



# Universitas 2018 Spring

May 1, 2018

## Dean's Article



In looking over the stories in this issue of *Universitas*, one cannot help thinking of the phrase: It's all about **students**!

This simple phrase should not be surprising. Universities exist to serve students in meeting educational and life goals. Yet as one works through the day-to-day challenges of keeping a university functioning—staffing classes, developing curricula, writing reports, attending meetings—one can easily get lost in detail and lose sight of the fact that all of the daily hustle and bustle is being done for one single group of people, our **students**.

There is a second group that provides a critical role in this academic enterprise; our **faculty**. Faculty and students go hand-in-hand. This issue of *Universitas* highlights the importance of faculty to student success.

PSU and the College of Arts and Sciences are fortunate to have great faculty like Virginia Rider, Barbara McClaskey and Christine Brodsky, to name a few, who are dedicating their life's work to students. They go above and beyond what happens in the classroom enriching student's lives in countless ways. Our faculty well-understand their importance in providing transformational experiences. Clyvens Exantus, David Oakley, Emily Fry, Katie McMurphy and Austin VanBecelaere have chosen the College of Arts and Sciences and PSU as their academic home. Their successes are testimony to the quality, high-impact teaching-learning experiences that faculty are providing our students. We are so proud of the accomplishments of these students.

After graduation, the PSU experience continues beyond our walls. **Graduates** like Mark Brown are succeeding in the world. In Mark's case, he is impacting the world of medicine. We see graduates like Amanda Minton being recognized for their leadership abilities. Amanda and Mark are great examples of graduates connecting the human riches of our university with the

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needs of the broader **communities** in which we live.

Robert Lee Mays and Glenda Sanderson-Mays are **alumni**, who after having graduated from PSU, went on to rich careers and lives. They chose to give back to PSU. They are impacting our future through their planned giving directly

benefitting students. We are thankful for their generosity.

This glimpse of the full circle of impact of our university, **students-faculty-graduates-communities-alumni-students**, is at once reassuring. Students and faculty are working together, accomplishing great things for the benefit of the world in which we live. Students are graduating and

making a difference in their communities. It is a dynamic and impressive circle of transformation!

Thank you for your support of Pittsburg State University and the College of Arts and Sciences.

Mary Carol G. Pomatto, University Professor and Dean

## From Haiti to Here

"If you'd have told me this 10 years ago, I don't think I'd have believed you," said Clyvens Exantus, a PSU political science major. "I've have wondered what you were up to, because it probably would have been no good."

Ten years ago, Exantus was living 2,000 miles away in his home country of Haiti. Exantus' parents moved to the U.S. when he was a child in order to seek a better life for him and his siblings, who stayed behind in their home county.

"I grew up with my grandmother first," said Exantus. "She passed away when I was about 10. I then was sent to live with my Auntie whose name was Sheila. She put an emphasis on going to school."

Because they had moved to the U.S., his parents were able to pay for private school.

"That's a luxury not every kid in Haiti has," said Exantus. "Now, I just want to emphasize what private school in Haiti is." He pauses for a chuckle before adding, "It's not the private school of here, but still, I was able to get an education."

Thanks to his aunt's insistence on the importance of academics, and his parents' financial support, Exantus began to see the possibilities an education could provide.

"Most of my peers weren't going to high school," said Exantus. "My auntie and grandma really wanted me to be different. I guess I inherited their competitive nature. I wanted to do better than the rest of my peers. I had dreams of becoming a lawyer."

After spending his entire childhood away from his parents, Exantus found himself, at the age of 17, moving from Haiti live with them in Maryland.

"It was a culture shock," said Exantus. "There was no uniform to wear, buses came to pick you up and you didn't have to pay the woman who drove you to school."

Not only did Exantus have to learn a new culture, he also had to reconsider his relationship with his parents — especially his father, who had transformed his own life from math teacher in Haiti to non-commissioned officer in the Army.

"I'd never lived with my dad," said Exantus. "So, I had this picture in my head of a math teacher. But then I came to live with him and here was this incredibly competitive man. He woke up early for P.T. (physical training), and took pride in what he did. His Army friends would come over and I remember thinking, 'I want that type of brotherhood.' So, I knew I wanted to join the Army."

His parents would move several times over the subsequent years, eventually settling in Fort Riley, Kansas, where his father currently is stationed. It was at PSU that Exantus was able to combine his two passions, military and academics, into one by contracting in the ROTC program.

"I actually Googled colleges in Kansas, and Pittsburg State showed up," said Exantus. "I saw the Gorilla mascot and thought, 'Well, this is unique.' When I toured



campus, I was shown the ROTC Hall of Fame and that's what sold me. I saw the type of people that graduated from here. I went home and told my dad I knew where I was going."

Exantus has made the most of his time while at PSU, and, according to Major Eric Hollingsworth of PSU's Military Science department, he has a bright future.

"He's a hard worker, and he's hungry," said Hollingsworth. "A lot of the cadets haven't had the trying life experience Clyvens has had. He's definitely an outstanding example of the type of officer this program is known for producing."

For his part, Exantus understands the tremendous opportunities he's had from Pittsburg State and the Army.

"I can't say thank you enough," he said. "Think about it: A kid from the poorest country in the western hemisphere. For me to get an opportunity to come to Pittsburg State and not only graduate college, but to also commission in the United States Army, the greatest fighting force the world has ever seen. It's beyond my wildest dreams."

# Students' Work is 'For the Birds'

"From the Ozarks to urban areas, their research, they say, is for the birds."

In fact, the opportunity to study birds in unique ways is why the three students chose PSU for their advanced degrees.

Student Katie McMurry, who earned her undergraduate degree in biology from PSU in 2016, wanted to stick around for two more years for the chance to study with Christine Brodsky. An assistant professor, Brodsky's work in urban and avian ecology has gained media attention as far away as Baltimore, Maryland, where she has worked with public schools to study bird habitat.

Students Michael Barnes, a graduate of the University of Tennessee at Knoxville, and

David Hollie, a graduate of the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, had their sights set on doing research for the Missouri Ozark Forest Ecosystems Project, or MOFEP. The 100-year-old data collection project began in 1991 across three counties in Southwestern Missouri.

One of the most comprehensive forest management studies in North America, is based on one question: How can foresters best manage forests to provide wood products, as well as benefit wildlife, provide for public recreation, and keep forests healthy for the long-term? Among the project's goals: to gather data about the effects of the region's heavy tree harvesting on migratory songbirds.

The reputation of Andrew George, an assistant professor whose post-doctoral work was part of that study, was what drew Barnes and Hollie to PSU.

"I wanted more research experience, and his track record brought me here," Barnes said of George. "And there are lots of opportunities to help undergrad students here; I taught an ELS course last semester."

Hollie ultimately hopes to teach or work for an NGO or perhaps the Nature

Conservancy, while Barnes wants to teach one day at the university level.

George, in turn, said he is learning from the two students.

"David is a world-class birder and photographer on eBird, and Michael has a great deal of knowledge in gray bats so is helping me with an ongoing research project related to that," George said. "We're learning from each other. They're outstanding students, and we're fortunate to have them here."

McMurry, meanwhile, has been assisting Brodsky in conducting research on ecology at a residential scale, looking at how property owners impact birds and butterflies, specifically.

"What is the implication of their management practices on the environment?" McMurry said she wanted to know.

McMurry would like to leverage her degree and experience to one day work as a naturalist, perhaps at a state or national park.



## Keeping up PACE

Students from the Irene Ransom Bradley School of Nursing earned credit for working as volunteers at PACE in the Ninth Ward of New Orleans, Louisiana.

PACE (Program of All Inclusive Care for the Elderly) promotes the health, independence and dignity of senior citizens by enabling frail older adults to live in their homes and in the community as long as medically and socially feasible.

It includes Adult Day Health Centers, primary and specialty physician care, medications, rehabilitative therapy, personal care services provided on site with a focus on preventative care.

The students aren't the first from PSU to do so. Since 2011, more than 50 Gorillas have volunteered to serve at the center over winter break. University Professor Barbara McClaskey started the program as a replacement for her department's annual trip to Juarez, Mexico.

"I want to expose students to a different cultural environment," said McClaskey, who accompanied them on the trip. "As they go forward in their profession, it will be important for them to be able to relate to and care for a diverse population."



"They come away each year with an appreciation for different kinds of elderly care in a different area of the U.S."

Students worked in the medical clinic assessing patients, assisted with

physical and occupational therapy, and interacted with them socially.

"There is a significant need for nurses caring for the elderly," McClaskey said, "so this is a great experience."

Her class, Transcultural Health Care, comes with three credit hours, provided the students also complete a journal and assigned readings in tandem with the trip.

Students raised their own funds to go on the trip, covering hotel costs, meals, and incidentals. They also were able to do a bit of sightseeing on the trip, including visiting

historic Jackson Square and the French Quarter.

Mariah Zerr, a senior from Pittsburg, agreed the experience was a valuable one for many reasons.

"It was a completely different environment from here," Zerr said.

She noticed that from food, to living styles, to public transportation, to social interaction and dialect, the South is much different than the Midwest.

Stephanie Edwards, a senior from Frontenac, said it was worth giving up part of her winter break for.

"I would encourage other students who come after us to do it," Edwards said. "The juniors now definitely should do it next year. It's a unique opportunity you might not ever get again."

McClaskey said she is proud of her students for volunteering.

"These students do an incredible job of adapting to a different care setting in a very short period of time," she said.

## PRAD Returns from NYC

PSU's Public Relations & Advertising club (PRAD) returned on Sunday, April 16, 2017 from a five-day professional engagement trip to New York City. Fifteen students and two faculty members spent several days visiting top public relations and advertising firms including J. Walter Thompson, Zeno Group, Rosen, Finn Partners and Fleishman Hillard.

PSU students gained firsthand knowledge of the skill set needed to succeed in today's PR and advertising fields. Students noticed the increased emphasis on social and digital campaigns, and the way these new media networks have transformed human relationships.

"One thing that surprised me was the amount of research. They have teams that look at data from different angles at each stage of the process," said Alexis Arenas-Andrade, senior from Springdale, Ark. majoring in communication with an emphasis in broadcasting and minor in

Spanish. "They stressed the importance of being a dynamic worker, as well as to be open to change."

"All the firms we visited had something new to share with us about specific programs and internship positions they offer, who their clients were and how they handle certain situations in PR and advertising," said Natalie Coomes, senior communication major with an emphasis in PR from Frontenac.

PSU students were able to meet and learn from innovative practitioners. At J. Walter Thompson Worldwide (JWT), the creators of the Tribeca Film Festival ReActor, a one-of-a-kind experiential system that combines voice and facial recognition with motion technology to record people re-enacting notable scenes from beloved films shared their knowledge and experience.

"One agency that really caught my attention was JWT. They set high expectations for themselves if their work doesn't move the dial against three metrics, they crumble it up and start over," said Aspen Renee Ghanchi, junior in communication from Oswego, KS. "They actually change the way people feel, think, and act- that's when culture starts to shift," continued Ghanchi.

The accessibility and relatability of the firm directors, agency heads, project coordinators, creative teams and research and data analysts impacted several attendees.

"I work hard but being in NYC and seeing that young people around my age have made it possible to work in NYC makes me want to work even harder," said Justine Barrett, double major in marketing and graphics management from Olathe, KS.

"The most surprising thing to me was that they all said the same thing 'you're on the right track'," stated Ryan Urban, junior in communication from Louisburg, KS.

After nine months of fundraising, event planning, and client service projects, PRAD was able to raise the funds necessary to travel with help from the Department of Communication and the Communication Research Lab (CRL).

Many returned with a deeper appreciation of their education at Pitt State.

"Most of the agencies encouraged us to branch out and be fluent in multiple disciplines (rather than just PR or just advertising), which is exactly what the Department of Communication at PSU teaches us," said Cali Cox, public relations, senior from Alliance, NE.

"This trip just further solidified my certainty in being a public relations major," said Alexandra Odell, public relations, from Overland Park and PRAD president. "I



found so many new opportunities that I never knew were available to me."

Several stated they were able to see the big picture and gain new insight into their career fields.

"It was interesting to know how well their teams collaborated and how they work together to create wonderful campaigns and movements for their clients. Abigail White, sophomore, communication major with an emphasis in public relations from Ottawa, KS. "This trip helped me realize the possibilities that are out there for me as a communications major in our modern society," she continued.

"There are so many different jobs out there and going to a giant firm and getting to know about each agency really puts that into perspective- the scope of our career choices," said Chloe Biancarelli, senior in communication major from Cherokee.

Other students attending include the following: Stacey Burke, communication major with an emphasis in advertising minoring in graphic design, Frontenac; Erin DeWeese, communication major with an emphasis in advertising minoring in photography, Belton, MO; Skylar Hoch, communication major with an emphasis in advertising minoring in leadership studies, Basehor, KS; Sarah Joshway,

communication major with an emphasis in public relations minoring in business administration, Lees Summit, MO; Sydney Shields, communication major with an emphasis in public relations minoring in sociology, Bartlesville, OK; and Peyton Walker, communication major with an emphasis in public relations minoring in history, Knoxville, TN.

For more information about PRAD Visit: [Facebook.com/PSUPRAD](https://www.facebook.com/PSUPRAD)

## Bradley School of Nursing Celebrates Two Record Scores

Students, faculty, and staff at Pittsburg State University's Irene Ransom Bradley School of Nursing are celebrating two record-breaking accomplishments this week.

University administrators received official notice that PSU's 2017 Bachelor of Science in Nursing graduates achieved a first-time pass rate of 94.29 percent on the NCLEX-RN exam, the test all nurses must pass in order to be licensed. It's the school's highest number in over a decade and nearly 7 percent higher than the national average.

"It's our highest pass rate since at least 2005," said Cheryl Giefer, director of the Bradley School of Nursing. "It's an important accomplishment because it reflects the quality of our program, and because employers know our graduates are ready to work."

Normally, the NCLEX pass rate alone would be cause for celebration, but the Bradley School of Nursing also achieved another record in 2017: one that has a special meaning for Giefer.

"Our 2017 completion rate was 97.26 percent," said Giefer. "A completion rate that high is almost unheard of in the world of undergraduate nursing education. Obtaining a completion rate this high is

only possible because our School of Nursing faculty believe the field of nursing is a calling as much as it is a career. They'll do what it takes to make sure our students succeed."

One of the keys to having such a high completion rate is the level of personalized attention given to students who might initially find the curriculum overwhelming.

"Nursing isn't easy," said Giefer. "Students can suddenly find themselves falling behind. Our previous director, Mary Carol Pomatto, understood the importance of identifying students who may be at-risk early in their nursing academic career. She helped design our 'Enrichment' program which mentors these students through tutoring and dedicated study time. It's very prescriptive and, as you can tell, very effective."

This type of personalized academic programming also is very popular with employers who actively are seeking qualified nurses to meet a growing demand.



"In 2016, the Kansas Hospital Association reported a staff-nurse vacancy rate of 8.3 percent," said Giefer. "That's nearly 1,000 unfilled positions in Kansas alone. As our population ages, the demand for qualified nurses is certain to increase. We're doing our part to help meet our state's healthcare needs."

Which leads us to one final number Giefer is proud to list.

"Our placement rate for graduates is 100 percent," said Giefer. "Many of our students have two or more job offers to choose from after graduation, which makes all of the hard work worthwhile."

# She Speaks for the Trees

During the Fall Semester of 2017, Emily Fry was in a hurry.

"There's only one of me," she said, "and I'm racing fall."

The arrival of fall meant that leaves will be dropping soon, making it more difficult to identify each tree species.

Fry settled on 250 trees in sections on the Oval, by the University Lake, and in front of Russ Hall — a swath of campus that takes up several acres and includes both native and non-native species.

Her purpose was simple, yet impactful: "There's data on how much pollution a college campus can create, and we were interested to see how much it can get rid of," said Fry, who is working closely with Assistant Professor of Biology Christine Brodsky, a specialist in urban ecology.

Fry, a senior from Paola, came to PSU to pursue a degree in a relatively new major and

one that is unique to Kansas: the Sustainability, Society & Resource Management program, which is a joint initiative between the biology, geography, and communication departments.

"I transferred here from Johnson County Community College especially for this program," Fry said. "I wanted to do something in sustainability or with an environmental aspect, and then found out this was here."

Her fiancé, a track athlete, was searching for a university with an indoor facility and learned about the newly-built Plaster Center at PSU.

"We both found what we wanted," said Fry, who came here in 2014 and is now a senior.

In May, Fry received a grant from the Kansas IDeA Network of Biomedical Research Excellence, a program of the National Institute of Health. It helped provide funding for materials and equipment.

With each tree, she must measure the diameter, calculate the height, and enter the species name into iTree, which then uses a complex equation to report how much carbon that tree can sequester in one year.

She is tagging each tree with a small

silver circle stamped with a number and is using GPS coordinates.

"We hope by the end of the project the campus would have an interactive map to track how much carbon is being taken out of the atmosphere and which trees are the most important in this regard on campus," said Brodsky.

The support and encouragement Brodsky has offered, Fry said, has been invaluable.

Along the way, she's had a few challenges that even a professor can't curtail: squirrels, which are attracted to the shiny tags and end up chewing them, and other students, which also are attracted to the shiny tags but evidently take them as keepsakes or, perhaps, jewelry.

Both Fry and Brodsky are proud of the results, which Fry presented at the K-INBRE Symposium in Overland Park this past January.

Among Fry's results: Pittsburg State's ginkgo tree — the only living species in the division Ginkgophyta, found in fossils dating back 270 million years — is at the top of the list for super pollution absorbers.

In addition, Fry is compiling results from her secondary study: how trees and nature affects student cognition.

"I'm hoping to see if green trees on campus have an impact on students," she said. "I'm looking at their ability to remember numbers, and at their emotions, before and after a 20-minute walk."

"After [graduation], I'd like to investigate a career in the arborist industry," she said. "This has definitely helped me get experience to do that."



## Saving History

For several years, the Crawford County Historical Museum had struggled financially, drew few visitors, and had just one staff member who was not paid. There were no volunteers; there was no board. That lone staff member turned the keys and the

contents over to the Crawford County Commission in May 2015.

A few months later, with the endorsement of the commission, Amanda Minton, an adjunct history teacher in PSU's Department of History, Philosophy, and Social Sciences,

stepped forward to lead the effort to revitalize and reopen it.

"I'd done an internship at the museum as a student," said Minton, who earned her bachelor's degree in 2003 and her master's

degree in 2011, both from PSU. "I felt strongly that it [should] be saved."

Joining her was Mason Lovelace, who holds a master's degree in history from PSU and now serves as vice president of the board.

"I read about the museum's plight and it tugged at my heartstrings," he said. "It's an asset that was lost to the community, and I knew we ought to do something about it."

Minton, Lovelace, and others leveraged community resources and grants to help make repairs and carve out new and interesting spaces. They developed a new logo and a new online presence.

They also engaged groups of PSU students, but thanks to PSU's ROTC program, they didn't have to twist too many arms.

"Cadets in the program are always looking for positive ways to make an impact," said Savannah Mitchell, a senior from Louisburg who is a member of Pittsburg State ROTC.

Mitchell and her fellow cadets signed on to assist tasks like moving heavy collections, reconstructing exhibit walls, and during large events, traffic control and parking. At a recent World War II re-enactment, they engaged with visitors by providing an up-close look at military vehicles.

"The re-opening of the museum has provided a learning experience for all ages and we are honored to be a part of that," Mitchell said. "History is and always will be an important part of our future career as Army Officers, and we are lucky to be a part

of a town that finds preserving history is important. Understanding the heritage of the United States and what the soldiers [who came] before us sacrificed to protect this country's freedom is invaluable."

PSU Freshman Lauren Hurt, from Pittsburg, remembers as an elementary school student going to the museum on field trips — particularly the historic general store located on the museum grounds.

She was happy to be part of breathing new life into it as a member of Circle K, a collegiate service club that Minton advises. Circle K also plans to volunteer to help at the upcoming 1940s Christmas party and with children's programs next summer.

Other PSU groups involved include the PSU Volleyball team, which cleaned and organized the grocery store and school house, Interior Design students who created the Pioneer Room Exhibit, and the School of Construction, which is building a pavilion for outdoor educational events.

"I think Mrs. Minton is doing a great job in bringing more attention to the museum and making history fun and interactive," Hurt said. "She is doing a lot to attract more visitors."



Minton said she's not done yet.

"It is overwhelming to believe how much was accomplished in under two years, but there is still much to do," she said.

That includes a new facade to give the museum a new look. Over Christmas break, all fluorescent lights will be replaced with LED bulbs and new flooring will be installed in the Education Room.

"As a PSU alumna, I feel that it is important for the students and faculty to give back to the community that gives so generously to our University," Minton said. "When we perform community service alongside students, we are teaching the students how to get involved in the community and after graduation, and they hopefully will want to donate their time, talent and treasure to their future communities."

## Virginia Rider: A Mentor Among Us

Ashleigh Elbert, a graduate student, hopes future generations will benefit from what she and classmates are researching.

She and her fellow students are among the many enrolled in PSU's premedical program who look to Virginia Rider, a University Professor in the Department of Biology since 2000, as a mentor.

When one listens to her students speak about the impact she has had on them, it is no wonder Rider was chosen as the recipient of this year's Joan S. Hunt Distinguished Mentoring Award.

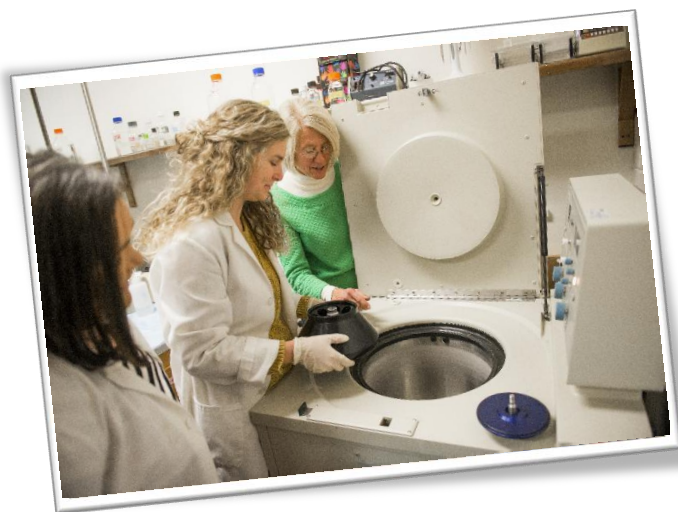
Her students say Rider pushes them to be their best.

Virginia Rider earned her Ph.D. from Arizona State and continued her research training as a postdoctoral fellow in Cambridge, England, and then at Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, Texas. She also taught at Tufts University, where she developed an independent research program investigating the hormonal control of uterine cell proliferation and differentiation.

Rider looked to Hunt, a reproductive biologist, as a model researcher and teacher. Hunt—one of the world's foremost

scientists in the area of reproductive immunology—has held many titles at KU Medical Center, including Vice Chancellor for Research and President of the Research Institute. She also founded the K-INBRE statewide symposium—a symposium Rider has attended ever since with colleagues and students.

"[Hunt's] area was implantation and the immunology of pregnancy," Rider said. "How does the endocrine system talk with the immune system in the establishment of pregnancy?"



One of Rider's students is studying proteins involved in embryo implantation in hopes that understanding the process will help women who want to have children someday.

"Some of the best discoveries in the lab have come from undergraduate students working there. They don't even know how significant their observations are, often times," she said.

Rider, meanwhile, said she enjoys their successes more than her own.

"It has to be that way. If you want to mentor students, that's a critical part of it. You have to be just as excited — maybe more so — for them as you are for yourself," she said.

Rider says that Hunt's passion for mentoring also was evident throughout her

prominent career. Spanning many years as a researcher, administrator and as Principal Investigator of the K-INBRE, she served as a valued mentor to numerous emerging scientists throughout Kansas, as well as internationally. Today Rider is mentoring her students in those research topics, taking up where Hunt left off.

Nominated by colleagues, Rider is the first from PSU to receive the award. It was presented at the K-INBRE Symposium in

Overland Park, Kansas. A huge contingent from PSU including more than 40 PSU biology and chemistry students, faculty members from Biology and Chemistry, and a bevy of high-level administrators including President Scott journeyed to Overland Park to witness the honor given Dr. Rider.

The honor included a \$5,000 financial award to be used for research and/or mentoring activities.

K-INBRE is a project funded by the National Institutes of Health that includes nine academic institutions in Kansas, including PSU. One of the goals of the K-INBRE program is to identify and recruit promising undergraduate science students into careers in biomedical research in Kansas.

The institutions who partner K-INBRE are as follows: University of Kansas Medical Center (lead institution), University of Kansas-Lawrence (scientific partner), Kansas State University (scientific partner), Emporia State University, Fort Hays State University, Haskell Indian Nations University, Langston University, Pittsburg State University, Washburn University, Wichita State University.

## Theater Unplugged

During the fall semester, a unique class at PSU gave Austin VanBecelaere the chance to step off stage and assume a new role: Director. The experience, he said, will add weight to his portfolio that he can show to future prospective employers, and has been transformative in how he views acting and the business of theatre.

VanBecelaere is one of seven theatre students enrolled in Cynthia Allan's Comm-544 Stage Direction class who made a directing debut last December with "Theatre Unplugged: Student-Directed One-Acts." Their shows were performed in the Grubbs Hall Studio Theatre.

Allan started the Theatre Unplugged program when she joined the faculty of the Department of Communication in 1999.

"Previous directing classes had always done pieces of things — scenes — and they hadn't done them for the public," she said. "I felt if you were going to be graduating and

heading out to a job at a school teaching theater, or anyplace else in the industry, and you still had not been put through the whole process of theater, that was a real weakness."

Allan's class requires that students select a script, defend their choice, hold auditions, select cast and crew, organize their time, and do their own marketing and programs.

"The one thing they can't have with this acoustic theatre is they're not meeting with set designers, costumers — it's not a fully-realized production," Allan said. "But it gives them the experience of using all of these other skills. It's not about making the stage pretty — it's creating a plan and bringing it to life from the page to the stage."

Allan teaches her students about script analysis, theories, ground plans, and creative exercises. They learn blocking, or the movement of actors on the stage. And they must learn the tedious business of scheduling rehearsals and production meetings.



VanBecelaere chose "The Last Yankee" by playwright Arthur Miller. It stars Alex McNay, who VanBecelaere grew up acting side by side with, and Duke Walter who is also a regular in Pittsburg Community Theater.

"When I read it, it really spoke to me," said VanBecelaere of his script.

"It's really different, being on the directing side of things. You have to shift your focus when you're going from an actor to a director. You're not reacting to characters on stage, but understanding them collectively. You have to get across to the actors what you're visualizing. And there's a lot of decision making to be done. This has given me a whole new appreciation. I never really understood how hard it could be until I put on the directing cap. It's been eye-opening."

Other directors include students Stephen Reida, who chose "Bolero" by David Ives; Ayman Syed, who chose "He Said, She Said" by Alice Gerstenberg; Ila Phelps, who chose "Death Comes for a

Wedding" by Joe Tracz; Krista Hightower, who chose "The Worker" by Walter Wykes; Curtis Wilkins, who chose "An Interview" by David Mamet; and Amanda Longpine, who chose "For Whom the Southern Belle Tolls" by Christopher Durang.

Allan pops in to rehearsals randomly and unannounced.

"I will help, but they have to ask me specifically," she said. "They are not allowed to say, 'What did you think?'"

Students are expected to turn in portfolios to Allan the week following their productions with an analysis of their script, a critique of the process including what worked and what they need to improve on for next time, and a full design concept if they were to have an unlimited budget and more time.

Sometimes things don't go so well, Allan said.

"But if it's a flop, and you recognize that, and you address it in your critique, that's part of the learning experience," she said.

"Sometimes failing is the best learning experience. To stand there and feel your soul melting out of your body. This is a safe environment to do that in. You won't lose a job, you won't get kicked out of the industry, and you can use that experience next time."

As for VanBecelaere, he hopes to land a theatrical carpentry job after graduation in May 2018 in order to get his foot in the door of the industry.

"I'll apply anywhere and everywhere," he said. "A lot of actors, including Harrison Ford, take tech jobs, smaller jobs in theatre, and they grind until they build a rapport with their superiors and are given a chance. If you nail that chance, you might get to go on. I plan to put in the grind until it turns into an acting career or it turns into something else. I can't imagine a world in which I'm not involved in theatre in one way or another. I don't want to."

## Oliver at the George Billis Gallery

Jamie Oliver, Chair of the Department of Art, has added something special to his resumé: A solo exhibition in the George Billis Gallery in New York City, which ended Jan. 6, 2018.

The gallery has been part of the Chelsea Art District for 20 years. It is not Oliver's first time there; he showed there in solo exhibitions in 2006 and 2010, and in group exhibitions several times.

Heather Horton, a PSU graduate (2005, 2007) who turned art into a business by opening her own custom cake shop in downtown Pittsburg, said Oliver's work as a professional artist inspired her — so much so that when she won a trip to New York City last year, she made it a point to seek out his work in an exhibit.

"I pretty much took every class that he offered," Horton said. "Jamie is the perfect example of what a 'working artist' is and can be. Art is not just about creating. It is a full-time job. You have to work it to make it work for you."

A native of Jacksonville, Illinois, Oliver received his Master's degree in Fine Arts from Tulane University in New Orleans, a Master of Arts degree from

Eastern Illinois University in Charleston, Illinois, and a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Denison University in Granville, Ohio. He taught at Denison as an assistant professor of painting and drawing from 1997 to 2001.

He joined the PSU faculty as an assistant professor in 2001. He currently serves as the interim chair of the Department of Art.

His solo exhibitions have been at the Spiva Center for the Arts in Joplin, Missouri; the Strawn Art Gallery in Jacksonville, Illinois; the University of Oklahoma Lightwell Gallery; and Art Central in Carthage, Missouri. Professor Oliver has been part of group exhibitions at Missouri Southern State University in Joplin; the Brooklyn Art Library in Brooklyn, New York; the Maryland Federation of Art Gallery in Annapolis, Maryland; the Art Institute of Seattle Galleries in Seattle, Washington, and many others.

"He's very diligent and professional with his work,"

Horton said. "He constantly has projects going on and is constantly sending his work off to galleries and entering it into shows."

In organizing his paintings, Oliver said he combines aspects from multiple sources — drawings from observation, photographing reference, and memories of being in the place.

His paintings of crowds will immediately feel familiar to anyone who has ever been to a community festival — Little Balkans Days



and Fourth of July town-wide celebrations in Pittsburg come to mind. Dads wearing baseball caps, moms pushing strollers. A backpack slung over a shoulder.

Oliver's goal is to integrate the viewer of his paintings as an active participant in the experience of his work.

"Rather than just viewing the work passively, the viewer is asked to engage in the work both formally and conceptually by filtering

A concert by the SEK Symphony Orchestra

the generalized scene through his or her own personal memories of similar events or spaces," Oliver said.

He said that he also enjoys engaging students by involving them in the business side of an exhibition, including preparing and packaging paintings for shipping. Horton said she appreciated that as a student. As a professional herself, she knows how challenging it can be to be creative on a daily basis.

world congresses and international

"People often think that fame and fortune equal success. To me, success is being able to continue your craft over years and years," she said. "Success as an artist is continually growing, changing and adapting with the art scene. Success is being able to wake up and go to work and produce."

Oliver is a member of the College Art Association, Popular Culture Association, and Founders in Art: Theory and Education.

While the musicians have benefitted, York

## Local Composers Shine at SEK Symphony

this year featured two original works by composers Barbara York and John Ross. Both York and Ross call McCray Hall on the Pittsburg State campus home.

York is the music department's staff pianist. But she is also more than that.

Across the nation, musicians are recording CDs of York's songs and doctoral students are basing their theses on her compositions. Her score and lyrics for the Canadian musical *Colette* won a Dora Mavor Moore Award (Canada's version of a Tony Award). In addition, she's been invited to present at

symposiums, and she's received several commissions.

Her composition, a seven-movement piece entitled "Spiral Road," is based on the seven poems she wrote years ago, each about one of the seven chakras.

This year's symphony season is dedicated to female composers, so conductor Raul Munguia was excited to include it in the lineup.

"They can't go and find a recording of this anywhere to listen to — they are performing this music for the very first time," he said of the orchestra. "That's both challenging and thrilling. And the audience will be able to say they heard a world premiere."

Because York works with vocal music faculty Stella Hastings and Patrick Howle — both noted performers — she wrote it specifically for their voices.

says she has, too.

"I am at each rehearsal, which is rare for a composer, because I get to find out if the way I wrote it actually works for live musicians," she said. "I can tweak, make adjustments."

The concert also featured music theory and composition professor John Ross.

The orchestra played Ross's fanfare *Columbia*, a work he wrote in 2003 in memory of the seven astronauts of the space shuttle Columbia who perished upon re-entering earth atmosphere.

A respected composer, Ross's music has been performed at forums, several university music schools, and by many orchestras both in this country and in France. His awards are numerous.

"One of the good things about this is when you're working with the orchestra on a piece and the composer is next to you — that's an immediate feedback that you get," Munguia said. "You can ask the composer...what would you like to hear? What parts of this section can be played louder or softer? Very different than when you're working on a piece by Mozart — who do you ask?"



## 1.4 Million Grant Received

The Irene Rance Brandley School of Nursing has received a two-year grant, known as the Advanced Nursing Education Workforce (ANEW) program. This grant will support

innovative academic-practice partnerships that prepare students to become primary care practitioners in rural and underserved settings.

The grant will be used to help qualified students in Pittsburg State's BSN-DNP program fully cover the cost of their education.

"This is monumental for our students and our program," said Cheryl Giefer, director of the Irene Ransom Bradley School of Nursing. "It's actually a two-part grant. It will provide funding for faculty, equipment and program development, but more importantly it will cover tuition and expenses for many of our BSN-DNP students."

One of the DNP students who'll benefit from the grant is Jordan Howard. A father of three young children, Howard is currently working the overnight shift as an Emergency Room nurse at Via Christi Hospital in Pittsburg.

"[Receiving the grant] is a huge weight off of my shoulders," Howard said. "I won't have to struggle financially through school, and I'll have more time for my studies. That's a big thing, especially having three kids and a fourth on the way."

Howard, who earned his BSN degree from Pittsburg State, credits faculty member Amy

Hite with inspiring him to pursue his Doctor of Nursing Practice degree.

"I've actually worked with Dr. Hite in the ER," Howard said. "As we talked about career choices, I mentioned how I've always been interested in teaching but don't want to stop practicing. She motivated me to go back to school and earn my DNP because it would allow me to do both."

The flexibility of the DNP degree is one of the primary reasons Pittsburg State's newest program has become so popular.

"It gives [students] so many more opportunities," Giefer said. "As a graduate, you can practice at the boundaries of nursing. If they enjoy being a nurse, they'll really enjoy practicing as a nurse practitioner."

As for Howard, his plans align perfectly with the ANEW program's goal of serving medically underserved and rural settings.

"I grew up in this area," Howard said. "It's given me so much. I want to give back by providing those who are less fortunate with the best patient care and the best evidence-based practice possible."



## Honeywell Partners with PSU and is Pleased with Polymers

Officials from Pittsburg State University and Honeywell Federal Manufacturing & Technologies in Kansas City signed an agreement in 2017 that paves the way for expanded research opportunities, technology exchange and closer collaboration between the two entities.

PSU President Steve Scott and Honeywell

Stubenhofer signed a master collaboration agreement in a ceremony at PSU's Tyler Research Center, home to the Kansas Polymer Research Center.

"What I'm most excited about is where we are going next," Scott said, noting that building partnerships is something PSU has done for a long time. "Time after time we've built partnerships that have allowed us to leverage up and do things that are pretty amazing."

Vice President Stubenhofer said Honeywell is interested in the work going on at PSU in the field of polymer chemistry.

"Pittsburg (State) has done a fantastic job of developing the polymer piece of this," Stubenhofer said.

She said Honeywell's mission in Kansas City is about national defense.

"We feel very strongly connected to the Department of Defense," Stubenhofer said. "We have, over the past several years, developed [university]

centers of excellence with the intent that we want to move forward where the Department of Energy and the National Nuclear Security Administration goes with future products. We want to make them safer (and) more manufacturable and do it in a way that really benefits the nation."

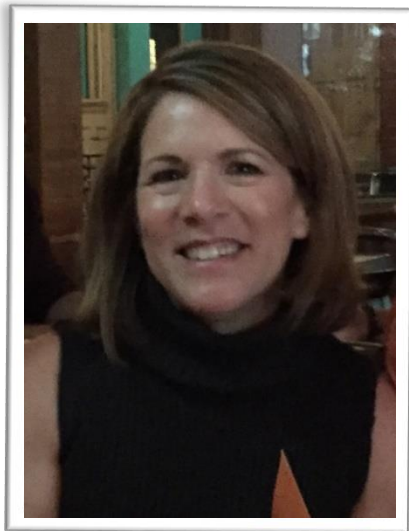
Accompanying Stubenhofer to PSU was a Honeywell team comprised of centers of excellence leaders and scientists. After the signing, the group toured the labs at the KPRC and the Department of Chemistry and then visited Plastics Engineering Technology at the Kansas Technology Center.



Vice President of Engineering Robin

Stubenhofer

## Math Professor Part of Grant



Karla Childs, an associate professor in Pittsburg State University's Department of Mathematics, and four faculty members at Emporia State University, are working with three Kansas school districts this year to improve math and science education in rural schools.

In 2017, the team of educators received a \$194,605 grant from the U.S. Department of Education to deepen the cross-curricular content knowledge of K-6th grade mathematics and science teachers in three districts: Neodesha (USD 461), Independence (USD 446) and Dodge City (USD 443).

"Teachers in rural districts may not have as much access to professional development as teachers in other areas," Childs said.

## Family and Consumer Science Faculty Leads Webinars



While presenting at the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) conference, Dr. Amber Tankersley was approached by a managing editor for the new early childhood education division of the online professional development company, continued, an education platform that offers a variety of webinars to its membership. Since learning about this company, Dr. Tankersley has recorded two webinars and has joined their advisory board.

Her first webinar, *Budget Friendly, Creative Play Ideas Targeting STEM Standards in the Early Childhood Classroom*, focuses on locating and using inexpensive materials to incorporate STEM standards in an early childhood classroom through play experiences. The second webinar, *Essentials for the New Early Childhood Teacher*, focuses on tips to help new early childhood teachers make a smooth transition into their new role. Dr. Tankersley is excited to share her knowledge about working in the field of early childhood with others.

## Teaching Physician of the Year

Mark Brown--a Freeman Health System emergency physician--was named the Emergency Medicine Residency Teaching Physician of the Year at the Freeman Health System Medical Resident Graduation.

Brown received his bachelor of science in biology from PSU in 2007. In 2011, he earned his medical degree from the Kirksville College of Osteopathic Medicine at A.T. Still University in Kirksville, Mo.

"Being awarded the Teaching Physician of the Year is a great honor," Brown said. "Because it is given to you by the residents that you help to teach. You spend hundreds of hours a year with the residents, helping to further their education. The fact that they

give you recognition for your commitment is very humbling."

Brown, a native of Coffeyville, Kansas, credits Pittsburg State with helping him begin his journey into the medical field.

"Pitt State offers preparatory classes that are on par with any other medical or professional school," he said. "The education that I received at PSU made it possible for me to succeed at medical school."

He said he chose Pitt State for several reasons.

"One of the main reasons was that my father went there in the 1960s when it was Kansas State Teachers College," Brown said. "He

always talked about the school and living in Pittsburg. The other reason was its outstanding reputation for its students getting accepted into professional schools."



# Discovering Oneself at PSU

David Oakley found three things at PSU.

"Pitt State was transformative for me. I wasn't the world's best high school student, I hadn't found myself yet," he said. "I was able to discover myself here, find my passion – and I found my wife!"

On Oct. 13, he was back at PSU to accept one of three 2017 Dr. Kenneth K. Bateman Outstanding Alumni Awards at a reception in the Wilkinson Alumni Center, and was honored during the Homecoming Parade and football game, as well. Oakley also spent time on campus visiting with current students.

"It was surprising and very exciting," said Oakley of learning of the award.

Oakley earned a bachelor's degree in political science from PSU in 1998, a master's degree in public administration from the University of Oklahoma in 2005, two masters of military arts and sciences degrees from the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College and the U.S. Army's School of Advanced Military Studies in 2012 and 2013, and a PhD in security studies from Kansas State University in 2016.

He has served nearly 20 years as a national security professional in the U.S. Army and the intelligence community.

Oakley began his career as a field artillery officer, but he got his start in the PSU Army Reserve Officer Training Corps.

He went on to serve in South Korea and Fort Sill, Oklahoma. He left active duty for a few years, serving as a Staff Operations Officer in the Central Intelligence Agency and as a contractor within the National Counterterrorism Center.

Since 2007, Oakley has served as a strategist at National Defense University in Washington, D.C.; U.S. Army North/Fifth Army in Fort Sam Houston, Texas; at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas; and with 1st Infantry Division at Fort Riley, Kansas, and in Iraq.

Oakley, who now lives in Ashburn, Virginia, is currently working on getting his first book, *Militarizing Intelligence: The CIA/DoD Post-Cold War Relationship*, published. Oakley and his wife, Kristen Jensen Oakley (BA 1999), have four children, Taylor, who is 17; Tanner, who is 16; Tatum, who is 14; and Tyler, who is 8.

While at PSU, Oakley was elected president of the Student Government Association and the Senior Gifts Council and was a member of the Student Foundation Board and Lambda Chi Alpha.

"I don't think I would have been able to go to a larger university and gotten as involved," he said.

He counts several faculty and administrators as important mentors, including former Vice President (Ret.) Col. Bill



Hollenbeck, Assistant Professor of Political Science Mark Peterson, Emeritus Professor of Political Science Paul Zagorski, Master Sgt. Sam Haskins, and Major Jim Snyder. But one in particular was the most influential: (Ret.) Brigadier General Jim AuBuchon, who died Sept. 1.

"I looked up to him so much; he meant so much to me," Oakley said. "He took it upon himself to push me forward. I got really involved in campus, and that helped me find myself and give me new opportunities. Anything I accomplished in life, I credit to doing that and to people like Dr. AuBuchon. It's hard for me to put into words, but it was a foundation that put me on the path to where I am today."

## Major Gift

Robert Lee Mays, a native of Burgess, Missouri, had established the Glenda Sanderson-Mays English Scholarship at PSU in memory of his wife just after her death in April 2013, but he was also looking ahead.

He passed away in May, and subsequently PSU received something more to be added to the Sanderson-Mays scholarship fund and earmarked for students from Crawford County, Kansas, who are attending PSU with the intent of majoring in English and communications.

Glenda Sanderson-Mays, who was a native of Pittsburg, graduated from Pittsburg High School in 1958 and PSU in 1962. She went on to teach French and English in Ft. Scott. After marrying Mays, who was then serving in the Army, she joined him in Alabama, South Carolina, Virginia, and eventually France.

When the couple returned to Pittsburg, she worked in the Registrar's Office at PSU and later for Pittsburg SRS until she retired in 2000.

Mr. Mays, who was a resident of Frontenac when he died, graduated from Mulberry High

School in 1956 and from Ft. Scott Junior College in 1961. He served in the Army from 1962 until he received his honorable discharge in 1964. Afterwards he worked for Pittsburg Job Service until his retirement in 1996.

The couple was married in 1962 and had celebrated 50 years of marriage just before Mrs. Mays' death.

"I always was inspired by Bob's love for and devotion to Glenda. He gave her credit for all they accomplished together, and truly loved and honored her to the day he died," said Kevin Mitchelson, with Wheeler &



Mitchelson, Chartered law firm in Pittsburg and attorney for the Mays estate. Donna Geisler, chair of the PSU Foundation board, accepted the gift this week on behalf of the Foundation from Mitchelson.

Three scholarships already have been awarded to PSU students.

Kathleen Flannery, vice president of University Advancement and President and CEO of the PSU Foundation, said it was

humbling to see the connection that Mrs.

Mays had to PSU, a connection that inspired her husband to make such gifts.

"Students will benefit from this scholarship from years to come," she said.

Celia Patterson, chair of the Department of English and Modern Languages, said that the couple's gift was an especially welcome one.

"As the cost of attending college rises, scholarship endowments need to rise as well so that our students can continue to get the education they need," Patterson said. "We were thrilled to hear about the Mays endowment, which will enable us to compete with other schools to attract the best and the brightest students."



## Universitas 2018 Spring

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