and fellow alumni, either in person or virtually.

By engaging with the growing network of fellow SIUE graduates, you are making your Alumni Association the best it can be.

Andrew Ravanelli, PhD

BS Biology '04

President, SIUE Alumni Association Board of Directors



Stay Connected with Your Fellow Alumni!

The Alumni Association is excited to roll out an expansive chapters and networks initiative to connect with our alumni! Chapters are established based on geographic location, while networks are created around a common degree focus, shared interest, etc. Our current chapters and networks are listed below:

- **Chicago Chapter:** The first and largest regional chapter
- **Springfield, Ill. Alumni Chapter:** Established this year for alumni in the Springfield, Ill., area
- **Young Professional Network—St. Louis:** New this year for graduates from the last 10 years who reside in the St. Louis or Metro East area

Get involved in these groups by checking them out on Facebook or start your own by emailing sieualumni@siue.edu.

Learn from Experts through the Alumni Learning Consortium

Want to learn more about at-home gardening, relevant parenting topics or bridging racial divides? As a member of the Alumni Association, you have access to these and other webinars presented by experts and authors every month through the Alumni Learning Consortium.

Check out these free upcoming webinars at alumlc.org/siue:

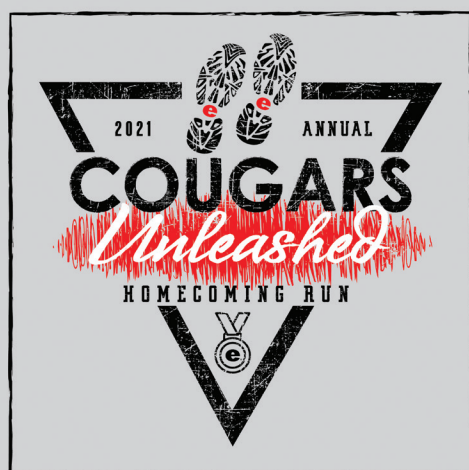
- **September 14:** Beginners: The Joy and Transformative Power of Lifelong Learning
- **September 21:** The Connector's Advantage: Get Known, Get Ahead
- **October 6:** The Unlikely Art of Parental Pressure: A Positive Approach to Pushing Your Child to Be Their Best Self
- **October 20:** Enrich: Create Time in Wealth, Money & Meaning



Save the Dates for Homecoming 2021

Mark your calendars for September 20-25 and plan to come home to celebrate SIUE Homecoming 2021. Plans are still in the works, so be sure to check the official SIUE Homecoming website for the latest information.

siue.edu/homecoming 



Cougars Unleashed Homecoming Run

Join fellow alumni and friends from all over the world for the Cougars Unleashed Homecoming Run! Complete a 10K, 5K or one-mile run in one of two ways:

- Any way and anywhere you choose during the week of September 18-25
- In-person on the beautiful SIUE campus on Saturday, Sept. 25 (subject to change due to COVID-19 regulations)

Help us celebrate the sixth year of this SIUE tradition. All proceeds from this run benefit scholarships for SIUE students.

Register today at runsignup.com/cougarsunleashed

Become an Alumni Recruitment Ambassador

Looking for a way to give back to SIUE and recruit the next class of Cougars? The Alumni Association has partnered with the Office of Admissions to create the Alumni Recruitment Ambassador Program. Alumni volunteers attend local college fairs, reach out to prospective students by email or phone, host student receptions, and much more!

Contact Kayla Staley at 618-650-3075 or kaystal@siue.edu or visit siue.edu/alumni-ambassadors. 



Fierce Urgency of Now

SIUE stands firm in its commitment to creating access for everyone, including students from racially minoritized groups; LGBTQIA+, first-generation, low-income and military students; and students with disabilities. This issue of the eConnection details many of the programs we have put in place and the initiatives that are continuing to create a more diverse, equitable and inclusive environment at SIUE, including the establishment of an Anti-Racism Task Force and appointing Jessica Harris, PhD, as our new vice chancellor for equity, diversity and inclusion.

Join us on this journey and track our progress at siue.edu/artf-dashboard.