

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

University Commencement

Our December general commencement programs marked my first as president, and it was certainly a highlight of the year. This opportunity to celebrate the culmination of our students' hard work and dedication brings a great deal of pride, both for their accomplishments and our role in helping them succeed. Experiencing the joy with our students, their family and friends makes the work we do each and every day that much more meaningful. Our December graduating class included approximately 2,450 bachelor's, master's and Ph.D. students. Joining them in person were more than 5,000 family, friends and loved ones, and thousands viewed via the livestream and recorded event.

I particularly enjoyed the ability to acknowledge and celebrate those who were first in their family to earn their degree and those who served our country in the military. It was exciting to see that so many – roughly one-third of all students – stood when I asked them if they had participated in a College to Career “learning by doing” experience as a part of their college studies under the mentorship of our outstanding faculty, supported by our dedicated staff.

Each ceremony included an address to the graduates by a representative of the Academic Senate, who brought best wishes and advice from the faculty, and by a graduate from their respective class, who shared their own stories of their personal journeys and lessons learned. Addressing the candidates from the Senate were Senate President Linda Beale, Law School; Professor Pramod Kholsa, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences; and Academic Services Officer Naida Simon. Student speakers included Jutona Hightower, B.S., College of Nursing; Ghalia Said, B.A., the College of Fine, Performing and Communication Arts; and Carlissa Baker, B.S., College of Education.

Onsite vendors provided opportunities for purchasing memorabilia for the graduates, including T-shirts, flowers, stuffed animals and personalized photographs. In addition, this commencement marked the first to use AI to announce and display the students' names, synchronized with their faces as they walked across the stage. Our Special Events commencement team received tremendous positive feedback on the changes implemented to make this celebration all the more special for our graduates and their families.

WSU's Tribute to the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

The 2024 Tribute to the Life and Legacy of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. marked the 24th year for the event, which was instituted by former Wayne State University Senior Vice President Dr. Arthur L. Johnson. Amazon returned as the Presenting Sponsor along with other sponsors at various levels. Each year, the Division of Government and Community Affairs works with sponsors to ensure this event remains free and open to students, faculty, staff and members of the public.

This year's tribute was held over two days, on Thursday, Jan. 11, 2024, from 5 to 7 p.m. in the Industry Innovation Center Auditorium and on Friday, Jan. 12, 2024, from 10 a.m. to noon in the Hilberry Gateway. This year marked the first time since early in its inception that the event was held on Wayne State's campus; in recent years, the event had been held at Orchestra Hall.

The theme for 2024 was "Arts, Culture and Music of the Movement." The university was honored to welcome Santita Jackson, political analyst, radio and TV host, and internationally recognized vocalist, to serve as its special guest on both days. Jackson continues the legacies of Rev. Dr. King and her father and mother, Rev. and Mrs. Jesse Jackson, by educating others about voting rights and advocating for civil and human rights. The lessons she learned as a child growing up under these influences are still relevant today.

The Jan. 11 event, titled, "The Motor City and the Movement," focused specifically on Detroit and the civil rights movement. The panel discussion, moderated by Rochelle Riley and featuring guests from throughout Wayne State and the Detroit community, examined the city's influence on the civil rights movement in the areas of music, art, religion, politics and labor. The evening concluded with a conversation between Chuck Stokes and Santita Jackson about voting rights and the role activism plays in today's culture.

On Friday, Jan. 12, "Arts, Culture, and Music of the Movement" featured presentations, music, and dance, followed by a conversation with Ms. Jackson. The university also presented the Dr. Arthur L. Johnson Community Leadership Awards, which honored Gretchen C. Valade and the Detroit Symphony Orchestra's Detroit Harmony project, highlighting an individual and an organization that exemplify Dr. Johnson's commitment to community and making a positive difference in Detroit and beyond. A soul food reception in the lobby immediately followed the program.

More than 75 people attended "The Motor City and the Movement," and more than 300 people were in attendance on Friday for "Arts, Culture, and Music of the Movement."

Friday's program was recorded and aired on WSU's website on Monday, Jan. 15, Martin Luther King Jr. Day. As of the following day, more than 600 people had viewed the program, providing an opportunity for those who were unable to attend in-person events to experience the program. The link will remain active throughout the year, continuing to provide education so important to maintaining Dr. King's legacy.

Faculty Impact Highlights

Sokol V. Todi, Ph.D., professor and chair of pharmacology in the School of Medicine, **received a second competitive four-and-a-half-year, \$2.4 million renewal of his R01 grant, "Mechanisms of Neuroprotection in Polyglutamine Neurodegeneration,"** from the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke. The research focuses on age-dependent neurodegeneration, which is a major health and socioeconomic burden. The mechanisms of degeneration initiation and progression and the protective pathways to combat neurodegeneration are poorly understood. Dr. Todi and his research team aim to

elucidate how proteins implicated in the polyglutamate family of degenerative diseases are regulated in human cells with the goal of finding a way to combat them therapeutically. This achievement is particularly noteworthy given the National Institutes of Health's priority emphasis on distributing funding across investigators and areas.

Shooshan Danagoulian, Ph.D., associate professor of economics in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, **received a two-year, \$125,000 grant from the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention** for the study, "Seasonal Allergy Blues: Is Mental Health Worse on High Pollen Days?" This project aims to fill the gap in knowledge of the relationship between mental health and seasonal pollen – a component of air pollution that intensifies with rising global temperatures – using newly available, high-frequency data to quantify the impact of seasonal pollen on mental health and suicides in the United States.

Kelly Young, Ph.D., associate dean of Wayne State University's College of Fine, Performing and Communication Arts, was recently awarded **the American Forensic Association's (AFA) Distinguished Service Award**. The AFA Distinguished Service Award recognizes long-term service to American intercollegiate competitive speech and debate communities and argumentation scholarship that has a positive impact on the field, such as current research and educational practices, community development, and consideration of career as a model for AFA professionals.

Gil Mor, M.D., Ph.D., Scientific director of the C.S. Mott Center for Human Growth and Development at Wayne State University School of Medicine, received the **Best Mentor Award from the International Society for Immunology and Reproduction**. Dr. Mor was recognized for his leading efforts to mentor young researchers in the field of reproductive immunology and ovarian cancer. He received the award during the 15th World Congress of the International Society for Immunology and Reproduction, held in Hamburg, Germany, last fall.

While I don't usually report on submitted proposals, the work of this interdisciplinary team, led by Dr. Arava and co-PIs Helen Durand, Dongxiao Zhu, Ming Dong and Yinlun Huang, is a **notable example of the timely, impactful work by our faculty in a cutting-edge field, Artificial Intelligence, that will drive the next generation technologies and economic development**. Here is a summary of the large-scale, interdisciplinary project proposal's focus:

AI-Guided Critical Materials Research for Clean Energy Technologies. Critical materials are essential for the development of clean energy technologies vital for national security and societal well-being, but they suffer from supply chain risk. Although recycling of critical materials may sound like a viable solution to material recovery, this alone cannot offer sufficient supply of the materials with the ever-growing demands. There is a critical need for new materials that not only mimic the performance of the critical materials, but also account for sustainability standards. However, this task can be extremely challenging for human researchers as it involves designing and synthesizing diverse materials through continuous modeling and experimentation. The motivation behind this AI institute is the need to accelerate the discovery, synthesis and manufacture of new materials that can efficiently replace critical materials. Our institute envisions a groundbreaking fusion of AI

with materials research, aiming to revolutionize the development of materials essential for advancing energy technologies by resorting to various advanced AI techniques. Our transformative notion is to develop novel AI-guided strategies for intelligent materials discovery, suggesting replacements for critical materials, ensuring life-cycle sustainability, automating the accessibility of material development advancements and fostering rapid progress in this domain. The rational basis for this institute lies in integrating AI tools with physics and mathematics-based models, incorporating material life-cycle factors for the discovery of new materials.

Institutional Impact Highlights

Wayne State University was selected to participate in the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities (USU) and the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) two-day Student Experience Project (SEP) Institute at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas from Jan. 29-30, 2024. The Institute convened 15-20 institutional teams to design faculty communities of practice, using evidence-based classroom practices from the SEP, that will launch in the fall of 2024. With funding from the Raikes Foundation, the institute aims to increase equity in college success by transforming the student experience.

Wayne State's project focused on establishing a framework for a faculty community of practice that will focus on narrowing disparities in student outcomes – including, but not limited to, course outcomes, retention and graduation, and workforce development and career attainment. In addition to Ahmad Ezzeddine, vice president for academic student affairs and global engagement, Wayne State's cross-functional institutional team included Darryl Gardner, assistant vice president for Student Success; Sara Kacin, assistant provost for faculty development and faculty success and director of the Office for Teaching and Learning; Christine Jackson, professor and chair of the Department of Management and Information Systems; Emily Reetz, academic advisor and president of the University Advising Council; and Alex Boesch, intercultural training director.

2024 Mandela Washington Fellowship. Wayne State University has been selected by the U.S. Department of State as an Institute Partner for the 2024 Mandela Washington Fellowship for Young African Leaders. Beginning in mid-June, the university will host 25 of Africa's bright, emerging public management leaders for a six-week leadership institute. This is the fourth year that Wayne State has been named a partner. The Mandela Washington Fellowship is the flagship program of the Young African Leaders Initiative, which empowers young African leaders through academic coursework, leadership training, mentoring, networking, professional opportunities and local community engagement.

2024 Fulbright Orientation Programs. For an unprecedented seventh year, the U.S. Department of State has selected Wayne State University to provide Fulbright Gateway Orientation. Fulbright, the U.S. government's flagship exchange program, provides U.S. citizens with grants to study, teach and conduct research abroad and for non-U.S. citizens to come to the United States to do the same. The Office of International Programs will

manage the virtual orientation for 1,200 foreign grantees coming to the U.S. for the 2024-25 academic year. This is the fourth time WSU has been named sole provider for this program.

Wayne State University has also been selected by the Institute of International Education to host the Fulbright U.S. Program Virtual Pre-Departure Orientation-Middle East and North Africa (MENA) this summer. This program prepares U.S. Fulbright awardees who will either teaching or conduct research in the MENA region by acclimating them to cultures and customs of the countries in the area, as well as the expectations of the Fulbright Program. This is the sixth time the university has been named as host. The program is also managed by the Office of International Programs.

Student Athlete Success

Wayne State's student-athletes continue to excel in the classroom. Sixty-two (62) student-athletes recorded a perfect 4.00 term GPA, with more than 78 percent of Warrior student-athletes receiving above a 3.00 for the fall 2023 semester. The entire student-athlete population posted a 3.385 term GPA, with a cumulative GPA for all student-athletes at 3.421. Nearly 8 in 10 of the 406 student-athletes in the fall term have a cumulative GPA of at least 3.0, while more than 55 percent have a cumulative GPA of at least 3.5.

The Wayne State University Department of Athletics has been selected as one of 24 NCAA Division II Award of Excellence finalists as announced by the NCAA on Jan. 5, 2024, for its Bandana Project. Twenty-five (25) schools and two conferences have been named finalists for the 2024 Division II Award of Excellence, an accolade recognizing initiatives in the past year that exemplify the Division II philosophy, community engagement and student-athlete leadership. To date, more than 120 Wayne State University student-athletes have joined The Bandana Project, which ultimately earned them their bandanas as each student-athlete needed to complete a mental health training program.

The Bandana Project is a volunteer-driven movement dedicated to preventing suicide through promoting help-seeking behavior and increasing awareness of vital mental health resources. After a short orientation and basic suicide prevention training, Bandana Project volunteers can proudly attach or display a bandana on their backpack, bag or person, signifying they have pledged to be a safe individual to approach for mental health and suicide prevention information and resources.

WSU Athletics partnered with the Black Family Development Inc., which based in Detroit, for QPR (Question, Persuade, Refer) training by a suicide prevention coordinator. In September, Suicide Prevention Month, Wayne State created a month-long initiative to break the stigma around mental health issues. This included launching the Bandana Project and partnering with the B#4 Foundation, an organization that aims to honor former Wayne State student-athlete Brady Hessbrook by promoting mental health awareness and suicide prevention through education, outreach initiatives, advocacy and community engagement.

Institutional Advocacy

Detroit Policy Conference. On Jan. 11, I had the pleasure of participating in a “fire-side chat” with WXYZ-TV Channel 7 news anchor Carolyn Clifford at the 2024 Detroit Policy Conference about growing Michigan’s population.

During our conversation, I regaled the audience of community and business leaders with examples of how our Wayne State outstanding students and faculty contribute to the prosperity of our community, and our many initiatives that help make Detroit and Michigan vibrant, attractive places to live. We talked about:

- How Wayne State is helping the State of Michigan reach its goal of ensuring that 60% of the population have a college degree or credential by 2030.
- How three in four of our 6,500 graduates each year stay in Michigan and meet workforce needs.
- How higher education is the best public and individual investment to be made to advance social and economic mobility, spawn innovation and new business, and how it benefits society through better informed and healthier citizens.
- Our great faculty and students, and how our College to Career approach ensures students receive “learning by doing” experiences, in addition to a top-tier education with our faculty who are second to none, to help them graduate career ready.

Women Who Lead. I am honored to have been selected by WJR-AM 760 as its first “Women Who Lead” nominee of 2024. “Women Who Lead” honors female leaders from throughout the Great Lakes region who are influencing our communities in positive ways. I was interviewed for the “Women Who Lead” radio program by the show’s host, Ann Thomas. The program, which is sponsored by General Motors, aired on Saturday, Jan. 27.

During the interview, I had the opportunity to talk about how I started my career and transition into leadership through the support of shadowing and mentorship, as well as how excited I am to work with our campus community at an institution that is so committed to the success for our students to benefit our community.

I also shared some of my goals for 2024, including broadening our connections, hearing both from our academic colleagues and community members about their aspirations for the university and collaborating to identify new opportunities for the university. I have been invited to attend a Women Who Lead Honoree Ceremony later this year along with the other 11 women to be selected in the future.

A Bit of Fun

On Jan. 8, Wayne State’s Word Warriors program announced its 15th annual list of long-lost – but not completely forgotten – words. This annual list is composed of submissions from both administrators of the website as well as the public; participants worldwide have seen their favorite words brought back from the brink of obsolescence at <https://wordwarriors.wayne.edu/>. New entries are posted there – as well as on Facebook – weekly.

I was surprised to see “dollop” - and a timely entry as we enter the U.S. presidential primary season is “blatherskite”!

This year’s list received broad media coverage, including in outlets such as CNN, Yahoo News and the Detroit Free Press, among others. The Word Warriors’ 2024 list of eminently useful words that should be brought back to enrich our language can be found at wordwarriors.wayne.edu.