

MOVING FORWARD

AHS YEAR IN REVIEW 2023



Going Global

Opportunity abounds for AHS' international students





ON THE COVER

The College of Applied Health Sciences is proud to have one of the most diverse—if not the most diverse—student bodies on the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign campus. Thirty-three percent of AHS students belong to historically underrepresented racial and ethnic groups, while 149 of our learners are international students. In recent years, the university and AHS have been intentional in recruiting from non-traditional student areas such as Africa and the Middle East. The number of students enrolled at Illinois from Africa has risen from 81 in 2011 to 231 in fall 2022. AHS has seen its international student enrollment nearly double in that same time.

The students on our cover represent the emerging pipeline AHS is building. Emmanuel Dubure, a student in the Master of Public Health program, is from The Republic of Ghana; Byron Juma, a doctoral student in Recreation, Sport and Tourism, is from Nigeria; and Jemimah Bakare, an MPH student, is also from Nigeria.

These students are proud members of the expanding AHS community. With the efforts of Illinois International and the funding of the university's Investment for Growth program, we know this is just the start.

“Our diverse community is our most valuable asset, creating a richer educational experience for all,” said Chancellor Robert J. Jones. “And there is no other institution in this state that has the capacity to translate our missions of teaching and learning, discovery and public engagement into real, measurable and positive impact for the world.”

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HELP US HELP THE ENVIRONMENT!

If you received a print copy of *Moving Forward* and would like to receive future issues via email, please email Kathy Saathoff at ksaathof@illinois.edu.

A Message from the Dean

CHERYL HANLEY-MAXWELL

Welcome to Moving Forward, our annual sharing of good news from the College of Applied Health Sciences. I'm happy to report that 2023 was marked by significant growth throughout the college, and the future looks bright.



We added outstanding members to our staff, including important hires in the Center on Health, Aging and Disability, the Master of Health Administration degree program and the Division of Disability Resources and Educational Services. You'll meet the new director of DRES, Heather Stout, in this issue. You'll learn how, with help from Investment for Growth funding from the Office of the Provost, we're making our Master of Health Administration, Master of Public Health and Master of Recreation, Sport and Tourism degree programs accessible to students and beneficial to working professionals around the world.

The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign has one of the largest representations of international students among public universities in the United States. While the majority of them hail from China, India and South Korea, the numbers of students from African countries are growing. The university has made increasing numbers from underrepresented countries in the Global South a priority. The AHS student body includes people from Africa, Brazil, Iran and other underrepresented countries. You'll meet some of them in this issue of *Moving Forward*.

AHS is proud to have one of the most diverse student bodies on campus, not only international students but also domestic students from underrepresented groups. This diversity is critical to graduating professionals who are truly global citizens, who understand the cultural differences that impact their fields as well as the ways in which they are similar. In a world that seems to be building walls and fomenting an "us vs. them" world view, AHS is committed to tearing down walls and building bridges of understanding and a sense of shared humanity.

This has been our mission, and that of all our instructional and service units, since the beginning. Two of our units celebrated milestone anniversaries in 2023: the Division of Disability Resources and Educational Services observed its 75th anniversary, and the Department of Speech and Hearing Science celebrated 50 years. *Moving Forward* spoke with SHS department head Pamela Hadley about the future of speech-language pathology and audiology, and it's an exciting one.

I hope you all face futures that are exciting in good and positive ways. One of the best things about working in an environment of discovery and learning, surrounded by enthusiastic and earnest people and brilliant minds, is that one cannot dwell too long on what is wrong with the world. The business of preparing students for a meaningful future in which they are able to make a difference must be done to the best of our ability every day. We have to be optimistic. We have to believe that as the pendulum can swing toward the extremes of division and violence, it can also swing back to extreme unity and peace. I wish you and yours, all of us, peace in the days ahead.

Cheryl

Global Opportunities

Story by ANNA FLANAGAN

The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign has more than 11,500 international students enrolled in its undergraduate and graduate programs. While the majority hail from China, India and South Korea, the number of students from African nations is starting to grow—at both the campus level and within the College of Applied Health Sciences.

The Republic of Ghana has the second-largest population in West Africa. Until recently, Emmanuel Dubure was one of its more than 32 million inhabitants. He said the part of the country where he grew up faces many health challenges, and he wanted to develop the expertise to make a difference. He chose to study in the United States, he said, because “the U.S. has the best educational system at the graduate level and is a hub for research and experts in many fields.”

Dubure aspires to work at the community level to improve health back home. He learned of Illinois on LinkedIn and liked the idea of obtaining his master’s degree in community health from a well-ranked Research 1 university.

“Most importantly, I chose to come here because the College of Applied Health Sciences had faculty doing good research in my area of interest, which is the use of nutrition education to improve health, particularly in relation to chronic conditions,” he said.

Dubure described his experience at Illinois as “amazing” and said he would strongly recommend it to other international students.

“I have met a lot of wonderful people, both students and professors. The environment here is very stimulating and supportive of learning,” he said. “AHS is very multicultural, which gives you an opportunity to learn about different cultures. It also helps you feel at home because you meet other people from your home country.”



Left to right: Jemimah Bakare, Emmanuel Dubure, Byron Juma



A WORLD-CLASS UNIVERSITY NEEDS A WORLD-CLASS STUDENT BODY TO PREPARE FUTURE PROFESSIONALS FOR CAREERS THAT WILL INVOLVE ADVANCING RELATIONSHIPS ACROSS INTERNATIONAL AND CULTURAL BOUNDARIES. INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS ELEVATE CLASS DISCUSSIONS AND ACTIVITIES AND RESEARCH PROGRAMS BY SHARING INSIGHTS AND CULTURAL VALUES.

—BILL STEWART, INTERIM DEPARTMENT HEAD, RST

A common sense of humanity

The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign boasts one of the largest international student populations among public institutions in the United States. According to the university's Vision 2030 Global Strategy document, the first international students arrived on campus just four years after the university was founded. In 1907, the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign became the first university in the nation to create the position of international student adviser, an early recognition of the benefits of worldwide perspectives in education and scholarship.

Marta Schneider, associate director for global communication at Illinois International, said the university's global strategy puts a high priority on intentional engagement in Global South countries.

"The number of students from the African continent have indeed been increasing, with Nigeria being among the top 10 represented countries at Illinois in 2021 and 2022," she said. "The university also is committing resources to increasing ties with Latin America and underrepresented parts of Asia."

Bill Stewart, interim head of the Department of Recreation, Sport and Tourism, thinks encouraging international enrollments is a good idea.

"A world-class university needs a world-class student body to prepare future professionals for careers that will involve advancing relationships across international and cultural boundaries," he said. "International students elevate class discussions and activities and research programs by sharing insights and cultural values."

As a result, he adds, domestic students often better understand cultural differences and similarities and reflect on their own cultural heritage. International students can increase understanding of a common sense of humanity.

This has certainly been the case for Sandraluz Lara-Cinisomo, associate professor of kinesiology and community health. Her research addresses disparities in the mental health of women and mothers in different racial, ethnic and immigrant groups and the military. In her Laboratory for Emotion and Stress Assessment, she has graduate students from Nigeria, Ethiopia and The Republic of The Gambia. She said the insights that international students provide on perinatal mental health disparities are critical for addressing the diverse needs of mothers not only globally but also within the United States.

"International students have lived experiences that are valuable when considering risk factors for perinatal mental health, barriers to care and innovative strategies that respect diverse communities' cultural and linguistic needs," Lara-Cinisomo said.

Domestic students also benefit from learning, she added, that while public health crises abroad may appear identical to ones in the United States, they may actually involve layers of complex cultural and political systems that aren't observed here.

One of Lara-Cinisomo's mentees, Mary Ellen Mendy, hails from the smallest country within mainland Africa, the Republic of The Gambia. Women in The Gambia face many challenges to their physical and mental health. After completing her Ph.D. in community health, Mendy hopes to apply all that she has learned from this program and her Master of Public Health program at the University of Illinois Springfield to making a difference back home.

"The skills I am developing are already paving the way for my future career as a researcher," Mendy said. "I have received so much training in the Laboratory for Emotion and Stress Assessment lab, which I greatly value."

Mendy said she already has recommended the program to friends back in The Gambia: "The University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign is a prestigious institution, and I am extremely proud of being a student here. I wouldn't want other international students to miss out on these crucial opportunities."

A wholehearted recommendation

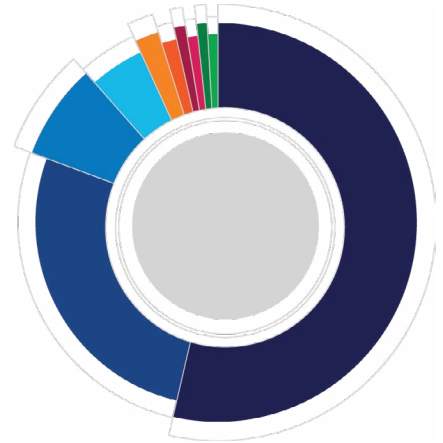
Like their domestic colleagues, international students also benefit from the exposure to different cultures. Kenyan student Byron Juma said he has seen the months fly by as he's grown "leaps and bounds" from his interactions with students from different parts of the world.

"I have taken classes from different departments and appreciated the opportunities to interact with students from diverse academic and social backgrounds and nationalities," he said. "Such interactions have enriched my academic life and allowed me to view my research from different perspectives. Furthermore, these interactions have allowed me to learn and appreciate other cultures, thus building my emotional and social intelligence."

Juma, who is pursuing a Ph.D. in recreation, sport and tourism, has researched doping in sport in Africa and Europe. The unique closed-league system and heavy commercialization of sport in the United States offered an exciting new perspective for his research. The possibility of studying with RST Assistant Professor Julian Woolf, one of the world's leading scholars on the topic, was also enticing.

TOP 10

SENDING COUNTRIES BY NEW STUDENTS



*International Student and Scholar Services/International Statistics
Fall 2022*

"I firmly believe that AHS has some of the best faculty in the country," Juma said. "Getting a degree in the college counts as a prestigious achievement."

Juma also noted that the outstanding diversity of the student body in AHS, where 33 percent of the students belong to historically underrepresented racial and ethnic groups and 149 students are from other countries, makes it easy to feel at home.

Nigerian student Jemimah Bakare, who is pursuing a master's degree in community health, agrees.

"The campus' commitment to diversity and inclusion makes it an attractive choice for an international student," she said. "The sense of belonging and the opportunities for cultural exchange are enriching aspects of the university experience that I believe are essential for personal growth and academic success."

Bakare's interests focus on the management of type 2 diabetes and chronic kidney disease in older adults. She was drawn to the strong academic and research reputation of the campus and the college as well as the student body diversity.

"The academic rigor and quality of instruction have exceeded my expectations," she said. "Furthermore, the university's emphasis on research and practical application of knowledge has provided me with valuable hands-on experiences that will undoubtedly contribute to my future career in community health."

Because of this combination of academic excellence, diversity and translational research opportunities, Bakare would "wholeheartedly" recommend the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and the College of Applied Health Sciences to other Nigerian students. In addition, she said, the support services and resources available to international students at the university help to ensure a smooth transition to life in the United States.



EXPANDING GLOBAL OUTREACH

In addition to Africa, the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign's Vision 2030 Global Strategy underscores the desire to increase student enrollments from other parts of the Global South, which includes Latin America, the Caribbean, and underrepresented parts of Asia including countries in the Middle East. Many of these countries already appear on the list of 126 that currently are represented in the university's student body, but their numbers are small.

Iranian student Sahel Moein, who is pursuing a master's degree in kinesiology, said that unlike other colleges and universities in the U.S.



where Iranian students predominantly choose to focus on engineering and basic sciences, Iranian students at Illinois can also be found in the health sciences, art, literature, education and sociology.

"Thanks to the U. of I.'s outstanding reputation and high rankings, earning a degree here is perceived very positively in Iran," she said. "Graduating from a top-ranked university is a significant advantage when seeking faculty positions there."

Moein was working as a clinician at a rehabilitation hospital in Iran when she realized there was more that could be done to improve the quality of life of individuals with disabilities. Given the quality of American institutions of higher education, she decided to pursue her graduate work here. She was drawn to the College of Applied Health Sciences because of its exceptional research in kinesiology and rehabilitation sciences.

"The diverse range of research, encompassing both physical and biomechanical, as well as social and behavioral aspects, greatly piqued my interest and influenced my decision to study here," she said.



Brazilian student Jonathan Rocha de Oliveira thinks many more Brazilian students would be interested in attending Illinois if they knew about the opportunities here.

"Unfortunately, many folks there do not know what to do to attend such a prestigious institution as Illinois," he said. "They believe it is impossible, but it is not. I did it so others can make it, too."

De Oliveira, a Ph.D. student in the Department of Recreation, Sport and Tourism, had always dreamed of studying abroad. He believed the United States, with its significant investment in education and research, would be the place to become the world-class professional he envisioned.

"Illinois' strong reputation, research opportunities, outstanding resources and internationally renowned faculty drew me here," he said. The strong interdisciplinary focus and diversity of the College of Applied Health Sciences also got his attention.

"It has expanded my mind in ways I never thought possible. Having different perspectives makes you think outside the box and sparks innovative ideas."

Fellow Brazilian Ana Laura Selzer Ninomiya, whose doctoral studies in kinesiology focus on exercise psychology, said because of the time involved in getting an advanced degree, choosing the right program is critical. She's happy with her decision to study at Illinois.



"I've been able to form important connections with leaders in my field and with colleagues who have graduated and are pursuing careers. I also have a broader understanding of my professional aspirations and opportunities," she said. "It definitely makes a difference to have great mentors, a safe and friendly lab environment, and good friends."

Social contacts can be especially important to international students who are not only adjusting to a large university but also to a new country.



Yadira Alonza Espinoza, a Doctor of Audiology student in Speech and Hearing Science who is from Mexico, said she initially was lonely on campus and had difficulty connecting with others. Over time, she has created long-lasting relationships and is having, in her words, "one of the best experiences of my life."

"Graduate school is tough and really tests your resilience, but I have kept a positive mindset thanks to many of my close friends," she said. "The Office of Vice Chancellor for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion; La Casa Cultural Latina; and my SHS mentor, Dr. Fatima Husain, have made my experience at Illinois an incredible one thus far."

AHS MAKES ADDITIONAL PROGRAMS GLOBALLY ACCESSIBLE

In its 2020-2025 strategic plan, the College of Applied Health Sciences makes a commitment to improving the access and affordability of its programs and reducing barriers that have historically limited individual opportunity.

For international students, the prospect of pursuing degrees in the United States can be both alluring and daunting. While the U.S. system of higher education is widely regarded as among the best in the world, the expense of moving overseas, securing required visas, learning a new language in some cases and adapting to a new culture can be overwhelming. One way to increase educational opportunities for both international and U.S.-based students is to offer degree programs and professional certificates online.

Currently, AHS offers a master’s degree and professional certificate in recreation, sport and tourism online, as well as a certificate of professional development in information accessibility design and policy. Efforts are underway to create two new online degree programs in the Department of Kinesiology and Community Health, the Master of Public Health and the Master of Health

Administration. In addition, the online master’s degree in RST will be restructured into three specialized degrees. Each new program also will offer online certificates that focus on professional skills that are in demand. For example, non-degree students and other professionals can take advantage of the college’s expertise in public health and health administration by pursuing certificates in epidemiology, biostatistics, public health, physical activity and health, health promotion, health finance, healthcare quality and health informatics.

Cheryl Hanley-Maxwell, dean of AHS, said the college is always happy to welcome students to campus but recognizes the challenge residential learning poses for many.

“We have incredible, internationally renowned scholars on our faculty and degree and research programs that are exceptional and visionary,” she said. “We want to continue our leadership in health and health-related education by sharing our outstanding resources with a global audience.”

According to the Investment for Growth proposal submitted by the college, the online MPH program could begin enrolling students by year three of the process, while the MHA program is expected to enroll students by the fourth year. As far as the RST plan, following two years of redesign, the department plans to enroll students by year three.

Places of Origin of International Students				
	2021-2022	2022-2023	Percent of Total	Percent Change
WORLD TOTAL	948,519	1,057,188	100.0%	11.5%
China	290,086	289,526	27.4%	-0.2%
India	199,182	268,923	25.4%	35%
South Korea	40,755	43,847	4.1%	7.6%
Canada	27,013	27,876	2.6%	3.2%
Vietnam	20,713	21,900	2.1%	5.7%
Taiwan	20,487	21,834	2.1%	6.6%
Nigeria	14,438	17,640	1.7%	22.2%

U.S. Institutions Hosting International Students, 2022-2023				
New York University		New York	NY	24,496
Northeastern University – Boston		Boston	MA	20,637
Columbia University		New York	NY	19,001
Arizona State University – Campus Immersion		Tempe	AZ	17,981
University of Southern California		Los Angeles	CA	17,264
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign		Champaign	IL	14,680

For a full list of places of origin of international students and U.S. institutions hosting international students, visit opendoorsdata.org/annual-release/international-students.

Q&A: Pamela Hadley

What better way to wrap up a year-long celebration of the Department of Speech and Hearing Science's 50 years at the University of Illinois than to gather its current leader's thoughts on the department's storied past—and the discipline's very bright future?



Dr. Pamela Hadley joined the Department of Speech and Hearing Science in AHS in 2007 and has been department head since 2021. A tireless advocate for the groundbreaking work of SHS colleagues past and present, Dr. Hadley somehow found the time for an energetic interview on a sunny September afternoon.

This year's deeper dives into the history of the Department of Speech and Hearing Science at the University of Illinois have been fascinating. Was there anything in any of these explorations that surprised you, even in your role as the department's head?

Oh, absolutely. For example, I didn't know how instrumental faculty at the University of Illinois had been in the development of the ASHA [American Speech-Language-Hearing Association] journals. The field continues to grapple, even today, with how to disseminate scientific findings.

There also are many discussions about opening up access to science, especially those things that are federally funded by taxpayer dollars. The internet and social media have fundamentally changed the number of options for sharing scientific findings and clinical resources with the public. That's something that, looking forward, we will continue to work through. With regard to the SHS at 50 stories, it was really important for me to appreciate the role that Illinois faculty had in the development of those early journals at the very beginning.

What are some topics you would have liked to explore for this series if we'd had more time?

Something we talked about early on was exploring paradigm shifts in the field. There are individuals from Illinois who were responsible for changing the way in which our field approached clinical practice. Some of those researchers include Dean Emerita Tanya Gallagher and Carol Prutting, who were mentored by Tom Shriner Jr. in the 1970s. Together they were responsible for bringing the pragmatics revolution into the field of speech-language pathology and establishing the subfield of clinical pragmatics, focused on how language is used in conversational interactions.

Another example: Elaine Paden and Ph.D. student Barbara Hodson contributed to a paradigm shift in how we treat young children's speech-sound disorders. They were instrumental in shifting the field toward treating classes of sounds to improve the intelligibility of young children's speech more efficiently. That was a huge paradigm shift.

Professor Emerita Adrienne Perlman was an advocate for expanding the speech-language pathology scope of practice to include dysphagia, or swallowing disorders. When I was a clinical student, swallowing wasn't part of our scope of practice yet! Now it's such a fundamental aspect of medical SLPs' role in hospitals and skilled nursing facilities in particular.

Finally, it would have been wonderful to highlight major research projects throughout the history of the department, such as the Illinois International Stuttering Research Project that was led by Professor Emeritus Ehud Yairi.

What's impressed you the most about the department's growth and development since you joined the faculty?

I'm so impressed with my faculty colleagues. We have such a great group of remarkable scientists who are really committed to rigor in their research. They hold themselves and their students to high standards, and at the same time, they're just truly wonderful people who've been so committed to delivering high-quality instruction through some really unprecedented times. I admire their resilience. I enjoy their company. In short, I'm just really proud to lead this department.

What are some new areas in this field that recent graduates, current students, and students who will join you in the next few years have, or will have, the expertise to address as they move into their careers?

Telehealth is a professional area that has really expanded rapidly in the last three years. Prior to COVID-19, students weren't trained to assess or treat via telehealth at all. It was considered to be an advanced clinical skill and not something that students would be expected to learn until they had years of clinical practice under their belt.

During the stay-at-home mandates, telehealth became a lifeline, and it caused our professional bodies to reconsider whether this was an essential skill that all our students in training needed to have. We also had many research projects that were required to pivot to remote data collection. Students today are far more advanced in their knowledge and skills in this area, and they are better prepared to conduct research and deliver clinical services remotely than prior graduates.

Let's talk a bit more about the department's Audiology and Speech-Language Pathology Clinic (shsclinic.shs.illinois.edu). You've referred to it as the "crown jewel" of the department's community outreach efforts. How would you like to see the clinic evolve?

This summer we had a public meeting as part of a follow-up, in-person site visit from our accreditation body, and a number of individuals who received services from our clinic and their family members attended the meeting. They just raved to the site visitors about the services that they were receiving and the impact of those services on their well-being and quality of life. To hear that kind of feedback from the families that we serve just means everything—it's so essential to what we're trying to accomplish in terms of our public engagement and outreach, and it's testimony to how critically important communication skills are to participation in everyday activities. That encapsulates why I've referred to the clinic as a "crown jewel."

I'd really like to see the clinic expand its sphere of influence beyond the Urbana-Champaign community. My dream for the clinic would be for it to be a center of excellence, particularly for families in rural communities that may not have access to state-of-the-science resources in their local communities. Also, it would be my hope that we could bring individuals here for comprehensive assessments and develop the types of support those families might need for ongoing care, and then maintain that contact through telehealth with educators or health care providers in their local communities. I think that that could be really powerful.

We've established through these stories that the SHS faculty at Illinois have been pioneers in the research, and they've been leaders in their profession since the beginning. Will these stories serve as inspiration for future activities? Where do you think this department can lead your disciplines in the future?

I think these stories helped us bring history alive and explored some topics in a more conversational way than reading a review of the history of the department. What I most hope, though, is that these stories provide our students and faculty with a strong sense of where they come from and, really, a deeper appreciation of the fact they're standing on the shoulders of giants—pioneers who really established the profession and were influential from the beginning.

Where do I think SHS will lead the discipline in the future? I envision SHS faculty and students contributing to innovations in health technology, including the use of that technology to improve treatment options, and evaluating how different design features might promote people's use of those technologies and what new technologies are desired. Those health technologies could include how we are designing and developing hearing aids, which treatments best fit an individual's cognitive profiles and communication needs, how we interact with augmentative and alternative communication devices, how we use speech recognition devices, or how we use different kinds of technologies to age in place successfully. Technology has moved really quickly just in the last year. So the next 50 years? It's hard to imagine where we'll be!



FOR MORE ON THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF SHS AT ILLINOIS, CHECK OUT OUR STORIES AT [AHS.ILLINOIS.EDU/SHS-50](https://ahs.illinois.edu/shs-50) OR SCAN THE QR CODE.

MASTER PLAN

How campus investment will boost AHS master's programs

Story by ETHAN SIMMONS



Left to right:
Pedro Hallal,
Lynne Barnes,
Bill Stewart

Three master's programs in the College of Applied Health Sciences are undergoing transformations for the digital age.

After receiving a \$2.035 million award from the University of Illinois Investment for Growth program, AHS faculty, administrators and industry partners will collaborate to create online versions of the Master of Public Health and Master of Health Administration degrees. Additionally, the Master of Recreation, Sport and Tourism online degree will be restructured into three specialized programs: recreation and park management, sport management and administration, and tourism and event management.

The revamped online degrees are expected to expand the accessibility of AHS programs worldwide, reaching new students from underrepresented and nontraditional backgrounds.

"Going global has been a priority of this university for years," said Pedro Hallal, Alvin M. and Ruth L. Sandall professor in the Department of Kinesiology and Community Health and director of the MPH program. "So now going global is a priority of this program as well."

The addition of "stackable certificates" across each discipline will attract nontraditional students looking to boost their knowledge as well as mid-career professionals seeking expertise in their chosen industry.

Each program is committed to including new voices in their online instructional material, mainly experienced professionals working in the respective fields.

"It'll be a nice blend," said Lynne Barnes, the longtime top Carle Foundation Hospital administrator who was hired as director of the MHA program this fall. "We'll have professors who really understand the knowledge base of the field, and we'll also have clinical people who are working in the field doing the teaching, just like we do for the in-person program."

The creation of new online master's degree formats will start with collaboration with AHS' online learning team. The online MPH program and restructured RST online master's degrees will begin enrolling students in fall 2025; the online MHA program will debut in fall 2026.

"We're taking the 'growth' term very seriously," said Professor Bill Stewart, interim department head for RST. "This is a long-term investment for us, not just a one-off thing."

MPH: ‘The perfect storm’ for growth

To populations around the globe, the COVID-19 pandemic was a clarion call to the vital importance of public health infrastructure.

The awakening clearly reached young people pondering their life paths: According to data from the Association of Schools and Programs of Public Health, applications to public health graduate degree programs increased 40 percent from 2020 to 2021.

“It’s so much easier now to choose a career related to public health,” said KCH Associate Professor Andi Schwingel, who is working alongside Hallal in developing the online coursework.

For the University of Illinois’ MPH program, the decision to create an online program is also a matter of maturity, Hallal said. Four years have elapsed since the program obtained accreditation from the Council on Education for Public Health.

“Some people in your neighborhood will add a security camera, and you don’t think it’s important until your house gets robbed, and then you see, ‘Oh, I needed that camera,’” Hallal said. “I think that is exactly what happened with public health.

“It was the perfect storm for our time to grow.”

The work ahead will be rigorous, with 20-plus courses awaiting development. Faculty plan to work with external partners, such as public health professionals, to create new course content. And it will be suited to the future landscape of public health, Hallal said: How might climate change and global warming transform health needs? How can we address the coexistence of infectious diseases with chronic conditions, like hypertension and diabetes?

A target for the MPH online expansion is the non-traditional student population. The MPH program will offer six certificates: epidemiology, biostatistics, public health, one health, physical activity and health and health promotion.

“It’s the time for us to reach nontraditional students, we feel ready for it,” Schwingel said. “We want to keep the rigor, the quality that we’ve been giving students in their residential program to the online space as well.”

MHA: Making health administration accessible

The MHA program at Illinois is designed to prepare students for leadership in the healthcare industry.

What the MHA program has recently observed, according to KCH Assistant Professor Mina Raj, is an influx of requests for an online equivalent, especially among mid-career healthcare administrators.

“The pandemic has made salient how important the healthcare system is, and how important it is to have administrators who can respond to public health emergencies and other unpredictable situations,” Raj said.

The overriding goal for the online degree is accessibility, Raj said: What material can be packaged into a four-week or eight-week course? The MHA online degree will offer three professional certificates: health finance, healthcare quality and health informatics.

“I think for this group of professionals it’s really about giving them the context and rationale behind why certain decisions are made as administrators or within a healthcare organization, as well as the tools to anticipate the impacts or consequences of various administrative decisions,” Raj said. “We have faculty with different expertise, different professional backgrounds, and everyone is excited to teach these courses.”

The work has already begun for Barnes, who wants to incorporate seasoned industry experts into course content. Barnes came to the university after retiring from a 45-year career at Carle Foundation Hospital.

“I hope to use real clinicians, people doing the work like at Christie Clinic, Carle and OSF Healthcare to be part of the lectures, so that the students who are online, all over the world and all over the United States experience instruction through people who are actually doing the work,” Barnes said.



The pandemic has made salient how important the healthcare system is, and how important it is to have administrators who can respond to public health emergencies and other unpredictable situations.

—Mina Raj, assistant professor, KCH

RST: Degrees for specialized industries

The Department of Recreation, Sport and Tourism has been a leader in online education, debuting the first online master's program in the discipline back in 2008.

But there wasn't much fanfare, Stewart said. Online degrees were seen as "second-class programs" two decades ago.

"We were there at the beginning of the front to move online learning into a respectable degree process of education," Stewart said.

Today, recreation, sport and tourism combine for an estimated \$90 billion global set of industries. The pandemic resulted in a surge of public interest in leisure time and nature exploration, opening up new opportunities for professionals in the field, Stewart said.

"[RST] is about what we do in our free time to extend who we are and add value to our lives," Stewart said. "We've come to embrace our needs for leisure-time activities in the last two years in ways that enhance our well-being and nurture our souls."

The upcoming split of the current online master's program into three tracks is a response to internal and external trends. Enrollment in the online MS in RST has plateaued in recent years, while other institutions have introduced their own online degrees in the discipline.

Meanwhile, the demands of the industry have become more specialized over time.

"There's still a need for the generalist degree, but because of the growth, we are finding professionals out there who need more help with the specialty," Stewart said.

Students and mid-career professionals will be able to enroll in a new slate of RST certificates in high-demand topics, including inclusive design, agricultural tourism, sport analytics, e-sport administration, and diversity, equity and inclusion.

The department is in the process of searching for a director of the RST online program, Stewart said, while tapping into a vast network of alumni to help develop new course content.

"Our alumni value the friends and faculty they came to know as students and find various ways to give back to the department," Stewart said. "Many of our alums are leading remarkable careers in contexts related to recreation, sport and tourism; they readily share their expertise through assistance in course development, guest lectures, creating internship opportunities for our current students, and in some cases, teaching classes for us.

"Our students come here because they care about making people feel better, their well-being, their sense of community and health. They want to give back to the community and they want to give back to the department that gave them this path in life."



Stout LEADERSHIP

Alumna's return to DRES provides continuity at a pivotal point

Story by BRUCE ADAMS

When Disability Resources and Educational Services, better known as DRES, began advertising for a permanent director of operations in 2023, it was apparent to current employees who would be a great fit.

“Before there was ever the possibility of Heather [Stout] becoming DRES director of operations, my mentor and the first DRES director I worked for, Dr. Brad Hedrick, mentioned her as one of his respected colleagues working at a peer institution,” said Susann Sears, director of Beckwith Residential Support Services, which is affiliated with DRES and provides care for disabled students.

Stout was hired in June and officially joined DRES in August, succeeding interim Director Kim Collins, who retired at the end of June. Stout returned to DRES with established relationships in hand.

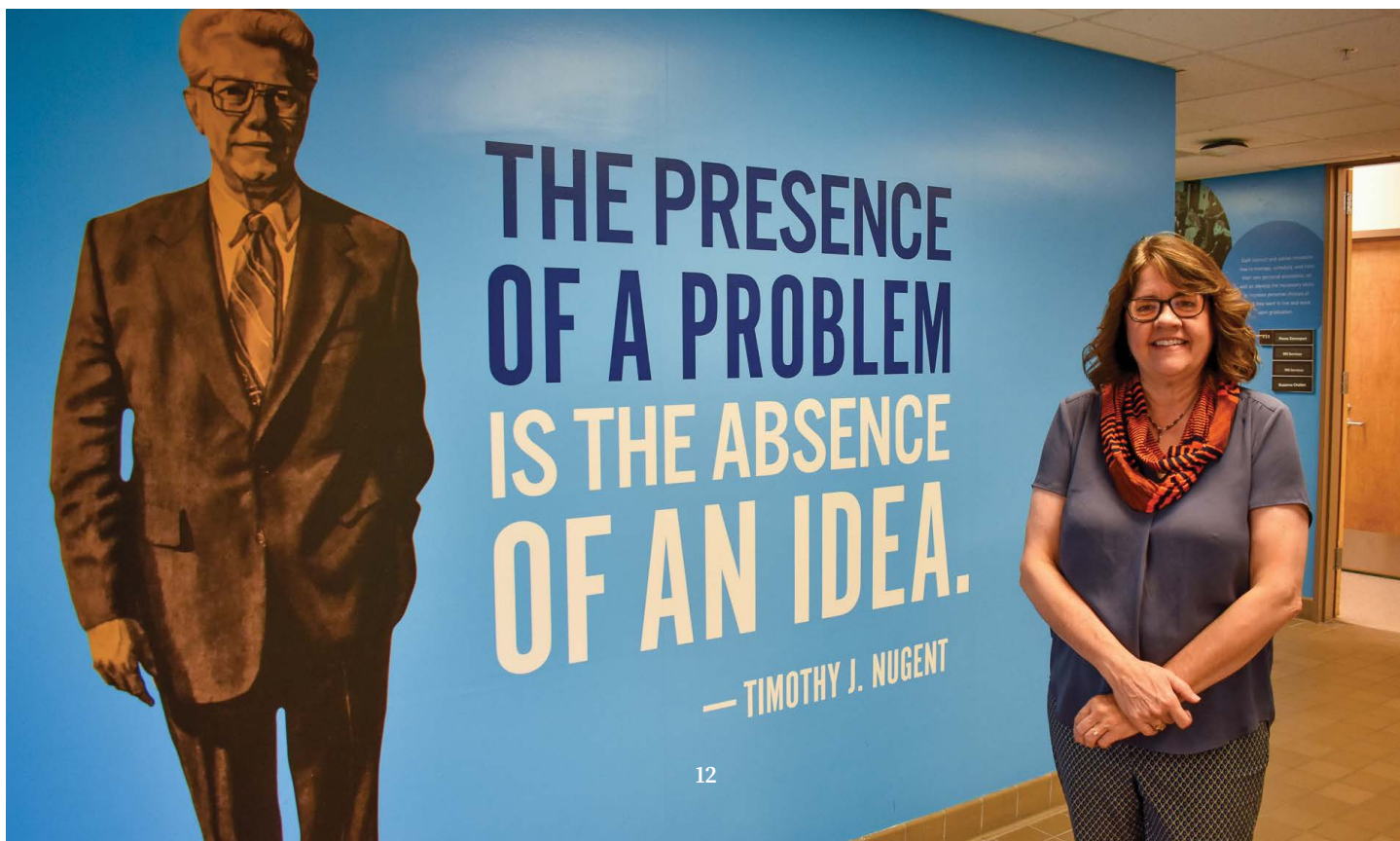
“I worked closely with Susann Sears, because she and I were in similar roles at [the University of Illinois Chicago] and Illinois, respectively,” Stout said. “Paige Lindahl-Lewis [assistant director at Beckwith] and I graduated from AHS together. Paige and I both graduated from rehab programs when I graduated from Illinois.”

Stout returned to the University of Illinois from the School of Law at St. Louis University and has roots in Central Illinois. She got her bachelor's degree from Penn State and a master's in rehab counseling at Illinois, interning at DRES along the way. Stout emphasized the values of continuity.

“It's important that Illinois has some long-term staff that have historical knowledge and cultural context for DRES and our program,” she said. “In higher ed, there have been a lot of changes across universities, particularly in disability. It's good that there has been consistency at DRES, along with some of the changes in staffing.”

Maureen Gilbert, DRES' coordinator for the unit's Office of Campus Life, agreed that Stout's understanding of the university was a huge plus.

“Her familiarity with campus and DRES is helpful because she understands the impact and presence DRES has,” Gilbert said. “With Heather's experience and knowledge base, she can advocate for a strong presence at the table, especially when the discussion involves disability and accommodations across all aspects of the campus community.”



That's especially important because of the tremendous growth in DRES student enrollment.

Gilbert said that "in four years, our numbers have increased 33 percent. Our access specialists have caseload numbers of 600 to 700 students; we have waitlists for mental health services counseling and neuropsych testing; and our service requests for deaf and hard-of-hearing students and staff are increasing. To continue supporting students and their growing needs, increased financial resources are essential to support current and prospective staff."

Fulfilling the DRES mission and serving increasing enrollment will require expanded facilities. To that end, Stout said a new facility is necessary. She has seen proposed building designs and said, "It is my hope that in the next five years, we can talk more about that and what we can do to make DRES and each of the departments centrally located. That's a very thoughtful conversation we'll need."

Stout referenced the Center for Movement and Performance, a proposed state-of-the-art, stand-alone indoor multi-use facility for the wheelchair track and wheelchair basketball programs with enhanced strength and conditioning, equipment, sports medicine, training and meeting areas.

Adam Bleakney, renowned coach of the men's and women's wheelchair track and road racing teams, said, "We have a vision for a facility that is built upon the legacy pillars of our program—service, outreach, research, education and innovation—and that will allow us both room for growth and increased interdisciplinary collaboration across campus and the community."

Although facility upgrades are high on her list of things to do, Stout acknowledged the priority is "serving the entire student."

"We have a career services area," she said. "We have mental health resources. One of the things I hope to expand upon is our connections with each academic department. Are we working with and partnering with them so that students are getting the accommodations that they need and each unit can work with us effectively? And are we doing what is best for graduate and professional students, as well as the faculty and administration in those programs?"

Early in her career, Stout worked as an interim coordinator/disability specialist at the University of Illinois Chicago, and worked as director of the Disability Resource Center at Purdue University.

She said Purdue's approach to disability was "very methodical, very careful" and said Illinois had a similar approach.

"Illinois was the first model for disability resources in higher ed. It includes programs that few universities have," Stout said. "It also has tremendous support. Being located within an academic college is a crucial connection for faculty and students. Our history is unparalleled in the U.S. and continues to include incredible resources. I hope to build upon that legacy as we look to the future and envision what DRES can be five years and 10 years from now."

Maureen Gilbert started her career at DRES in August 1993 as a graduate student, and as she told us, "I'm still here." We asked her about DRES turning 75.

What does DRES' anniversary mean to you?

To me, our 75th anniversary means that we have the opportunity to honor how rare it is that disability services has been on a college campus for 75 years! It brings to the forefront just how forward thinking Tim Nugent was when he fought to have DRES on this campus for longer than a two-year pilot program. It is also an opportunity for us as staff to continue moving the bar of excellence forward so we are always evolving and growing.

Besides Tim Nugent, who stands out as the most impactful person in DRES' history?

So difficult to pick just one! I would have to say Brad Hedrick. He had vision and passion like Tim. He saw the importance of hiring a clinical psychologist to develop our mental health services, including neuropsychological testing, and brought in Marty Morse, who became the first wheelchair track and field coach who revolutionized the way wheelchair track athletes pushed their chairs and developed some of the most outstanding and successful athletes in the world.

What historic DRES events stand out to you?

The South Africa trip in 1962 when Tim and some of his staff took a group of students to tour the Republic of South Africa and Northern and Southern Rhodesia [now Zambia and Zimbabwe, respectively]. It was a monthlong trip that included wheelchair sports exhibitions that showed the people in those countries that a person with a physical disability could live a productive and active life and achieve professional and personal goals.

What is something most people don't know about DRES?

I don't think most people understand the breadth and depth of our services. We focus on the development of the whole student, providing them support in the areas of academics, physical health and wellness, mental health and vocational and career development. Our staff is also involved in cutting-edge research and development as well as actively doing presentations on campus, nationally and internationally.



AHS ABROAD

Kinesiology and Community Health

ITALY

In May 2023, 24 students traveled to Italy in a faculty-led Study Abroad program focused on the Italian public health system. Students attended tours and talks at prestigious Italian sites in Rome and Florence and also enjoyed some amazing cultural activities, including Italian cooking and art classes, guided tours to the main historical attractions in Rome and a visit to a winery. Some of the places visited were the Catholic University, the Italian National Institute of Health and the Department of Planning and Organization of the National Health Service, a regulatory agency within the Italian Ministry of Health.



KCH faculty members Andi Schwingel and Aline Lamas led the group. The students also visited the National Agency for Regional Health Services (AGENAS) and the Department of Planning and Organization of the National Health Service, a regulatory agency within the Italian Ministry of Health that deals with regulating pharmaceuticals, medical devices and other health products. They met with AREU (Azienda Regionale Emergenza Urgenza), which handled the coronavirus pandemic in the Lombardy region, to learn about emergency preparedness operations and experiences with COVID-19.



GREECE

In the summer of 2023, students—led by KCH faculty members Kristin DiFilippo and Beth Frasca—embarked on a two-week tour for IHLT 498: Interdisciplinary Health in Greece.

Students spent two weeks exploring health from an interdisciplinary perspective. Participants experienced campus life at Perrotis College, connected with academic staff, and participated in Greek cultural activities. Greece provided an opportunity for students to experience the Mediterranean lifestyle while learning about health from the viewpoint of the whole person.

Participants also toured cultural, historic and religious sites in Thessaloniki and Athens, learned about the public and private health systems, and gained further knowledge of Greek culture through shared meals, winery visits and Greek dancing lessons. Greek experts on the Mediterranean lifestyle and the healthcare system interacted with students, who also took part in cooking classes and learned to make several different Greek foods. They also tasted olive oils, learned about the Mediterranean diet, climbed Mount Olympus and visited the Parthenon. Undergraduate students interested in learning about health while exploring Greece gained an appreciation for the role that various dimensions of health and culture play in quality of life.



CROATIA

RST students enrolled in ACE 436: International Business Immersion Program (IBIP) Croatia traveled for two weeks in May 2023 all around the country to learn about the unique recreation and tourism economics of Croatia from their professor and Croatian native, Renata Endres. Most of the students who traveled with IBIP were visiting Croatia for the first time, and some had never left the United States before this trip. Others arrived in the United States as immigrants or international students themselves, and some had already traveled the world. Students came from an array of academic disciplines as well as a variety of cultural and linguistic backgrounds growing up on small farms, in mid-sized towns, in suburbs and in large cities.

Recreation, Sport and Tourism



LONDON

Nineteen students enrolled in RST 199: Global Interpretations of Recreation, Sport and Tourism: Discovering London embarked on a once-in-a-lifetime trip in spring 2023. The course provided students with an opportunity to explore one of the world's most popular tourist destinations firsthand. The group of students and their professor, RST Clinical Associate Professor Michael Raycraft, departed from O'Hare International Airport on a Friday evening. After a long flight, they arrived in London early Saturday morning and were immediately struck by the city's bustling energy and vibrant culture. Over the course of the following week, the students had a busy schedule filled with tours, museum visits and cultural experiences, visiting iconic landmarks such as Buckingham Palace, the Tower of London, the British Museum and more.





Payne has ***BIG PLANS*** for Revitalized ORPR

Story by BRUCE ADAMS

In November 2021, while Laura Payne was the interim director of the Office of Recreation and Park Resources, a group of stakeholders held a retreat to focus on the core missions of ORPR.

“We generated a lot of rich discussion and accomplished a lot in a short amount of time,” Payne said. “One of the key points to emerge from the planning meeting was that ORPR can and should play a key role in addressing emerging challenges related to community health and well-being by generating creative and innovative solutions.”

Fast-forward to 2023, and Payne—now the Joseph J. Bannon director of ORPR—said, “We want to be known as a leader in conducting applied research and outreach across recreation, sport and tourism.”

ORPR, which is affiliated with the Department of Recreation, Sport and Tourism within the College of Applied Health Sciences at Illinois, is designed to be an asset to faculty and RST, Payne said.

“We see ourselves as an applied research and outreach unit that serves the entire department,” she said. “Where it makes sense, we’d like to be a resource for faculty. We can assist with grant applications, community engagement and outreach efforts. Since we have a formal connection with Illinois Extension, we can assist with building collaborations between Extension and RST.”

Payne is a professor in RST and an Extension specialist who has directed statewide outreach and research programs. Her research has examined the relationship between leisure style and the health of older adults with chronic conditions and the role of local parks and recreation agencies in health promotion and health behavior change.

Joelle Soulard, assistant professor in RST, called Payne “a respected colleague. Her dedication and expertise have been invaluable to our field. As the leader of ORPR, Laura is committed to enhancing health and well-being through research, education and outreach programs. Her vision aligns perfectly with the university’s land grant mission.”

Payne is focused on channeling the expertise and knowledge of RST faculty and students to impact people’s lives positively and address many of society’s health and wellness challenges.

“It is our goal to become the place RST organizations and professionals seek out for evidence-based information and research-based resources that are useful for organizations,” she said.

Payne said the core principles and mission of ORPR have not changed, but she wants to build on what was done before she was appointed to the top role.

“I view this stage of ORPR’s continued development as fine-tuning,” she said.

To that end, ORPR has refreshed its mission statement, which is to collaborate on recreation, sport and tourism initiatives to build healthy communities. The values that guide their mission include utilizing scientifically sound applied research and best practices, being responsive to community and industry needs, issues and trends and providing undergraduate and graduate students with hands-on educational experience via projects.

Soulard said Payne’s “innovative approach has been instrumental in advancing statewide outreach and research initiatives that directly benefit communities across Illinois. Her work is driving the next wave of innovation in our field, making a meaningful impact on the quality and sustainability of recreation, parks and wellness programs and services.”

RST Assistant Professor Sharon Zou said that Payne “speaks multiple languages with community leaders, RST professionals, Extension colleagues, academic faculty and students. She involves undergraduate and graduate students in ORPR projects, which have been great learning experiences for our students.”

Most importantly, Payne said, wants people to understand how parks and recreational activities enhance lives.

“Sport and tourism initiatives can play important roles in enhancing human health and improving environmental sustainability,” she said. “Parks and recreation agencies offer places for people to be physically active, reduce stress, engage in social activities and strengthen community ties through festivals and events.”



Jenna Fesemyer

Jenna Fesemyer's enduring love of wheelchair racing boils down to two factors. First, like other skill-heavy sports, there is always a way to fine-tune her mechanics and improve her craft, she said.

The second reason is simpler: "I love the feeling of going fast."

While the Ohio-born Paralympian keeps up her competitive pace, she's also racing toward her next professional challenge: obtaining a Ph.D. in recreation, sport and tourism from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

In many ways, Fesemyer's approach to her academic pursuit matches her attitude on the track. She's organized, consistent and utterly committed to both disciplines as avenues for personal growth.

"When I first met her, I worried how she'd manage both being this high-level athlete and doing a Ph.D., which is so time-consuming," said her adviser, RST Associate Professor Toni Liechty. "But it seems like she takes the same dedication she applies to her training and her sport and she brings that to the Ph.D. She doesn't do anything halfway."

Fesemyer graduated from Illinois' kinesiology program in 2019 and stayed to earn her master's degree in education policy, organization and leadership. Initially, she wanted to be a physical therapist but now has her sights set on becoming a faculty member at a university.

She's returned to her "intellectual home" in the College of Applied Health Sciences, entering

her second year of the RST Ph.D. program. Fesemyer chose RST to focus her research on the psychosocial benefits of sport interventions for youth with physical disabilities and to build more inclusive recreation communities.

"Our faculty is really strong. I've enjoyed every single class that I've taken so far," Fesemyer said. "When you have faculty that believes in the power of being in the classroom and passing on their legacy of their knowledge to their students, it makes a big difference.

"I'm excited to have my own classroom one day."

Track star without a track

Tracing back, Fesemyer's future in athletics seemed a far cry from the opportunities she had in hometown of Ravenna, Ohio, about an hour south of Cleveland.

Due to a rare congenital condition known as proximal femoral focal deficiency, she was born without a hip socket. Her high school had an old cinder track, unsuitable for wheelchair sport.

"It's interesting how I ended up being a track athlete not having access to a track," she said.

So, Fesemyer and her family forged a path of her own. Growing up with her two triplet siblings, she competed in basketball, volleyball and golf with the use of a prosthetic leg and even threw discus and seated shotput for school track teams.

Fesemyer attributes a lot of her competitive nature to growing up as a triplet. But sibling rivalry never stood in the way of their bonds: The trio decided to stay in the same classrooms whenever possible.

"We were always competitive, but we always acknowledged we were teammates and advocates for each other," Fesemyer said. "Watching them take on this role of constant allies for me as a sibling with a disability, we really have grown a lot together through those different facets. I attribute a lot of who I am to those experiences."

In 2013, the Ohio High School Athletic Association added wheelchair events to the state track meet. With some persuasion from her parents, Fesemyer began making the half-hour trip east to Newton Falls High School to practice wheelchair racing, and "quickly fell in love" with it.

PARALYMPIAN IS IN PURSUIT OF A PH.D.



“I think she’s a great representation of AHS as a whole and why our college goes together.”

—Toni Liechty, associate professor, RST, on Jenna Fesemyer

As her skills grew and college drew nearer, she began investigating schools that would help to take her talent to the next level.

She reached out to University of Illinois wheelchair track coach Adam Bleakney and scheduled a visit in fall 2014. Immediately, the fit felt right—the proximity, the academic programs and the history of the school’s accessibility and wheelchair athletics.

Fesemyer’s application to Illinois was the only one she submitted.

“I put all my eggs in one basket. I’m very happy it worked out,” she said.

Fesemyer’s “sunny disposition” is near-constant, Bleakney said, to the point where her peers draw on her positivity to keep spirits high in tough practices.

“[Jenna has] always had an attitude of comprehensively applying her work ethic, self-discipline and drive to all areas of her life: academics, athletics and work,” Bleakney said. “She shares my philosophy as a coach: We’re training versatile student-athletes who are successful not only in athletics and academics, but in skills that will make them more employable.”

That approach has carried Fesemyer’s improvement in the sport, culminating in an appearance at the 2020 Tokyo Summer Paralympics, where she placed seventh in the women’s 5,000-meter T54 race and shattered her personal best time.

Circular moment

Fesemyer’s athletic and academic journeys crossed for a moment this January when she hosted a wheelchair track clinic in Columbus, Ohio, for middle school and high school athletes.

While helping adolescent wheelchair athletes with their skills, the clinic served a broader purpose: It set the stage for her pilot academic study, and she’ll revisit Columbus for a follow-up next January.

“It really was a full-circle moment for me, starting as an athlete in Ohio in wheelchair racing to be able to go back and serve that same community through this wheelchair track clinic,” Fesemyer said.

So far, her academic endeavors number from collaborating on a paper about inclusivity in recreation centers to working in Department of Kinesiology and Community Health Associate Professor Laura Rice’s lab on a fall prevention project for people with disabilities.

Fesemyer’s experience in kinesiology has made it easier for her to collaborate across the college, her adviser said.

“I think she’s a great representation of AHS as a whole and why our college goes together,” Liechty said. “Because she understands why lifestyle fitness is important, why it’s important for people with disabilities, and how organizations or recreation or fitness centers can facilitate that happening in a way that promotes health.

“She’s kind of the epitome of everything we do in this college.”

Not all of Fesemyer’s contributions take place at the track, classroom or lab. She recently served as a tour guide for the RST program during summer Illini Days.

Prospective students were particularly interested in her Paralympic resume—despite her best efforts to conceal it.

“I don’t know why, but I always try to hide that part of my identity when I give tours because the identity of a student, for me, comes first,” she said. “That’s really important for me to showcase that, because my identity coming to Illinois was always to be a student first and celebrate the opportunity of being an athlete on the side.

“But it’s sports, and students get excited about sports, which is great, too.”

As year two of her four-year Ph.D. program begins, Fesemyer is continuously grateful to return to full classrooms and in-person experiences with her graduate cohort.

“Having that experience with my peers, coming in at the same time and progressing through the program at the same time has been a remarkable experience,” she said. “I believe in working in community and working with others.”



Rank Followed His Passion in Effort to HELP VETERANS

Story by ETHAN SIMMONS

By fall 1965, the conflict between North and South Vietnam had escalated, as had the United States' military involvement. With the draft looming, Urbana teenager Joe Rank, newly enrolled at the University of Illinois, joined the Naval ROTC unit at the advice of one of his fraternity brothers a year after reserve officer training was no longer compulsory.

After four years as an undergraduate student majoring in advertising, Rank was deployed to Vietnam, where his responsibilities included pinging enemy submarines and managing gunners aboard the destroyer USS Lyman K. Swenson and the cruiser USS England.

Following his three-year tour, Rank returned to the university and embarked on several career journeys. He taught new cohorts of reserve officers, helmed a \$20 million Navy advertising campaign, and developed two decades of relationships at the University of Illinois Alumni Association.

"If anybody 55 years ago said, 'You're going to make a career of the Navy,' I would've told them they were absolutely crazy," Rank said. "All of life's twists and turns, I couldn't have planned it."

The retired Rank, now 76, is helping sustain a campus resource he could've used as a military veteran who returned for further education: the Chez Veterans Center.

"Joe is a bridge between the university's deep history in the veteran community and what the future can be," said Chez Director of Operations Andy Bender. "Joe has the passion for this work, being able to take the things we need and then bringing in the support to do it."

"They've got a clear mission now to serve all veterans," Rank said of the Chez Center. "Veterans bring diversity to the campus."

Rank, who lives in Urbana with his wife, Pam, has strong ties with his identities as an Illinois alumnus and veteran. While visiting the Vietnam Memorial Wall, Rank made a charcoal rubbing of the etched name of Marine Corps 2nd Lt. David Skibbe, a fellow Illinois Naval ROTC officer who died during a mission in 1970.

When he returned from Vietnam, Rank became an instructor for Illinois ROTC classes, earning the title of assistant professor of naval science while obtaining his master's degree in advertising.

Three years of 18-hour days in Vietnam made the daily study grind feel easy.

"I was at the library at 8 o'clock in the morning, got my work done by 4 p.m.," Rank said. "I had that discipline—I got one B in graduate school."

Rank soon went back to sea, when the Navy did something that "didn't make much sense" to him at the time: Brought Rank in as director of national advertising for Navy recruiting.



Joe Rank, left, stands with his son Jay Rank at the WWII Memorial. Rank, a Vietnam War Veteran, took part in the summer Honor Flight to Washington, D.C.

After 20 years of active-duty service, Rank faced the test of reintegrating into civilian life and passed with flying colors. The mission of the Chez Center has connected with him from the start.

While serving as vice president of membership and marketing at the Alumni Association, he was brought into an ad hoc committee to address the vision of Chez, then known as the Center for Wounded Veterans in Higher Education.

"The intent was it would be much like [Disability Resources and Educational Services] was for the World War II vets. It would accommodate severely, profoundly injured military veterans who wanted to come back to college."

Like DRES, Chez has morphed its service to apply to a wider range of students and staff. On the advisory committee, the word "wounded" was eliminated from the title as Chez became a one-stop shop for military-connected people on campus.

"Originally, it was a welcoming cocoon for people to recreate that military atmosphere and camaraderie. But in reality, the whole idea is to get people comfortable enough with the university and the civilian environment and push them out, get them involved in their major," Rank said.

"The idea is not to segregate them into a pseudo-military unit, but get them comfortable with what they're going to experience in civilian life."

Rank's support of the Chez Center is multifaceted as both a donor and member of its advisory board.

"He's a great sounding board for me," Bender said. "He's been a part of this project since the very beginning."

"He's a great supporter of us, of the veterans, and of the university at large."

DRES ALUMS UNITE

TO HELP STUDENTS

Story by ETHAN SIMMONS

In the heat of an Illinois men's wheelchair basketball season, intense morning practices roll into sociable team meals and lively late-night gaming sessions. The hours spent between busy student-athlete schedules—on buses and in residence halls—are where teammates became brothers.

For all that the Illinois men's wheelchair basketball teams of the early 2010s accomplished on the court—a National Wheelchair Basketball Association intercollegiate championship and three second-place finishes under former coaches Mike Frogley and Matt Buchi—they've surpassed that off of it, starting careers and raising families.

Now, the alums of this so-called "Band of Brothers" have come together once more to support the next generation of Illini wheelchair sport athletes through the establishment of an annual scholarship.

Their contributions, through The Fighting Illini Wheelchair Basketball Alumni Legacy Scholarship Fund, have been granted to two wheelchair basketball athletes in the past two terms.

"This scholarship is born from people that truly love each other and care about the future of the program at the University of Illinois," said Mak Nong, former Illinois wheelchair basketball player and founder of the fund. "For us to be able to give back and make things easier for the future generation, that's our moral obligation: to make this place even better than it was for us."



2016-2017 Men's Wheelchair Basketball team

The most recent recipient, rising senior Mary Wagstaff of the women's wheelchair basketball team, used the \$1,200 to pay out the remainder of her spring semester tuition.

Wagstaff was "both surprised and extremely honored" to receive the recognition, she said. Men's team junior Martrell Stevens, now a team co-captain, received the inaugural sum in 2022.

For the alumni who funded this scholarship, it represents a continued commitment to growing the game of wheelchair basketball. Many have taken jobs in the field of adaptive athletics, managing sports programs designed for children and adults with disabilities.

Moreover, the fund honors what money can't capture: the enduring teachings from their coaches and tight teammate bonds that have carried far beyond their last plays on the basketball floor.

"I think at a certain point towards the end of our run, we started realizing these really were the golden years," Nong said. "But even now, establishing the scholarship and still talking as adults, we're making the platinum era now, right?"



Tight bonds

Maureen Gilbert wears many hats as coordinator for the Office of Campus Life at Disability Resources and Educational Services, better known as DRES. To more than 29 classes of Illinois wheelchair student-athletes, she's "Mo," director of athletic programs, point-person for travel and eligibility questions and trusted confidante. Some lovingly call her "Mom."

On bus rides to and from track and field and basketball events, one can usually tell if the team is gelling off the floor, Gilbert said. Team chemistry always takes work to develop, but some teams bond faster than others.

"Once in a while, you get those athletes who seem to click, and they make it happen themselves," Gilbert said. "Like with Mak's group."

Martinez Johnson joined the team in 2013 as a transfer student from Atlanta. It didn't take long for the memories to start stacking up with his teammates.

"[We'd] just hang out and make sure we were doing our best to balance our social life, school and basketball," Johnson said. "And we leaned on each other to make sure everyone was doing OK mentally as well."

Just before the school year, Johnson recalls the team traveling to the 4H campground of Allerton Park for several memorable exercises. In what was a yearly tradition under former Coach Matt Buchi, the players wrote down their individual fears for the season before throwing them into a burning campfire.

"When I came in 10 years ago as a coach, that was one of the first things that I tried to do: have a bonding experience to learn about each other outside of basketball," said Buchi, who left DRES in November for a job in the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Institutional Advancement. "And that's what really bonds a lot of these guys for a lifetime, a comfortable place to be vulnerable as young men with our team."

"That bonding took a while to get there, but it just needed activities and locations to blossom."

Jacob Tyree's favorite memories with the team tend to revolve around food: morning rushes to Original House of Pancakes or Merry Ann's Diner after long, physical practices, or cherished visits to Cravings, an Asian cuisine restaurant.

"It could be a really crappy practice, like maybe things just were not clicking on the court—coach is yelling at you for things, your teammates are yelling at you for things—and then you go out afterwards and it's now a positive bonding experience," Tyree said.

As the teammates graduated and dispersed across the country and the world, those relationships stayed strong.

A random, gloomy day in the early weeks of the coronavirus pandemic led Nong to check in with many of his old teammates. He'd been pondering ways to give back to the things "he truly cared about," and Illinois neared the top of Nong's list.

His calls gave way to proposals: "Would you want to contribute to a scholarship?"

After checking with DRES and the College of Applied Health Sciences advancement team, the groundwork was laid.

"Mak took the lead on all of that," Gilbert said. "In fact, it was a great gift when they told me what they were doing. It gives a good example to our current students of paying forward and how to support those who come after you."

The generosity didn't stop with the scholarship, either. In the spring, program alumni used crowdfunding to finance customized, tailored suit jackets for the graduating seniors on the men's and women's wheelchair basketball teams.

"It was a surreal full-circle moment to see my alumni, the guys that I coached, are now taking care of the players that I'm coaching now," Buchi said before he moved on from DRES.

Life after basketball

After graduating in 2017, Nong played professional wheelchair basketball in Europe for a spell, winning a league championship for LUC Handibasket in Lille, France. What stuck with him was the governance over the sport that was present overseas.

“To them, it was just sport. People without disabilities were playing wheelchair basketball and getting paid to do it,” Nong said. “So, I was thinking, ‘How do I spread this joy to people?’ Recreation is a big opportunity for that.”

Years after graduating, many members of the wheelchair basketball teams have stayed in the orbit of adaptive sports, committing time and effort to growing the scene in myriad ways.

Nong is a program manager for Great Lakes Adaptive Sports Association (GLASA) in Lake Forest, Ill., overseeing a wide range of sports programs—from football, tennis, track and field, swimming and soccer—suited to disabled athletes of all ages.

His journey truly began as a young boy pushing along his wheelchair in Los Cerritos Mall near Long Beach, Calif. Longtime coach Lisa Hilborn noticed Nong and asked if he’d be interested in trying wheelchair sports.

“I didn’t want to do it at all—I was freaking out—but then I went to a practice and I fell in love with it and kept going back,” Nong said. “I’m trying to spread the love she gave to me to other people.”

By the time he was a senior in high school, Nong was heavily recruited for wheelchair basketball. Coach Frogley’s pitch from the University of Illinois stood out from the pack.

“He stressed the importance of education; he catered to me as not only a person but an athlete as well. Just having that balance and showing that we can use sport as a tool to get to where our success is,” Nong said.

Tyree, too, has found a career in the field as training coordinator for Move United, a nonprofit committed to facilitating adaptive sports opportunities. He returned to his hometown of Roanoke, Va., to found the Roanoke Stars Wheelchair Basketball program.

Like other program alums, he repeatedly credits his coaches’ attention to detail for his professional success.

“We all saw ourselves as having our roles, and thought about how do we support each other to fill in the gaps where this is my weakness, but that’s your strength? When I’m struggling, I can lean on you a little bit more,” Tyree said. “I think that that mindset really fell into creating that excellence and trickled into what we do full time.”

Alums who haven’t found careers in adaptive athletics have stayed around the game in some way, like Derek Hoot and Johnson, who started recording podcasts about it.

In the *Push Podcast*, the pair of alums discuss the happenings of U.S. wheelchair basketball and bring on established guests. “Wheelchair basketball has made a big impact on all our lives. Being able to find a sports community as individuals with disabilities is huge,” Johnson said. “I think that’s a big reason we have all stuck around adaptive athletics, is we know the change it made in our lives could be duplicated for the next generation.”

Buchi—who is being replaced as men’s coach by women’s wheelchair basketball coach Stephanie Wheeler—said he was beginning to see talented recruits who’ve been coached by his own wheelchair basketball alums.

“The next step is happening, I have so many of my guys that are actually coaching and are giving back to juniors programs,” Buchi said. “They get to put a little bit of our Illinois stamp on these kids before I even get them.

“Our alumni need to think as soon as they graduate, how do I give back to the guys that are coming up next? Because there’s always going to be that next person that comes up and you want them to have the best experience possible.”



*Listen to PUSH Podcast:
Wheelchair Basketball in the
United States wherever you get
your podcasts or connect on
social to learn more.*

AHS Honors Four Outstanding Alumni

Story by VINCE LARA-CINISOMO

In 2023, the College of Applied Health Sciences chose four AHS graduates to receive alumni awards. These awards serve as a testament to the unwavering dedication and great contributions of our graduates.

Young Alumni Award

MICHAEL LEACH

Recreation, Sport and Tourism

Michael Leach was appointed as the first-ever chief diversity and inclusion director for the White House in January of 2021. Leach, who earned his bachelor's degree from RST in 2009, spent more than five years working for the National Football League on the NFL Management Council and later worked for the Chicago Bears and Miami Dolphins.

"I am truly humbled and honored to receive the 2023 Young Alumni Award from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign," Leach said. "My time in the College of Applied Health Sciences, and the institution more broadly, was nothing short of transformative."

Dean Cheryl Hanley-Maxwell, left, poses with alumni award winners Michael Leach, Saul Morse and Walter Johnson. Distinguished Alumni Award winner William Haskell appeared via Zoom.

Harold Scharper Award

SAUL MORSE

Disability Resources and Educational Services

Saul Morse earned his bachelor's degree (1969) and law degree (1972) at the University of Illinois and since has focused his practice on legislative matters, health law, insurance and municipal law. In 2010, with the passage of the Affordable Care Act, Morse was asked by the Illinois Department of Insurance to establish and manage an insurance pool for individuals with pre-existing health conditions.

"The Harold Scharper award is of great importance to me," Morse said. "I came to the University of Illinois as a 17-year-old freshman. At the time, no other university in this country had a program which fully included students with a disability in all aspects of campus life, from academics to housing to activities. Most of what I have been able to do personally, professionally and within the broader community is due to the DRES program of the college."

Distinguished Alumni Award

WILLIAM HASKELL

Kinesiology and Community Health

William Haskell is an internationally renowned researcher and emeritus professor of medicine at Stanford University. Haskell earned his Ph.D. in exercise physiology from the University of Illinois in 1966, and his work and achievements have clearly fulfilled the Illinois mission.

"It is truly an honor to receive the Distinguished Alumni award," Haskell said. "Attending the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign offered me the opportunity to study and work with a large range of outstanding faculty and students, many of whom became exceptional leaders in exercise science research and teaching, as well as lifelong colleagues and friends."

WALTER JOHNSON

Recreation, Sport and Tourism

Walt Johnson was born in Watseka, Ill., and graduated from the University of Illinois in 1958 with an undergraduate degree from the RST program. Later he entered the graduate program in RST and had the privilege of learning from both Professor Charles Brightbill and Dr. Alan Sapora. Upon graduation from the RST master's program in 1962, Johnson moved immediately into a career in parks and recreation, where he served in a number of key leadership positions.

"The University of Illinois has always been the reason for my success and the lifestyle I live today," Johnson said. "It gave me knowledge, hope and encouragement. Growing up on a farm and spending hours on a John Deere tractor since age 8, and milking cows, planting, cultivating and raising cattle and pigs, I determined I did not want to be a farmer."



NEW FACULTY



Agate



Barnes



Johnson



Keye



Kluch



Leão

SARAH AGATE

Teaching Associate Professor, RST

Agate earned a Ph.D. in Parks, Recreation and Tourism Management from Clemson University. Her research focuses on exploring how transformative experiences contribute to developing components of emotional intelligence.

ahs.illinois.edu/agate

LYNNE BARNES

MHA Director, KCH

Barnes, past president of Carle Foundation Hospital, was hired on Aug. 1 as director of the Master of Health Administration degree program in the College of Applied Health Sciences at the University of Illinois.

ahs.illinois.edu/lynne-barnes

SHELLY JOHNSON

Teaching Assistant Professor, KCH

Johnson is an accomplished healthcare executive with nursing, public health and business degrees. Johnson previously taught undergraduate and graduate courses at Northern Illinois University in their Interdisciplinary Health Sciences program and has partnered with Wiley Publishing for curriculum development.

ahs.illinois.edu/shelly-johnson

SHELBY KEYE

Assistant Professor, KCH

Keye received her bachelor's degree from Virginia Tech in human nutrition, foods and exercise, followed by a master's degree in exercise and health sciences from University of Massachusetts Boston. She completed her Ph.D. in kinesiology at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

ahs.illinois.edu/keye

YANNICK KLUCH

Assistant Professor, RST

Kluch's research agenda is centered on why and how individuals and organizations utilize sport as a platform to advance equity, inclusion and social justice. Drawing from interpretive-humanistic and critical epistemological frameworks and using qualitative and critical methods, Kluch's research looks at the individual factors (e.g., identity, sense of belonging), cultural institutions (e.g., media), and systemic forces (e.g., racism, exclusion) that either prevent or empower individuals and organizations to engage in social justice efforts.

ahs.illinois.edu/kluch

OTÁVIO LEÃO

Assistant Professor, KCH

Otávio Leão holds a B.S. in kinesiology, a master's in public health and a Ph.D. in epidemiology. His primary field of research is physical activity and public health, focusing on longitudinal studies to evaluate the effect of physical activity on child development and health throughout the life-course.

ahs.illinois.edu/Otavio-Leão

The College of Applied Health Sciences added eight professors to its tenure-track faculty, three professors to its specialized faculty and one new master's program director prior to the fall of 2023.



McKenna

Sebastião

Senefeld

Tassitano

Tenório

Wilson

MEAGHAN MCKENNA

Assistant Professor, SHS

McKenna's research focuses on engaging in collaborative partnerships to solve educational problems of practice. She is interested in investigating components of a multi-tiered system of supports (MTSS) framework that optimize educators' and students' success. Her primary area of focus is early elementary writing in kindergarten through second grade. She studies assessment, data-based decision making, tiered instruction, and professional development.

ahs.illinois.edu/meaghan-mckenna

EMERSON SEBASTIÃO

Assistant Professor, KCH

Sebastião has a background in kinesiology and rehabilitation sciences and his research program is motivated by the positive benefits of a physically active lifestyle and exercise training on health and the detrimental effects on health of an inactive lifestyle.

ahs.illinois.edu/emerson

JONATHAN (JACK) SENEFELD

Assistant Professor, KCH

Senefeld earned a B.S. in exercise physiology and a Ph.D. in clinical and translational rehabilitation health sciences—both from Marquette University. Senefeld's research program focuses on advancing the understanding of nonpharmacological interventions (such as exercise) to mitigate the detrimental effects of human aging and metabolic diseases.

ahs.illinois.edu/jack

RAFAEL TASSITANO

Assistant Professor, KCH

Tassitano's research program is based on 15 years of experience in physical activity epidemiology research, teaching, and service experiences with low-income and other underrepresented populations from Brazil. The overarching goal of Dr. Tassitano's research is to gain a better understanding of health behaviors, including physical activity, sedentary behavior, and more recently, sleep, and to reduce existing disparities within and between populations.

ahs.illinois.edu/tassitano

MARIA CECÍLIA TENÓRIO

Teaching Assistant Professor, KCH

Tenório is an experienced teacher with more than 20 years of teaching experience in both schools and universities throughout her career. For the past 13 years, Tenório has been responsible for teaching, mentoring students, organizing outreach activities and coordinating events.

ahs.illinois.edu/tenorio

WESLEY J. WILSON

Assistant Professor, KCH

Wilson received his undergraduate degree in physical education and health education from Purdue University before continuing his studies in adapted physical activity at Oregon State University (master's) and adapted physical education at University of Virginia (Ph.D.). Wilson explores the lived experiences of adapted physical educators regarding their beliefs and behaviors toward inclusion, special education law implementation, and their experiences in teacher education and the workplace.

ahs.illinois.edu/wilson-wesley



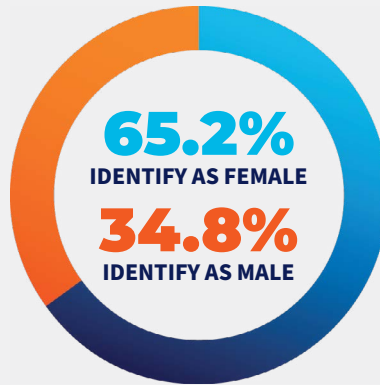
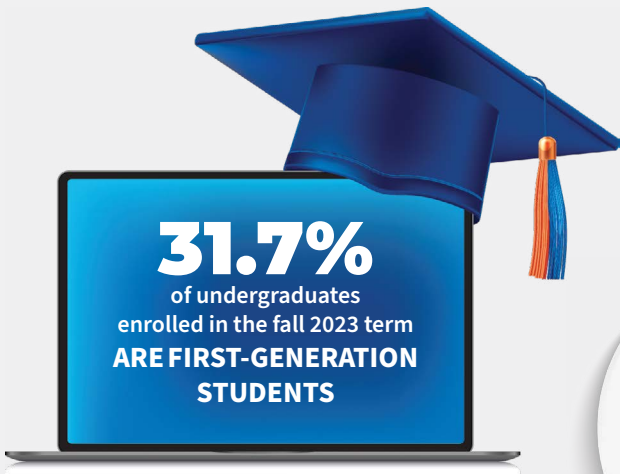
College of Applied Health Sciences

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

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AHS by the Numbers

Division of Management Information,
Illini Success, May 2022



(of those who reported a gender identity)



Making moves? Tell us about it!

We know you're out there making the world a better place. Keep the AHS connection strong by sharing your latest accomplishments, a new role, or updated contact info. Scan the code to get in touch; we'd love to catch up and loop you into what's happening on campus.