



Dr. Kimberly Andrews Espy  
President

## PRESIDENT'S REPORT

MARCH 6, 2024

### Faculty Impact Highlights

**Mark Huttemann, Ph.D.**, School of Medicine, Department of Biochemistry, Microbiology and Immunology, was awarded \$1.4M from the U.S. Department of Defense to support his project "Cytochrome c acetylation drives prostate cancer aggressiveness and Warburg effect." According to the National Cancer Institute of the National Institutes of Health, in 2023 it was estimated that more than 288,000 men would be diagnosed with prostate cancer and 34,700 would die in the United States, making it the second most common cancer in men. In the past decade, diagnoses of prostate cancer increased from 3.9% to 8.2%, with African American men having the highest incidence and mortality rates of the disease compared to white, Hispanic, and Asian men. Cytochrome c was previously suggested to be a molecular determinant of prostate cancer health disparities. This study aims to establish the role of the protein cytochrome c, which the team proposes is central in two hallmarks of cancer: switching from aerobic to glycolytic metabolism – also known as the Warburg effect – an evasion of apoptosis.

**Ann Schwartz, Ph.D.**, School of Medicine, Department of Oncology has been awarded \$1.9M from NCI/NIH to support her project entitled "Genetic Variation in Cancer Risk and Outcomes in African Americans." Genetic testing has improved our understanding of the basic biology of carcinogenesis, identified high-risk populations for targeted prevention and screening, identified targets for new treatment strategies, and has led to some of the most significant inroads in reducing cancer burden. Dr. Schwartz and her Wayne State team have assembled one of the largest populations of African American cancer survivors to date to study genetic susceptibility in this population. The overall goal of their work is to improve the identification and clinical management of hereditary and multiple primary cancers in African Americans who are currently underrepresented in genetic research.

**Jitao Zhang, Ph.D.**, College of Engineering, Department of Biomedical Engineering, was awarded a CAREER Award from The National Science Foundation, the agency's most prestigious accolade

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for early stage researchers of \$505,132 for his project entitled, “Photoacoustic-Brillouin microscopy for multimodal mechanical imaging of tumor growth.” Dr. Zhang will use a technology called photoacoustic-Brillouin microscopy (PABM) to find an absolute measurement of mechanical change of cells in their physiological conditions. This less invasive and more convenient technique will enable a previously unattainable absolute measurement of mechanical change of tumor growth properties. Using PABM to address a significant gap in current cancer research methodologies will advance research in both BioPhotonics and cancer diseases. Dr. Zhang intends to integrate this research into the GME curriculum by developing educational modules including a summer course on Brillouin technology for graduate students and post docs.

**Helen Durand, Ph.D.**, College of Engineering, Department of Chemical Engineering and Materials Science, was selected as a recipient of the AIChE 35 Under 35 Award, an honor presented by the American Institute of Chemical Engineers that recognizes 35 chemical engineering professionals under the age of 35 who have made significant contributions to the field and serve as role models for future generations. Dr. Durand was selected for the safety category for her efforts to mitigate safety and security hazards related to control systems for chemical processes, advance autonomous operations and exploring interactions between chemical process control and process system designs. Her work is helping to address critical national priorities in sustainable manufacturing, and the design of intelligent systems for applications across industries.

**Michael Petriello, Ph.D.**, School of Medicine, Department of Pharmacology, was featured by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences in its “Stories of Success” series for his research on how the interplay between environmental pollutants and nutrition influences health.

### **Student Impact Highlights**

**Syeda Zainab**, a public health major, is among a small group of future health research professionals selected to participate in a program sponsored by the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Zainab, who graduated from Wayne State University’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences in December 2023, is one of 61 scholars and 32 mentors accepted in this year’s [All of Us Research Program](#).

Student athlete **David Thurman**, a senior pitcher for the WSU baseball team, is hitting a home run in the community. David will graduate this year with a management degree from the Ilitch School of Business -- and though he wants to continue playing ball, he is also ready to inspire Detroit’s next generation of major league hopefuls. David credits a program sponsored by Major League Baseball called Reviving Baseball in Inner Cities, or RBI, as an important aspect of his own development. This program is the league’s youth initiative that provides playing opportunities for young people in underserved communities. David is an important member of WSU’s outstanding baseball program and a committed scholar, hoping to “give back” and inspire resilience and hope for the future for young players in our community.

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Redshirt senior pitcher **Karter Fitzpatrick** was one of nine collegiate student-athletes selected to the Inaugural Lou Gehrig Community Impact Team. Fitzpatrick was one of just three players chosen outside of the Division I rank, and the only Division II student-athlete chosen.

Both the men's and women's swimming and diving teams received Scholar All-America honors for the Fall term as determined by the College Swimming and Diving Coaches Association of America. The women's team had a 3.66 term GPA, while the men were at 3.38. At the GLIAC Swimming/Diving Conference Championships held earlier this month, senior **Mikaela Senkus** was voted GLIAC Female Diver of the Year for the second consecutive year, while graduate student Jordan Fox was selected as the GLIAC Female Swimmer of the Year. **Khalil Ben Ajmia** earned both the GLIAC Male Freshman Swimmer of the Year as well as the GLIAC Male Swimmer of the Year award.

Six members of the women's cross country squad were recognized with All-Academic Athlete honors by the U.S. Track & Field and Cross Country Coaches Association including **Thailiya Christensen, Emily Gordon, Reagan Justice, Anna O'Connor, Katherine Ray, and Briana Vojinov**. The team also received All-Academic Team honors for a 3.66 cumulative GPA. The men's cross-country squad had three honorees: **Ransom Allen, Tyler Buchanan, and Seth Pianga**, and the team was recognized for a 3.51 cumulative GPA. **Allen** was also selected to receive a GLIAC Commissioner's Award for Fall 2023 for academic and athletic excellence.

## **Institutional Impact and Activity Highlights**

### *Campus Speech Symposium*

As an inclusive learning environment that celebrates and protects open dialogue and free speech, Wayne State University held a symposium on campus speech titled “Speech on Campus, Perspectives, Implications and Ethics” on February 29, 2024. The full-day, interdisciplinary event featured two panel discussions with a focus on how to best promote and support free and civil discourse on our campus. The keynote speakers were University of California Berkeley School of Law Dean Erwin Chemerinsky, and President Eduardo M. Peñalver of Seattle University – both of whom are renowned legal scholars and national leaders on issues of campus speech. The morning panel focused on student, faculty, and institutional perspectives,” and featured nationally renowned authors and speakers, including Denise Taliaferro Baszile, Dean of WSU’s College of Education, who discussed the importance of identity dynamics at play in the classroom, and other forums, and how to best engage in uncomfortable conversations. The afternoon panel examined interests, perspectives, and emotions, utilizing a research and methodological approach to the critical issue of moving past, and even repairing, speech divides. This segment featured a dynamic group of individuals in a discussion moderated by Wayne State Associate Professor of Diversity, Culture & Communication, Donyale Pagett. Special thank you to WSU Law School Dean Richard

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Bierschbach, and the entire team that organized and planned this timely, thoughtful, and impactful program for our university community.

### *Community Health Outreach*

Wayne Mobile Health Unit partnered with Meridian in Michigan, a leading managed care organization in the state of Michigan, to announce a truly life-changing partnership to improve maternal and infant health and broadly support the WMHU's community outreach efforts. The collaboration will deliver preventative health services directly in neighborhoods, at homes and in workplaces. The \$1.1M grant from Centene Foundation will allow Wayne Mobile Health Unit to deploy mobile vans to low, moderate, and high-risk pregnant women living in metropolitan Detroit who have not engaged in routine prevention services. This will also connect them to the Detroit Medical Center's obstetrics and gynecology specialists, many of whom are Wayne State School of Medicine faculty, for follow-up care.

Wayne State University's School of Medicine climbed again in the National Institutes of Health funding awards. The Blue Ridge Institute for Medical Research, which curates an annual ranking of NIH funding to medical schools and their departments, recently ranked the WSU School of Medicine 71st nationally in 2023, with nearly \$57 million in awards, an increase of more than \$3 million from the previous year. In 2022, the school ranked 73rd nationally. Two departments, the Department of Emergency Medicine, and the Department of Ophthalmology, Visual and Anatomical Sciences, are among the nation's top 20 departments in NIH grant awards.

To address critical professional workforce challenges in healthcare, we partnered with the Detroit Medical Center to host a Career and Alumni Networking Event in the McGregor Memorial Conference Center last week. The event connected our university nursing and allied health community, including both current students and our alumni in these fields to the important professional work opportunities that Detroit Medical Center offers. We were fortunate to have WSU alum Rudolph P. Valentini, M.D., Chief Medical Officer at the DMC, join as our guest speaker. The Detroit Medical Center continues to be a valued partner, as we collaborate to address health and wellness in our community, along with workforce shortages and ongoing needs throughout Michigan's health care industry.

### *Educational Access, Research, and Economic Development*

Wayne State University participated in the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine *Government-University-Industry Research Roundtable* (GUIRR) on supporting K-12 STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) Education to Create the Foundations for Innovation, which was held in early February in Washington, D.C. This convening of senior leaders from government, university, industry, educational experts, and philanthropy explored how the K-12 educational pipeline can be supported by U.S. research enterprise across diverse

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sectors to encourage science-based economic development through regional education programs. Wayne State Vice President for Academic Student Affairs and Global Engagement, Ahmad Ezzeddine, moderated a panel discussion on Early Entrepreneurship Education and the Future STEM Workforce, which will survey models of early education approaches to encouraging innovation and entrepreneurial development. The discussion focused on developing future innovators, encouraging career development in STEM outside the classroom, and opportunities for developing partnerships to foster critically thinking early STEM learners.

### *Black History Month Program Highlights*

**Passion Meets Purpose:** Dr. Luis Ponjuan from Texas A&M University presented a keynote address on February 15<sup>th</sup> aimed to facilitate and inspire Wayne State University and the local community on ways to address the educational experiences of diverse student learners. More than 85 people attended, with the primary aim was to identify how the university can become more ready to serve the new generation of diverse student learners who vary by age, race, socio-economic status, religion, gender, sexual orientation identities and other factors.

**Detroit History is Black History:** On February 20<sup>th</sup>, the Division of Government and Community Affairs, Department of African American Studies, Organization of Black Alumni, and the Juneteenth Committee hosted the panel discussion Detroit History is Black History. About 100 guests attended the event that highlighted well-known and lesser-known facts about Black history in Detroit, with a focus on Wayne State's strong connections. For instance, Dr. DeWitt Burton became the first state-wide Black elected official when he joined the WSU Board of Governors in 1959. This event was another example of Wayne State hosting momentous events that bring the university community together to learn with and from each other.

**The Black Business Reunion:** TechTown hosted The Black Business Reunion on February 22, recognizing the vital role Black businesses play in our communities. We were honored to welcome Mr. Don Graves, U.S. Deputy Secretary of Commerce, to join as our special guest speaker for the morning program. President Espy shared with Mr. Graves the many ways that WSU is supporting and nurturing entrepreneurship, and as part of the visit, engaged with the university's corporate relations team, tech founders, and the Global Epicenter for Mobility pillar leads. The day also included two panels: The Elders' Corner, where owners of some of Detroit's most successful businesses shared their savvy and wisdom for longevity, and the second panel, The Youngins' Show-and-Tell, which showcased emerging entrepreneurs who have leveraged the resources in the entrepreneurial ecosystem to start and grow their companies. In addition to the reunion, TechTown also hosted a resource fair, which included participation from a dozen organizations highlighting information about loan programs, business training classes, and other areas of technical support for aspiring entrepreneurs and existing businesses. To encourage the future generation, there was a pitch competition for high school juniors and seniors to share an innovative solution that will help their favorite Black-owned business level up their success. More

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than 200 attendees gathered for the day, which included food, art, music, and ended with a video tribute to TechTown alumni and legacy business owners to celebrate their success, all while honoring the history of Detroit's Black business community.

#### *WDET 75th Anniversary*

On Tuesday, February 13th, I had the pleasure of addressing hundreds of staff, community members, and loyal listeners during the WDET Public Radio on the station's 75th Anniversary -- 75 years to the day after the station had its first broadcast. Nearly 400 station members, on-air personalities, business supporters, and friends were on hand at an upbeat party at Jam Handy to celebrate the birthday. One week before the event, the station implemented a significantly enhanced program schedule, featuring 40% more local content, including seven new music programs and revamped public affairs programming. Stephen Henderson will now host a program that explores diversity, equality and inclusion called "Created Equal," and local talent Tia Graham and Nick Austin are hosting a news magazine format show titled "The Metro." WDET will now sound even more like Detroit, reflecting the news, culture, and happenings in our great city.

#### *DSO Classical Roots Celebration*

Wayne State University was incredibly pleased to be a sponsor of the 23rd Arthur L. Johnson – Honorable Damon Jerome Keith Classical Roots Celebration, held this past weekend in the beautiful Orchestra Hall. This year, the program recognized the accomplishments of two remarkable individuals: Grammy Award-winning composer and jazz pianist, Billy Childs, and community leader, WSU Governor, and longtime DSO Board Member, Shirley Stancato. The program also celebrated the Third Annual Marlowe Stoudamire Honoree for Innovation and Community Collaboration, beloved poet and CEO of Moore Black Press, Jessica Care Moore. Since 1978, the Detroit Symphony Orchestra Classical Roots concerts have increased the awareness of the significant contributions that African American composers and musicians have made to classical music.

#### *Year of the Dragon*

The Office of International Programs and Association of Chinese Faculty and Staff partnered to create a campuswide event marking titled "Year of the Dragon." The Lunar New Year holds significance across many groups in East Asia, and more than 200 guests attended to help further the rich tapestry of cultures that define Wayne State University. The event included several performances, including a demonstration of the renowned Sichuan Opera Face Mask Changing, a duet of "The Drinking Song" from Verdi's opera "La Traviata," performed by Dr. Jinsheng Zhang, vice chair for research and research director of the Department of Otolaryngology in the School of Medicine, and his wife Jie Wang, and a Chinese fashion show incorporating the look of blue and white porcelain.