

KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY

SUMMIT

MAGAZINE



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\$200 million fundraising campaign transforming KSU

WINTER 2024

SUMMIT

THE MAGAZINE FOR
KENNESAW STATE UNIVERSITY

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SUMMIT is published by the
Office of Strategic Communications
and Marketing.

3391 Town Point Drive, MD 9103
Kennesaw, GA 30144
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features



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ON THE COVERS

Front Cover: KSU professor and author Garrard Conley.
Back Cover: 2023 home opener at Fifth Third Stadium.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Last fall, Kennesaw State launched The Campaign for KSU, the most ambitious fundraising initiative in the university's history. With a theme of "Together we make a difference," the campaign has been an overwhelming success, generating passion and energy far beyond our campus borders. Many of our donors are individuals from the community who, despite not having a direct connection to the university in the past, have felt compelled to be a part of our incredible journey. They are inspired by the transformative impact KSU has had and continues to have on our students, our state, and our society.

A key part of our mission at KSU is to equip students to succeed academically, but also to thrive as future leaders and innovators in Georgia and beyond. The Campaign for KSU is a rallying call to our entire community to join hands in shaping the future of Kennesaw State University and its students, and in so doing, contribute to the advancement and economic growth of our state.

The campaign is inspiring student success through scholarships and support programs, strengthening our multidisciplinary research initiatives, and expanding our impact through academic and athletic facilities that elevate KSU to a national stage.

As we embark on this journey, the spirit of "Together we make a difference" extends to each one of you. Your support, whether through engaging with our community or contributing to our campaign, is invaluable.

I encourage you to read more about The Campaign for KSU in this edition of our reimagined magazine. We also profile Garrard Conley, KSU professor and author of New York Times best-selling memoir *Boy Erased*, and visit with first-year men's basketball coach Antoine Pettway, who is galvanizing Owl Nation with his blend of authentic personality and competitive drive.

The magazine's new name, Summit, reflects the peak of achievement and the journey that lies ahead for Kennesaw State University. In this and future issues, you will not only read about the latest news from our campus, but you will also learn firsthand how KSU researchers are bringing science to life, as well as the many ways our faculty and staff are addressing issues of regional and national significance.

Thank you for your support and for your role in helping KSU reach new heights.

All my best,



Kathy S. Schwaig
President



\$6M INITIATIVE AIMS TO COLLAPSE DISPARITIES IN PUERTO RICO

Kennesaw State University associate professor of psychology and associate director of the Advancement of Military and Emergency Services (AMES) Research Center, Israel Sánchez-Cardona will embark on a five-year, \$6 million research initiative sponsored by the National Institutes of Health aimed at developing partnerships between researchers and community organizations to address structural issues affecting health in Puerto Rico.

The research initiative will focus on specific community issues contributing to poor health, identifying and addressing impediments to economic development, healthcare access and quality, and nutrition and food environment.

The research partners will develop a plan to introduce scientific resources in community collaborations, promote sustainable public health institutes, and promote strategies focused on the "knowledge economy," a system where knowledge and information are primary drivers of economic growth.

SOCIAL SCIENCE LABS OPEN IN FORMER STUDENT SUCCESS SPACE

The Office of Research at Kennesaw State University opened the Social Science Lab Complex (SSLC) in Summer 2023 to accommodate future social science and human subjects research opportunities.

The SSLC is a multi-disciplinary space featuring five labs that are strategically designed to be flexible in nature. One lab is dedicated to the use of research equipment, and the remaining four labs operate as unassigned spaces and can be reserved through the SSLC website on an as-needed basis by researchers from across KSU colleges. Ample storage for research equipment is available for researchers' convenience and to facilitate the smooth transition from one use to another.



BREAKING THE TREND: KSU SETS ENROLLMENT RECORD

Kennesaw State University continues to attract students in record numbers as its Fall 2023 enrollment reached a historic 45,152 undergraduate and graduate students. It is the fifth consecutive year of growth for Georgia's third-largest university.

The rise in the number of students represents an increase of 4.4% over Fall 2022, which includes a 4.1% increase in undergraduate and a 7% growth in the number of graduate students attending KSU. The university also welcomed more than 8,600 new freshmen and freshman transfer students, a 15.7% increase over last year.

Reflecting Georgia's diverse population, the number of first-generation students at KSU, those who have parents or guardians who did not attain a four-year college degree, increased by a little more than 5% and represent more than a third of the total student body (38.3%).



RESEARCH TARGETS TRIGGER OF SERIOUS DISEASES

A decade-long effort to study protein and enzyme binding could be the key to understanding and preventing cardiovascular disease and cancer.

Equipped with a \$405,650 grant from the National Institutes of Health, Kennesaw State University professor Carol Chrestensen will further investigate the binding process with the help of undergraduate researchers.

“Looking at those questions provides ideas to create treatments for cancers and heart disease, among other things,” said Chrestensen, who teaches biochemistry in KSU’s College of Science and Mathematics.

Chrestensen and fellow KSU biochemistry professor John Salerno, who died in 2015, discovered through their research that a protein and enzyme key to the formation of human tissue do bind, a finding key to her ongoing studies.

STUDY SEEKS QUANTUM LEAP IN FAST COMPUTING

In what could be a boost for national defense, associate professor Jianming Wen is working to create a building block of a new form of computing that is faster and more secure than today’s best supercomputers.

Wen has received a \$796,000 grant from the National Science Foundation to expand study of the physics of quantum computing. Quantum computing uses subatomic

particles to carry and process information at lightning speed. An obstacle to reliability is instability of the particles and the challenge is to create stable particles, called qubits, to be the basic building blocks of quantum computing.

Wen expects a reliable quantum computing system capable of billions of calculations a second within a decade. In national defense that could make missile defense systems much more effective, he said.

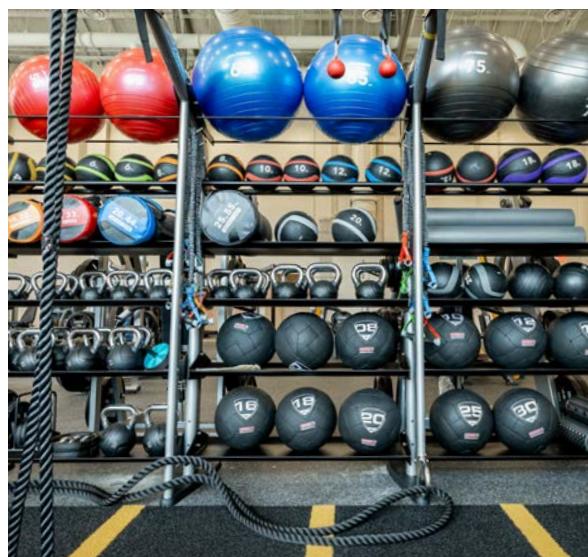


GREGORY DISPLAYS HALL OF FAME-WORTHY TEACHING

Diana Gregory, professor of art education in the Kennesaw State University College of the Arts, was honored with a Felton Jenkins Jr. Hall of Fame Faculty Award at the 19th Annual University System of Georgia Board of Regents Scholarship Gala.

Gregory was one of six outstanding faculty from USG institutions presented with the award for excellence in teaching and scholarship, named for the late Felton Jenkins Jr., a former Board of Regents member.

Gregory, who first joined Kennesaw State as part-time faculty in 2000, has in that time served as a fellow for Creativity and Innovation at the KSU Center for Excellence in Teaching and Learning and chair of the Inclusive Education Department in the Bagwell College of Education.



\$7.4 M UPGRADE PUMPS UP MARIETTA RECREATION

Kennesaw State completed a 10-month, \$7.4 million renovation of the recreation center on the Marietta Campus. The update to the 20-year-old facility began with installing a new heating-cooling and ventilation system and some electrical upgrades.

The project also included bringing in new fitness equipment, treadmills, ellipticals, free weights, weight machines, plus updating the area known as the Strength Arcade to allow more Olympic-style lifting for students. There is also a new turf-covered area where students can pull a sled or flip tires, which is unique to the Marietta rec center compared to the Kennesaw Campus rec center.



GLOBAL EDUCATION BRINGS SENEGAL TO COBB COUNTY



This fall, the halls of Kennesaw State University’s Carmichael Student Center were alive with the pounding of drums, chants and claps as master drummer Massamba Diop introduced the music of Senegal to students, faculty and staff. The drum demonstration opened the Year of Senegal at KSU, the 39th year of the University-wide

“Year of” program celebrating the music, food, arts, customs and commerce of cultures from around the world.

Each year, Global Education’s celebration of its chosen country continues with events throughout the fall and spring semesters, and often the University’s individual colleges also host themed programs. The Year of Senegal features Senegalese performing arts, stone carving, Goats on the Green, films, lectures and more.

FROM FACT TO FICTION

KSU PROFESSOR AND AUTHOR OF 'BOY ERASED' GETS CANDID ABOUT HIS BEST-SELLING MEMOIR AND UPCOMING NOVEL

BY AMANDA COOK

With his big cloud of black hair standing straight up, the gleam in his bright eyes, and the fluidity of his body as he speaks, it's easy to be intrigued by Kennesaw State assistant professor of creative writing Garrard Conley. It's easier still to be entranced by how candidly he speaks about religion, sexuality, activism, and why he asks his students to write with compassion even about the most flawed human beings.

Conley is the author of "Boy Erased," a 2016 Lambda-nominated memoir adapted into a major motion picture starring Lucas Hedges, Nicole Kidman and Russell Crowe. It tells the story of a closeted gay son of religious parents being forced into conversion therapy.

"When director Joel Edgerton first told me he was considering Nicole Kidman for my mom and Russell Crowe for my dad, I just laughed," Conley said. "I thought it was ridiculous, that it would never happen. I knew my mom would be flattered, but I wasn't going to even tell her. Then, a few days later, Nicole said 'yes.'"

Conley first broached the idea of his life story as a book when he was a graduate student.

"When I started sharing drafts of early chapters, I wanted to know if my classmates would judge my father in a way that I felt was unfair," Conley said. "Through my writing, I hoped they would come to understand my father as a complex human being who defies many of the labels they may have about a Missionary Baptist preacher from small-town Arkansas. A lot of readers have preconceived notions about

the South, and I want my work to offer a challenge to that readership."

The path from finding the courage to tell his story to seeing it portrayed on the big screen was long and winding, but the journey is an important aspect of what he teaches his students at Kennesaw State.

"I never want my students to think luck wasn't involved," Conley said. "But there's also a certain amount of grit and determination. Hopefully, you have talent, but that's really the smallest part of the equation."

Luck and grit intersected for Conley in 2013 when he attended a writers conference in Boston. That's where a friend invited him to a party where he sat next to an influential writer and critic. Conley pitched the concept of his memoir, and the critic, immediately intrigued, invited him to

meet her agent. A couple of sleepless weeks later with nonstop work drafting several more chapters of his memoir, Conley had a contract with that agent.

Getting an editor to agree to publish "Boy Erased" was one of the bigger challenges.

"It felt niche to a lot of people," Conley said. "They didn't see the potential for LGBTQ stories at the time, and I remember repeatedly hearing versions of 'gay memoirs don't really sell.'"

One publisher, Penguin Random House, finally said yes. Conley had a year to complete the book.

"It felt like a dream to me," Conley said. "I was nervous I wouldn't be able to write it. I kept asking, 'do I have it in me to write this?'"

Conley forged ahead, writing in the early mornings before dawn and teaching high school during the day. His book was published, and he soon realized it had not only opened eyes and started mainstream conversations, but his book was also saving lives.

"I got an email pretty early on from this 16-year-old student named Max," Conley said. "His parents were pretty conservative, and they wouldn't approve of the book at home. So, he would go to the library to read it, and his suicidal ideation would lessen. He'd go back to the library to read it until his suicidal thoughts disappeared altogether. He said he no longer felt alone. And I kept hearing things like that. After this letter, I was able to convince my publicity team that conversion therapy was a life-or-death situation, an issue we needed to push



what a table would look like in the 18th century. The texture of history is very important to my prose."

Conley said the time period and genre may differ, but the theme of his new book is similar to "Boy Erased."

"Yes, there's a central LGBTQ love story in the middle of my new book, but the story is much bigger, just like 'Boy Erased,'" Conley said. "It's about family, forgiveness, and love. It's an attempt to unerase people who existed in the past."

Conley is as passionate about teaching as he is about writing. He had wanted a nonfiction tenured track position when he was looking for a teaching opportunity.

After a brief visit from his residence in New York, he happily accepted an offer from Kennesaw State in 2020.

"I love that this university is dynamic and changing, and the students want to share their stories. They aren't shy or pretentious. There isn't a level of privilege that you get in other teaching institutions," Conley said.

Conley's mindful of his power to mold lives in the creative writing classes he teaches at the university.

"We talk about being vulnerable in our pieces," Conley said. "I push my students to write with compassion and to treat their subjects with respect. Good fiction and good nonfiction have to make us see perspectives we didn't consider. The students here are willing to listen, grow, and learn. I think there's some special magic at KSU that I'm not quite sure I entirely understand, but it's here."

Conley will be on a book tour throughout the spring, but will be returning to the classroom at Kennesaw State next fall.

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I push my students to write with compassion and to treat their subjects with respect. Good fiction and good nonfiction have to make us see perspectives we didn't consider.

- Garrard Conley

ENGINEERING BETTER HEALTH

CHRISTINA SCHERRER APPLIES MATHEMATICAL MODELING EXPERTISE TO HEALTH CARE SYSTEMS

BY KYLE DAWSON

If she hadn't become an engineer, Christina Scherrer might have chosen to be a medical doctor, dentist or other type of health care provider.

Instead, she has worked for years to apply her expertise in industrial and systems engineering in areas that improve the delivery of health care. She loves helping others, whether it's collaborating on health-related research, teaching new generations of engineers at Kennesaw State or volunteering in the community.

In the area of health care, Scherrer, a professor in the Industrial and Systems Engineering Department within the Southern Polytechnic College of Engineering and Engineering Technology, has done research on school-based dental sealant programs, fluoride varnish delivery, optimizing the location of community health centers, and modeling the hospital-based spread of tuberculosis.

"I am currently collaborating with several public health experts, dentists and a pediatrician. I think industrial engineers are especially well-suited to interdisciplinary research, since the modeling and statistical analysis tools that are core to our field can be applied to many different problems," Scherrer said.

Scherrer usually applies her expertise to projects that have an opportunity to help people, often children. She is currently studying fluoride varnish applications for pediatric practices, which have the potential to improve the oral health of young children who may not be able to visit a dentist.

"I have always been most interested in projects that have the potential to positively impact health, especially for populations that may have limited access to healthcare," Scherrer said. "It is exciting to receive research funding and to publish in respected journals, but for me it is even more rewarding to learn that work I was involved with was used to impact health

"With our college's new Ph.D. program in interdisciplinary engineering, my first Ph.D. student, Mahdiyeh Soltaninejad, has been working on the project," Scherrer said. "The opportunity to mentor the next generation of researchers is such a privilege and also really fun. This particular group of students is very diverse in terms of gender, race/ethnicity, and first-generation college student status, and they have all contributed their skills in a number of ways to improve the work we are doing."

Scherrer's advice to students at KSU who want to get involved in research is to reach out to faculty in their departments to see what opportunities there are. For incoming students, joining the First Year Scholars program will allow students to do research in their first semester.

Scherrer's passion to help others goes beyond her role as a professor. She is an active volunteer in the community, serving as a mentor to various math and robotics teams, an active leader in her church's youth group, and a member of the Board of Directors of the Georgia Oral Health Coalition. She said her time in service to others is a reflection of those who helped her.

"I love spending time with teenagers, because I can appreciate the ways that my life was positively influenced by the mentoring, support and affirmation I received from adults at that time in my life, and I want to pay that forward to the next generation," Scherrer said. "I always learn a lot from these experiences."



policy or even just to hear from a health center that they are using our results to improve their patients' health outcomes."

Scherrer doesn't only impact people via the outcomes of her research. Her students gain a lot from the experience as well. Nine undergraduate students and one doctoral student have been involved with her study on fluoride applications, in collaboration with professor Robert Keyser.



GOOD FELLOWS

NEW PROGRAM EMPOWERS STUDENTS,
SERVICE AGENCIES TO DO MORE

BY GARY TANNER

Kennesaw State students are doing good deeds every day, fulfilling needs in the wider community through the University's Office of Student Volunteerism and Service (SVS).

But some students want to make a bigger difference than a one-time volunteer opportunity, which led to the creation of a new program that is allowing 11 KSU students to have an outsized impact on 10 local nonprofit social service agencies.

Last spring, the SVS announced the groundbreaking Service Fellowship program, which began in August with participants working for local social service agencies. Spearheaded by Michael Almond, program coordinator for SVS, the fellowship aims to not only enrich the lives of participating students, but also make a lasting impact on the organizations they serve.

"We wanted to create a program that goes beyond traditional volunteering. The fellowship is an immersive experience where students work with various organizations, tackling real-world issues and gaining valuable skills that will serve them well in their future endeavors," he said.

HOW IT WORKS

The Service Fellowship spans fall and spring semesters, during which students commit to working 10 to 20 hours a week with a nonprofit agency. To ensure a meaningful experience, participants are matched with organizations based on their interests, skills, and career goals. This tailored approach not only

benefits the students but also maximizes the impact they can make in their assigned organizations.

Throughout the fellowship, students attend workshops and reflection sessions to deepen their understanding of the issues they're addressing and refine their skills.

"We want our students to not only contribute actively but also understand

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We wanted to create a program that goes beyond traditional volunteering.

- Michael Almond

the complexities of the challenges they're addressing. This program is about creating informed and empathetic change-makers," Almond said.

The students are able to provide operational services that nonprofits need, such as help with marketing, fundraising, data analysis and more, Almond said.

By the end of the academic year, the fellowship participants will have put in more than 3,000 hours of work for the participating agencies.

Through the Office of Financial Aid and the Division of Student Affairs, the Service Fellowship participants are paid for their work through federal work study funds. Students also work with their academic advisers to receive class credit for participating in the fellowship.

VOICES FROM THE FELLOWSHIP

Deja Boney, an information systems major from Conley, Georgia, found her calling in the Service Fellowship. Assigned to Circles Cobb, a local nonprofit focused on lifting individuals and families out of poverty, Boney spent much of fall semester working in an operational support role for the organization, analyzing data and researching grant opportunities. She also worked to provide service and support directly to client families.

"The executive director made a presentation to those of us in the fellowship program. Circles Cobb became my No. 1 choice because I loved their mission," Boney said.

Clients of Circles Cobb work with volunteers, who help them learn effective time and money-management skills and to set goals that can help them to permanently escape poverty.

"As someone who likes to give back, this fellowship has already taught me about

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AS SOMEONE WHO LIKES TO GIVE BACK, THIS FELLOWSHIP HAS ALREADY TAUGHT ME ABOUT CAREER OPPORTUNITIES THAT I NEVER KNEW EXISTED IN THE NONPROFIT SECTOR.

- Deja Boney

career opportunities that I never knew existed in the nonprofit sector," she said. Boney said she would like to continue to work with Circles Cobb throughout her KSU career.

Angeline Forestal, a marketing major from Roswell, Georgia, is working with YELLS, Inc., which stands for Youth Empowerment through Learning, Leading and Serving. The nonprofit teaches the value of community involvement and being kind to others to students from kindergarten through high school.

"I wanted to work with the youth, so I thought YELLS would be an ideal organization to work for. At YELLS, I've done a lot of administrative tasks in helping to support the staff," Forestal said.

YELLS offers three programs that include mentorship, leadership development, academic achievement, community involvement and service learning.

There is an afterschool program for elementary students. There is a community action café program for the teens. Finally, there is a mentoring program where the Bigs (high school students) mentor the Littles (elementary students).

Chelsea Holness, a senior exercise science major from McDonough, Georgia,





ANGELINE
FORESTAL

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I WANTED TO WORK WITH THE YOUTH, SO I THOUGHT YELLS WOULD BE AN IDEAL ORGANIZATION TO WORK FOR. AT YELLS, I'VE DONE A LOT OF ADMINISTRATIVE TASKS IN HELPING TO SUPPORT THE STAFF.

- Angeline Forestal

was impressed with the work being done by the Center for Family Resources (CFR) and was eager to work with the group during her fellowship.

“Learning that CFR not only focuses on people who are homeless, but on families with kids that are homeless, touched me very much,” said Holness, whose mother serves on the board of another nonprofit that helps the unhoused. With that background, she was eager to help and jumped right in.

“I do a lot of things at CFR – creating Excel spreadsheets, making phone calls, creating Amazon wish lists, sending emails, assisting with event planning, helping track food donations in the pantry, searching for auction items for the upcoming gala, etc.,” Holness said.

In addition to helping others, Holness said the fellowship is preparing her for a career as a physician assistant because she is learning to communicate with a wide range of people with different backgrounds and needs.

For Simran Mohanty, a sociology major from Lilburn, the fellowship became a platform to address issues of civic involvement through working with the Cobb County Democracy Center, a

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- Simran Mohanty

non-partisan group that encourages voting and civic engagement.

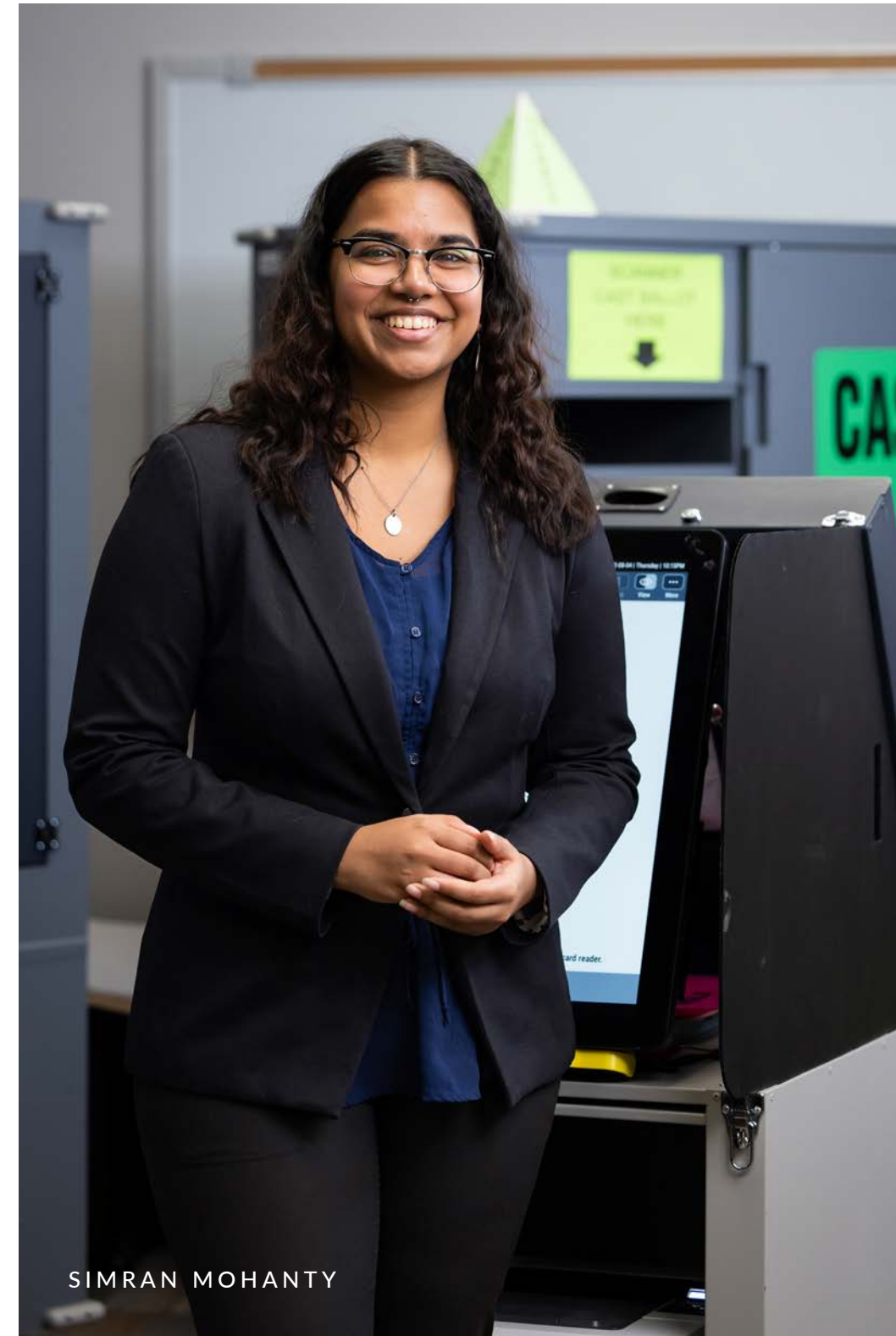
“I've had the opportunity to participate in a lot of different things,” Mohanty said of her fellowship work. “We just finished up with the municipal elections, which have been much of our focus. We had a long day yesterday – I didn't finish until 10 p.m.”

Mohanty has done canvassing on campus and in the community to encourage people to vote or register to vote. She has also helped the organization create and execute social media campaigns.

“The fellowship is giving me the chance to actively contribute to a cause I'm passionate about and witness the positive changes we can achieve when we work together,” she said.

The Service Fellowship extends far beyond individual experiences, Almond said. By placing students in diverse settings and roles, KSU is fostering a culture of civic responsibility and instilling a sense of purpose in the next generation of leaders.

“The goal is not just to produce graduates with degrees but to cultivate citizens who actively contribute to the well-being of society,” Almond said.



SIMRAN MOHANTY

CAMPUS OF CARE

MENTAL HEALTH INITIATIVES AT KSU AIM TO
COMBAT NATIONAL TRENDS

BY THOMAS HARTWELL

At 18, Moe Winograd left his family in Atlanta bound for Boston and the renowned New England Conservatory of Music.

On his own for the first time and with endless hours of practice trying to keep up with his peers, Winograd soon found himself suffering overwhelming stress and pressure to do well at one of the nation's top music schools.

Soon, feelings of isolation and fear of failure left Winograd feeling he could no longer function or take care of himself. He tried drugs and alcohol to cope. But stress, anxiety and depression continued to push him closer to the edge. So, Winograd began planning to take his own life.

"The weight of all of that drove me to this dark place so quickly," he said. "I felt like no one could help me, and I had nothing."

Winograd's story illustrates a familiar and troubling trend on college campuses across the country.

By nearly every metric, the mental health of college students is worsening. And while today's students are more likely than previous generations to reach out for help, more than half say they haven't. Meanwhile, surveys by college health organizations show some of the highest rates of anxiety, depression and suicidal thoughts ever recorded.

COLLEGE STUDENTS FACE UNIQUE CHALLENGES

Over the past 20 years, national data shows an alarming increase in mental health concerns among adolescents and young adults, including suicide rates that have climbed 30 percent.

In the latest Healthy Minds Survey, an annual web-based study of mental health and related issues among undergraduate and

graduate students, survey responses from 76,000 students across 135 campuses during the 2022-23 academic year revealed some of the highest rates of mental health concerns in the survey's history. The survey found that nearly two-thirds of college students meet the criteria for at least one mental health problem, up almost 40 percent since 2013.

Forty-one percent of respondents showed symptoms of moderate or major depression, 36 percent reported a possible anxiety disorder, and 14 percent said they had considered suicide in the past year. The previous year's survey found equally concerning results.

Similarly, in a spring 2023 American College Health Association (ACHA) survey of more than 78,000 students at 125 institutions, 1 in 5 respondents (21.2%) reported severe psychological distress.

KSU-specific data from ACHA surveys in 2022, the latest available, show 23.3 percent of the 2,632 respondents reported psychological distress. Nearly a third reported having a diagnosed anxiety disorder, 26 percent said they had depression, and 32 percent reported behaviors or thoughts that increased their risk of suicide.

Psychiatrist Ryan S. Patel, ACHA board member and chair of the association's Mental Health Section, has spent the past decade researching collegiate mental health and treating students at Ohio State University's Office of Student Life, Counseling and Consultation Service. He also authored a holistic guide for college students who struggle with common mental health issues, "Mental health for college students."

Patel said no two students' mental health concerns, combination of contributing factors or situations are identical, but the current

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"The weight of all of that drove me to this dark place so quickly. I felt like no one could help me, and I had nothing."

- Moe Winograd

issue spotlight

generation of college students share some historical experiences that can help to explain worsening national trends.

He said college students today were children during the Great Recession and have come to understand the importance of high-demand careers that can give a sense of security. Couple that with the ever-rising academic rigor and financial burden of higher education, as well as a lack of developed life skills compared with previous generations, and you've got a recipe for mental health disaster.

"It kind of sets you up mentally to think, 'Am I not good enough?'" Patel said. "There's this pressure to perform and a desire for perfectionism among this group that can be damaging to their self-image."

MEETING STUDENTS WHERE THEY ARE

The good news is that many universities are rising to the challenge of combating these trends. At Kennesaw State, innovative programming and inclusive education bring students, faculty and staff together as a community that watches out for its members and reaches out in times of need.

Instead of ending his life, Winograd was admitted to a hospital and received the help he needed. Now he is a Master of Social Work and Master of Business Administration student at KSU whose ambition is to improve the lives of those struggling with their own mental health.

"I want to show people that there are resources right here at KSU that are here to help and that can be accessed with ease," he said. "And I want to help KSU continue to improve on its existing resources and trainings."

Programs, training and events educating students, skill-building workshops, support groups focused on high-risk needs or underrepresented groups and a resource awareness campaign are driving KSU's efforts to respond to the growing mental health needs of students.

In his undergraduate experience, KSU senior Anthony Harrison said he and many of his peers can relate to the national trends.

Like Winograd, Harrison, a sociology major, moved far from his family and friends in New York City to attend KSU. Harrison said expectations of him were already high as a member of the University's track and field team, but he's also the first in his family to graduate from high school and the first to go to college.

"Even though everyone tells me how proud they are of me, I wish they could relate to my experience and offer me some guidance. On top of that, there's the pressure of being an athlete and pressures from college life in general, and they just multiply," he said. "There are times that, in my mind, I could be feeling like I'm failing, but all I hear from the people around me is how much I'm doing for myself and how far I'm going. But it can seem to me that I'm never where I need to be."

THE STRESS OF SCREEN TIME

This constant drive to "do better" and "be perfect" is common among college-aged people and exacerbated by another factor unique to them, Patel said: social media.

Young adults are the first generation to have grown up with a smartphone in their hands and social media feeding a constant stream of opportunities for comparison and conflict, Patel said. And the rapid shift of life online during Covid meant students

were suddenly spending more time on their screens than ever before.

Students' lifestyles went from balancing personal interactions – walking around campus, seeing friends in classes and socializing at events – with streaming or social media use to unwind at the end of the day. When Covid hit, students interacted and attended classes online and still wanted to unwind the same way as before, adding hours to the consumption of overwhelming amounts of information from all over the world at once, Patel said. Also important to note, he said, is that technology and social media are not inherently bad, but many users lack healthy use skills.

"The mental breaks are not as restorative, because you're engaging that same part of your brain," he said. "That can affect stress levels, because what you're used to doing as a mental break is not effective. It's no longer a break."

Harrison agreed. It can be exhausting to carry the weight of academics, athletics and social life and then spend hours staring at a screen barraging you with traumatizing and divisive content or unrealistic and often misleading snapshots of others' success.

"There's a quote that's really special to me: 'Comparison is the thief of joy,'" Harrison said. "So much of social media is creating these stereotypes, appearances and boxes that people are constantly trying to fit into, and if somebody can't fit into them, they're left feeling like they don't belong or they don't live up to some standard."

And it appears Harrison's KSU peers tend to relate with his experience. In the 2022 ACHA survey, 63 percent of KSU students who reported that they worried about their personal appearance also said it caused moderate or severe distress, and the overwhelming majority of KSU students who reported having academic challenges said those challenges were causing them moderate or severe distress. Likewise, nearly half of the students who reported experiencing general anxiety indicated that it negatively affected their ability to perform academically.



In KSU Counseling and Psychological Services (CPS) data collected in the 2022-23 academic year, student participants showed higher than national average rates of depression, general anxiety, social anxiety and overall distress.

But those metrics are not all bad news, said Patel. As mental health concerns have risen, so too have resources available to help and students' willingness to use them. National data from 2023 shows about 40 percent of college students have used a campus mental health resource, compared to about 20 percent historically, Patel said. And despite KSU's higher-than-average rates of distress markers, KSU CPS leaders say students are improving with help at the same rates as their peers across the country.

As Student Government Association vice president and a member of the Student Athlete Advisory Council, Harrison has enlisted Winograd's help to look for ways to expand KSU mental health resources and meet students where they are. Meanwhile Wellbeing@KSU, the department tasked with campus mental health programs, has

launched new programs and campaigns aimed at leading the charge when it comes to creating a "campus of care."

AT KSU, 'YOU MATTER'

Mental health programs and services abound at KSU, and the University offers various mental health resources to cast the widest net possible, said Ariyanna White, associate director of case management for CPS. Intertwined in the focus of Wellbeing@KSU are efforts specifically targeted at overcoming barriers, including student awareness and the "self-stigma" associated with seeking help, White said.

Most recently, KSU launched its "You Matter" suicide prevention and mental health program, aiming to teach the KSU campus communities to recognize when students may be struggling and to direct them to Wellbeing@KSU resources, led by CPS and Health Promotion and Wellness (HPW), for assistance.

The CPS program includes events and permanent signs in high-traffic areas



issue spotlight

on both KSU campuses, encouraging discussion of stressors and pressures of daily life, teaching students to recognize the signs of suicidal thoughts and depression among their peers and directing students to resources that can help.

White said the goal is to make “You Matter” events relatable to students. Discussions and games encourage peer interaction and capitalize on social media or popular culture trends that students are familiar with.

“We want students to know that they can connect with people without feeling like a burden,” White said. “We are interested in engaging the entire KSU community in becoming a campus of care and making sure students know there are people all over campus – faculty, staff and peers – who want to support them and that they don’t have to be afraid or ashamed to reach out.”

White said her department offers targeted support groups for students who could be more at-risk or who may be experiencing issues, like grief or loss.

“A large part of what keeps students in school and mentally healthy is finding a sense of belonging, so KSU’s ability to get students connected with a group where members help each other through common struggles is very important,” White said.

The support groups offered by CPS and HPW include Neurodivergent and Friends, Body Positivity, Grief, LGBT Support, Black Women Support, Latinx Support, and Anxiety Toolbox and help to build identity and a sense of belonging while the workshops provided focus on daily living and social skills, coping mechanisms, problem solving and crisis intervention. These University mental health initiatives also work closely with other Wellbeing@KSU departments, like Campus Awareness, Resource & Empowerment (CARE) Services for food and housing insecurity, or the Center for Young Adult Addiction and Recovery (CYAAR), Sports and Recreation and Student Health Services.

In January 2024, CPS also launched its peer counselor program, in which students

are trained to recognize the signs of suicide risk and to direct students to the help they need. The goal of the program is to provide peer to peer support with common challenges like stress, loneliness and life transitions.

Additionally, mental health trainings offered both digitally and in-person to students, faculty and staff include Kognito At-Risk Mental Health Training, Question Persuade Refer Suicide Prevention Training and Mental Health First Aid.

White said the offerings by HPW strive to educate faculty and staff on how they can help make students aware of campus resources; for example, by placing information about those resources in syllabi or signs at unrelated events.

“We want to get everyone possible involved in creating environments that put mental health first,” White said.

“

A large part of what keeps students in school and mentally healthy is finding a sense of belonging, so KSU’s ability to get students connected with a group where members help each other through common struggles is very important.

- Ariyanna White

‘IT TAKES ALL OF US’

The wide array of awareness campaigns, self-help resources, social events and life skill workshops is key to ensuring that students have access to the best resources possible to support their mental health needs, said Patel. But, he added, equally as important is the endeavor to involve as many stakeholders as possible in creating a mentally healthy student body.

“Everybody can do something to positively affect mental health in the campus environment – faculty, staff, administration, college health professionals, alumni, parents and students themselves,” Patel said. “When we start thinking like that, the whole culture changes, and it becomes a culture of care and support and community. That is the future that we want to look toward, and it takes all of us.”

Looking back on his own college experience, Winograd said he wished he’d been more aware of the resources that were available to him. While he can’t change the past, he knows that raising awareness for KSU’s support services will mean fewer students feel alone.

“We’re all working hard to assess student barriers to care, how we can break down those barriers and how we can get the word about these resources to more students,” he said. “We want to encompass all 45,000 students in the care that our programs and services provide.”

Since seeking counseling through campus resources and realizing that his mental health must be a priority to get the most out of other areas of his life, Harrison said he’s become a spokesperson in his KSU circles.

“Taking time to take care of yourself helps a lot and goes a long way. Your mental and physical health go hand in hand, so pay attention to those times you don’t feel right,” Harrison said. “Find ways to make sure you’re nourished. The resources are all around us here, and there are plenty of people who care.”

NATIONAL AND STATE RESOURCES

If you or someone you know is in mental health crisis or considering suicide, call or text the National Suicide Hotline at 988, or visit 988lifeline.org. KSU students who are in crisis can call the 24/7 campus health support line at 833-874-0013 or CPS at 470-578-6600 Monday through Friday 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Georgia Crisis & Access line: [1-800-715-4225](https://www.gacrisis.org)

KSU RESOURCES

Different resources found at this link:

kennesaw.edu/wellbeing/index.php

KSU COUNSELING BY THE NUMBERS: ACADEMIC YEAR 2022-23

8,713 INDIVIDUAL COUNSELING APPOINTMENTS

1,268
PSYCHIATRIC APPOINTMENTS

2,192
INITIAL CONSULTATIONS

621
CASE MANAGEMENT APPOINTMENTS

22
THERAPY GROUP OPTIONS



BRINGING SCIENCE TO MARKET

PROFESSOR USES KENNESAW STATE BUSINESS INCUBATOR TO CREATE WEBSITE PLAN

BY DAVE SHELLES

Kennesaw State professor of exercise science Bob Buresh had an idea and a goal.

He had an idea for a predictive website that could offer users the right amount of exercise each day in the form of a step count to achieve, based on information provided to the website. But how could he bring that idea to the marketplace?

KSU's Office of Intellectual Property Development helped Buresh take the necessary steps to bring his Stepping Forward program closer to launch by helping him secure a patent and pursue funding.

"This was a true collaborative effort," Buresh said. "Working with the Office of IP Development to patent the idea was such a great experience, and I look forward to bringing this idea to fruition."

The effort to bring the website to market originates on campus, too, thanks to the Innovation Launch Pad (ILP). Housed in KSU's Office of Intellectual Property Development, the Innovation Launch Pad is a six-session course on entrepreneurship for academics, followed by six months of coaching to get an idea to market. Both the Office of IP Development and the ILP are headed up by Chris Cornelison, currently the interim associate vice president for innovation and commercialization and the director of intellectual property development.

"It's been a tremendous pleasure to support Dr. Buresh's invention," said Cornelison, also an associate professor of microbiology. "He was very responsive and patient as we moved through the process.



FROM LEFT, BOB BURESH AND CHRIS CORNELISON

As you work on these projects you get to know all the details and become invested in the outcome as if you are also an inventor. Seeing the project develop into a prototype and ready for clinicians to work with it and give Dr. Buresh feedback on how we can fine-tune his work to create an improved product to positively impact the lives for clinicians and patients has been very rewarding."

Buresh came up with Stepping Forward over a period of years as a researcher in making exercise accessible. His research shows that a person can literally take steps toward a healthy lifestyle with an optimized walking plan—take a certain number of

steps each day, and body fat percentage will go down. From there, his research came up with a predictive model to determine how many steps a person should take based on their body weight and other biometric factors.

"The idea is that so many of us are now not active enough to achieve a baseline of good health," Buresh said. "We published a paper based on our research with young and middle-aged people that boosts our argument that walking is a great way to improve one's health, so we conceived a website using our predictive model."

From there, Buresh pondered bringing to market a website, or perhaps an app for

smartphones that integrates user-provided data to create an exercise program. Enter Cornelison and the Innovation Launch Pad. Cornelison said Buresh participated in a 15-week training session that helped him understand startup methodology and approach potential customers while assessing marketability of the product, critical for researchers.

"Dr. Buresh is an ideal example of what can be gained from the program," Cornelison said. "Initially he would start off every meeting with a statement like 'Please forgive my ignorance, this is a totally new area for me.' And as the program progressed, he developed a robust understanding of the process of customer discovery and leveraging the data generated to inform the development of his solution. Being open to learning new ideas is key to getting the most out of the program."

With the prospects of marketability emerging, Buresh then needed to get the website running, or at least in an alpha stage. Cornelison referred Buresh to the Industry Capstone program in the College of Computing and Software Engineering (CCSE), where each software engineering graduate fulfills a graduation requirement of a project that brings a product to market. The college receives both internal and external opportunities for this purpose, and students choose their final projects from a list of prospective ventures.

"Dr. Buresh had this idea for a website, and he gave the students the algorithm," said Darin Morrow, senior lecturer of information technology in CCSE. "The students worked on the user interface aspects of the site—they made it alive and built the software, thanks in part to a student interested in health and exercise."

An avid exerciser, Hayley Rymer gravitated toward Buresh's Stepping Forward project because of her interest in science and learning about the human body. She read Buresh's study while doing the Capstone project, which brought home the ready efficacy of a walking program and ignited her commitment to creating a website that can help people get in shape.

"One of the beautiful things about software engineering is that it can touch on any interest that you have because



everything with a website has code behind it," said Rymer, who graduated from KSU in May, 2023 with a bachelor's degree in software engineering. "I thought it was so fascinating to have a way to help people just by walking, which has such great benefits on the human body. This project satisfied the science that I'm interested in, but it also provided me a way to problem solve and code, which I'll take into my career."

The website remains in a bit of a holding pattern as Buresh seeks internal

and external funding to develop the app, as well as more help from a CCSE student interested in revising and activating the website. Buresh said he has interest from physicians and psychologists within Wellstar Health System in the hope of getting patients on board with this exercise program.

"This project can truly help people live better lives, which is what we strive to do at KSU," Buresh said. "It was a very interesting, rewarding and enjoyable process."

CAMPUS ARCHITECTURE

PHOTO ESSAY
BY STAFF
PHOTOGRAPHERS:

JUDITH PISHNERY
DARNELL WILBURN
MATTHEW YUNG



ATRIUM BUILDING, MARIETTA



PRILLAMAN BUILDING, KENNESAW



DESIGN II, MARIETTA



ATRIUM BUILDING, MARIETTA



BAGWELL COLLEGE, KENNESAW



OUTSIDE PRILLAMAN, KENNESAW

BUILDING A BRIGHTER FUTURE

\$200 MILLION FUNDRAISING CAMPAIGN
TRANSFORMING KSU

BY GARY TANNER

What could you do with \$200 million? Kennesaw State will use that amount to supercharge its mission to help students succeed, pursue significant scientific discoveries, expand impactful community partnerships and provide student-athletes the tools to compete in Conference USA.

In October, Kennesaw State officially launched the public phase of The Campaign for Kennesaw State, the most ambitious comprehensive fundraising effort in the University's history. The announcement was made during a campus event attended by members of the KSU Foundation, faculty and staff, students, donors and community leaders.

During the event, the University announced that it was increasing the campaign goal from \$125 million to \$200 million following the overwhelming success of the private phase, which began in 2019. The University raised nearly \$120 million during this first phase.

"The outpouring of support for KSU has been nothing short of incredible, and I'd like to express my gratitude to everyone who has given thus far and to those who plan to give in the future," said Kennesaw State President Kathy Schwaig. "This campaign comes at a time when the University is experiencing unprecedented growth, and the support garnered from this effort is critical in furthering KSU's commitment to its students and the community."

The Campaign will inspire student success through funding for scholarships and support programs, accelerate discovery

by strengthening and enriching the University's multidisciplinary research initiatives and enhance the community by improving academic and athletic facilities.

"This comprehensive campaign is a first for Kennesaw State, as it embodies all 11 colleges, Student Affairs, KSU Athletics and University research initiatives," said Lance Burchett, KSU vice president for advancement and head of the KSU Foundation. "We are poised to make a profound difference, and working together with our community, I am confident that we will be successful in achieving our goal."

In addition to its rapid growth in enrollment and programs, KSU has become an important center for robust research focused on solving real-world problems. Kennesaw State is also an essential part of the Georgia economy, having an impact of more than \$2 billion in 2022.

Along with the support of 21 Trustee volunteers serving on the Campaign committee, The Campaign for Kennesaw State is co-chaired by Michael A. Leven, former Chairman and CEO of the Georgia Aquarium, and Beth Lowry, president of Holder Construction Company and KSU Foundation Trustee. Debbie Pike, CEO of Meritage Restaurant Group and KSU Foundation Trustee, serves as vice chair.

"It's an honor to see firsthand the impact our alumni and students are making in our community. Together, we are charting a course for success," said Lowry.

Lead donors who propelled KSU from the private phase to the public phase include:

LEAD DONORS

Norman and Lindy Radow
Radow College of Humanities and Social Sciences and KSU Athletics

Audrey Morgan and the Bobbie Bailey Foundation
College of the Arts and the Academic Learning Center

Wellstar Health System
Wellstar College of Health and Human Services and School of Nursing

Henssler Financial
Coles College of Business and KSU Athletics

Doug and Robin Shore
KSU Journey Honors College and the Coles College of Business

Jim and Wanda Hills
Southern Polytechnic College of Engineering and Engineering Technology

After acknowledging the lead donors who set the pace for The Campaign during the quiet phase, KSU Foundation Chair Steven Cadranel announced a \$1 million campaign gift from himself and his wife, Janet.



**TOGETHER,
WE WILL UNLEASH
NEW POSSIBILITIES
FOR KSU**

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: KSU STUDENTS RECEIVING A PRIVATELY-FUNDED SCHOLARSHIP ARE 80% MORE LIKELY TO GRADUATE IN 4 YEARS; JANET AND STEVEN CADRANEL, THE LATEST 7-FIGURE DONORS TO THE CAMPAIGN, AND CO-CHAIRS BETH LOWRY AND MICHAEL LEVEN



The Cadranels' gift focuses on the holistic student experience by providing support to units across the University:

The Steven and Janet Cadranel Athletics Campaign Gift will support the construction of world-class facilities as part of KSU's Athletics Capital Campaign

The Cadranel Family Honors College Living Learning Village Scholarship Endowment will provide financial support to students within the Honors College Living Learning Village at KSU

The Adam Scott Cadranel Student Affairs Program Endowment will provide financial support to the Division of Student Affairs

With KSU joining Conference USA this summer, which includes moving into the Football Bowl Subdivision, Athletics has several projects designed to benefit its student-athletes.

These capital projects include a sports performance complex, a sports medicine center and a new baseball stadium. The University System of Georgia approved the baseball stadium project last fall.

The Sports Performance Complex is a planned operations center near Fifth Third Stadium that will provide players and coaches with a state-of-the-art facility to prepare for the next level of competition as we enter Conference USA.

"The impact this will have on Athletics, especially improving football operations, is astounding," Director of Athletics Milton Overton said.

The new Sports Medicine Center will serve all of KSU's 450 student-athletes. The cutting-edge center will be a one-stop

shop for injury prevention, physical therapy, treatment, and hydrotherapy.

"This will help our Owls stay in the game and get back to the field sooner as we compete in CUSA," Overton said.

To participate in The Campaign, visit:
KENNESAW.EDU/CAMPAIGN



COMING FULL CIRCLE

KSU PROVOST ENDOWS SCHOLARSHIP
HONORING PARENTS' SACRIFICES

BY ELYSSA REED

Following the kickoff event celebrating the public launch of The Campaign for Kennesaw State, Provost and Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs Ivan Pulinkala became the first faculty member to take advantage of an exclusive endowed scholarship match.

Pulinkala confirmed his campaign pledge to create a \$50,000 scholarship endowment. The Jeanette and George Pulinkala Leadership in Dance Scholarship, established in honor of his parents, is a tribute to their instrumental role in his educational journey. The scholarship will be awarded to undergraduate students who demonstrate leadership in the Department of Dance at Kennesaw State.

"This scholarship is a way for me to cultivate student leadership in the arts – identifying those who demonstrate an enduring passion and dedication in their academic pursuits and support them on their journey towards graduation," said Pulinkala. "To me, this is an investment that I know will not only continue to grow financially but also through the impact it will have on the future of dance and our broader society."

Throughout his service at Kennesaw State and being the recipient of scholarship support while pursuing his master's and doctorate degrees, Pulinkala has witnessed first-hand the transformational opportunities scholarships provide.

Moving to the United States from his home in New Delhi, India, Pulinkala attended Mills College in Oakland, California, where he earned a Master of Fine Arts in Dance. Later, as a member

of KSU's faculty, he earned a Doctorate in Higher Education Administration from the University of Alabama, supported by institutional scholarships, as well as Kennesaw State's Clendenin Graduate Fellows Program.

"Being able to provide KSU students with the financial support they need to accomplish their dreams feels like I've come full circle," Pulinkala said. "My journey would not have been possible had it not been for my parents' sacrifices, private scholarships, and graduate assistantships."

Founding the Program in Dance at Kennesaw State in 2005, Pulinkala is credited with building Georgia's largest collegiate dance program. Progressing through various roles at KSU, Pulinkala said his goal has always been to stay connected to the core mission of the University – the success of its students, which is why Pulinkala has continued to teach as chair, dean and provost.

"One of the most fulfilling responsibilities of working at this institution is the ability to lead by example," Pulinkala said. "I'm eternally grateful for how others have cultivated my leadership over the years and feel honored to have the opportunity to do the same for the deserving students here at KSU."



To learn how you can participate in The Campaign for Kennesaw State, please visit:

KENNESAW.EDU/CAMPAIGN

ALL STAR ALUMNI

STANDOUT GRADUATES HONORED FOR GIVING BACK TO THE UNIVERSITY

BY SCOTT WILTSEE

Whether from the days of Kennesaw Junior College, Southern Polytechnic State University, or the Kennesaw State University Class of 2023, former students create a community of support for their alma mater's positive impact.

Last fall, five outstanding alumni were recognized for Kennesaw State University's 2023 Annual Alumni Awards. The KSU Alumni Association honors KSU graduates who exemplify the ideals and mission of the University.

"We are proud to recognize these outstanding

alumni who have made significant strides in their professional careers and continue to invest their time and talents within the Kennesaw State community," said Frances Beusse, executive director of Alumni and Constituent Engagement. "It's an honor to bring our alumni award recipients back to campus to engage with current students and inspire the next generation of KSU alumni. Each of these honorees is an important part of where Kennesaw State is today and has helped to chart KSU's trajectory for the coming years."

THE 2023 AWARD WINNERS ARE:

SHELBY R. WILKES, M.D., DISTINGUISHED ALUMNI AWARD

Shelby Wilkes, MBA '98, was honored with the 2023 KSU Distinguished Alumni Award, which recognizes a graduate who brings recognition and pride back to the University through excellent leadership and service to the University, the community, and his or her profession. Wilkes, a vitreoretinal surgeon, established Atlanta Eye Consultants and served as the principal investigator of the first statewide diabetic retinopathy screening study.

Since graduating from KSU with an MBA, Wilkes started the University's first affinity group, the Black Alumni Society, as president. He and his wife, Jettie Burnett, created the Wilkes/Burnett Black Alumni Society Scholarship, which supports deserving undergraduate students who have an interest in the sciences or have declared themselves pre-med majors. In 2018, he was inducted into the Michael J. Coles College of Business Hall of Fame.

"I hope that I will stay involved with Kennesaw State University to try to help other students – share some of my knowledge, some of my experience and perhaps some of the wisdom – that I've gained from being affiliated with the Coles College of Business," Wilkes said. "One of the reasons why I wanted to be involved is that I think it's important to give back to the institution, to those who helped bridge the pathway for me to go forward."



LILI ZHANG, KSU ALUMNI SERVICE AWARD

Lili Zhang, Ph.D. '20, has been recognized with the 2023 KSU Alumni Service Award, awarded to a graduate who demonstrates exceptional service to KSU by volunteering their time and expertise. Zhang is a research engineer at Hewlett Packard Enterprise (HPE) in the Marketing Analytics organization.

She received her Ph.D. in Analytics and Data Science from Kennesaw State University and has made significant contributions to the School of Data Science and Analytics as a leading expert in imbalanced learning and graph analytics. Through her volunteer work as a guest speaker, mentorship of Ph.D. students, co-authorship of papers, and personal donation to endow The Dr. Lili Zhang Endowed Doctoral Scholarship, she exemplifies an exceptional commitment to giving back to her alma mater and supporting the academic growth and success of current students.

"I feel so honored to be selected for the KSU Alumni Service Award. I received so much when I was at KSU – the solid foundation of building a top career that supports my family," Zhang said. "So, when we were gradually financially stable after graduation, I knew it was time to give back to help more students at KSU succeed. Let's work together and build the strongest community for our young generation."



DARYLE HIGGINBOTHAM, SPSU LEGACY AWARD

DARYLE HIGGINBOTHAM, SPSU LEGACY AWARD

Daryle Higginbotham, BS '89, is the recipient of the 2023 SPSU Legacy Award, which is awarded to a graduate who illustrates commitment to the STEM field and continued service to the University. Higginbotham received his degree from SPSU, majoring in mechanical engineering. Founder of Marietta Nondestructive Testing, LLC, Higginbotham is a past chair of the Southern Polytechnic State University Foundation Board and has served as an advisor for the Department of Engineering Technology and the Mechatronics Engineering program.

Higginbotham is chairman of Marietta NDT, which currently has more than 55 employees – many of whom are KSU/SPSU interns or graduates. Since 1991, more than 75 students have worked part-time at the company while attending school, gaining valuable industry experience. Marietta NDT sponsors both the KSU Motorsports Team and the annual Pumpkin Launch.

"I feel very honored to be the first SPSU alum to receive the Legacy Award," Higginbotham said. "This award helps to show that we, as the older alumni, are here to support the new university as a whole and make it get where it needs to be."





MARIELLE MATTHEWS, YOUNG ALUMNI SERVICE AWARD

Marielle Matthews, BM '18, has been awarded the 2023 Young Alumni Service Award, which recognizes a graduate within the past 10 years who demonstrates exceptional service to KSU by volunteering their time and expertise.

Matthews, who graduated from KSU with a degree in music education, was the 2017 feature twirler for The Marching Owls. Upon graduation, she served as the first president of the Marching Owls Alumni Society (MOAS) affinity group. In her two years as president, she helped generate some of the University's highest and most consistent alumni engagement for KSU's young graduates. Since earning her degree, Matthews has continued to support the University through her attendance at School of Music concerts, athletics events, alumni events, and Marching Owls events.

"I'm very honored to receive this award," Matthews said. "I put a lot of blood, sweat and tears into MOAS, the Marching Owls Alumni Society, so being recognized for the amount of time and dedication I put in feels really good and is very flattering."

JOHN FUCHKO III, ALUMNI COMMUNITY IMPACT AWARD

John Fuchko III, BS '00, is the recipient of the 2023 Alumni Community Impact Award, presented to a graduate who has shown remarkable achievements in local, national, or global service. Fuchko, the president of Dalton State College, has made a tremendous impact on higher education in the state during his many years of service.

Prior to Dalton State, he served as interim president of Columbus State University and was a longtime professional with the University System of Georgia, most recently as vice chancellor for organizational effectiveness. Additionally, Fuchko has devoted nearly two decades of service to the Georgia Army National Guard, currently serving as colonel and commander of the 122nd Regiment with two combat deployments and five command tours.

Fuchko, who graduated from KSU with a degree in political science, is a past member of the KSU Alumni Association Board of Directors and continues to be an active alumnus by service as a speaker for numerous University events.

"In a very special way, your undergraduate – that experience, that four-year degree – it really just sets the course for your life," Fuchko said. "Part of the job of an alum is to help take care of that institution so that they can take care of those students who are transforming their lives family by family, graduate by graduate. It's an honor, but it's also a duty, to give back to that undergraduate experience."



MEET COACH NICE GUY

ANTOINE PETTWAY GALVANIZES OWL NATION WITH A REPERTOIRE OF AUTHENTIC PERSONALITY AND COMPETITIVE DRIVE

BY TRAVIS HIGHFIELD

While the final seconds ticked off the clock inside the Convocation Center last March, the capacity crowd reached fever pitch in celebration of Kennesaw State's first Division I basketball conference title and a berth in the NCAA men's basketball tournament.

Hundreds of miles away, then-Alabama assistant coach Antoine Pettway sat in a hotel room with his eyes fixed on the television. Having previously thrown his name into the hat to lead the Kennesaw State program, he was once again struck by visions of himself patrolling the sidelines and hoisting a trophy in front of the Owl faithful.

A little more than a month later, Pettway would have his chance. Following a successful rebuild of a program that won a single game four years prior, former Owls coach Amir Abdur-Rahim was tabbed to take over the University of South Florida program. Pettway immediately expressed his interest in the vacancy.

"Kennesaw State was so nice that I tried to get the job twice," he said with a grin.

Second time's the charm. Pettway was officially announced as KSU's eighth head coach in April, ending a 15-year stint on the Alabama coaching staff where he made his mark as one of the nation's best recruiters.

Not unlike a high school recruit on an official visit, Pettway said he immediately felt at home the first time he stepped on campus. From the Convocation Center to the Student-Athlete Success Service Center to the Commons, there was a foundation in



place that put him at ease as he transitioned into his first head coaching role.

"When you step on campus and see the facilities and meet the leaders we have here, this is a sleeping giant," Pettway said. "You can't have championships without championship people, and we have that here."

Beyond the facilities, Pettway said he was also inspired by a sense of momentum sweeping across the community in the wake of last year's March Madness run. Having been a part of several successful Alabama

teams as both a player and coach, he's familiar with the challenge of meeting high expectations year in and year out, as well as the difficulty navigating coaching changes.

To keep momentum on his side, Pettway prioritized engaging the KSU community. While his wife, Kim, took the lead on decorating his new office, Pettway was making introductions at alumni events across the Atlanta metro area. He quickly stood up a series of youth basketball camps to give Cobb County children a taste of Kennesaw State much earlier in their



amateur careers and had his players read books at local elementary schools.

As Cobb County's lone Division I program, Pettway immediately recognized an opportunity for the community to see his program as their own.

"I want people to invest themselves in our program and invest in our guys, and there's no better way to do that than to make them feel like a part of it," Pettway said. "I want them to take ownership of this team and be proud of the product we put on the court. When we win, we win together."

The wins have already begun to pile up. Under Pettway's guidance, KSU secured its third consecutive season with double digit wins. The community support has also been evident. Pettway's first game at the helm saw the fifth-largest crowd in KSU basketball history. Weeks later, the Convocation Center tied its single-game attendance record against cross-town rival Georgia State.

"Owl Nation has adopted Coach Pettway, and his staff and our players respond to the energy he brings to work each and every day," said Director of Athletics Milton Overton. "He has brought together a roster of key returners and talented student-athletes from across the nation to compete for championships."

With all the challenges that come with tackling a new coaching opportunity, from relocating a family to adjusting to a new routine, Pettway admits that he's been spoiled by the mental fortitude of his returning players. He uses the label "every-day guys" to describe players who are willing to show up to off-season workouts and practice with the same attention to detail they would have in a championship game.

It's the every-day mentality that separates championship-caliber programs from the rest, he said.

"These guys know what it takes to come in and compete every day in order to be a championship-level program," Pettway said. "You raise the championship trophy in March, but you win the championship by how you prepare in August. That's what I've learned in my coaching journey."

Pettway's rookie season benefitted from the return of key players like ASUN

Tournament Most Valuable Player Terrell Burden, a senior who stepped into a veteran leadership role on the team. Burden said he felt an immediate connection to Pettway after their first conversation. Like Burden, Pettway played point guard and favors an aggressive style of play that suits Burden's skill set. Off the court, Pettway has proven to be as genuine as they come, Burden said.

"Everyone told us he's a people person, and that's exactly who he has been since he arrived," he said. "He's been a great dude both on and off the court and is one of the most genuine people that you'll meet. He's definitely one of a kind."

Off the court, Pettway has a reputation for building strong bonds with his players that persist long after their collegiate playing days. At his introductory press conference, Collin Sexton of the NBA's Utah Jazz surprised his former coach by taking a redeye flight to pay his respects. Two other former players, Kira Lewis Jr. and Herb Jones, of the New Orleans Pelicans, chipped in to buy shoes for the Owls program out of respect for Pettway.

"I try to tell my guys that this relationship extends far beyond the basketball court," Pettway said. "This is the number you can call when you have your first child. I want to be there for your weddings. I view them all as an extension of my family, and I really mean that."

On gamedays, Pettway's family is found sitting just behind the home bench. He credits his wife as the real head coach of the family. She's the one who keeps him grounded and instills in him the confidence to compete every day, he said. When he returns home each day, he's greeted by his son, Kingston, and daughters, Jana Rae and Summer.

Kingston was a visible part of the Alabama basketball program during Pettway's tenure as an assistant coach. After every win, Pettway would scoop up his son so he could dance with the players in the locker room, a tradition he expects to carry over to KSU.

"Hopefully, he will be dancing a lot because that means we're winning games," Pettway said with a laugh.



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