



AURORA UNIVERSITY

MAGAZINE

VOLUME 8, ISSUE 1 — SPRING 2022



**DISCOVER WHAT
MATTERS. AND BUILD
YOUR LIFE AROUND IT.**

Aurora University Magazine is published twice a year for alumni of Aurora University. Editorial offices are located at 1500 Southlawn Place, Aurora, IL 60506.

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About the Cover
Aurora University graduates celebrate their academic accomplishments at the commencement ceremony on the Quad.



Rebecca L. Sherrick

REBECCA L. SHERRICK
PRESIDENT

IN THIS ISSUE

FEATURES

2

Building on Student Success: A New Center, More Advisors, and a Jumpstart When Students Struggle
Over the past year, Aurora University has forged new student success initiatives aimed at fulfilling the promise of a richer future for AU students.

16

A View from the Board of Trustees
Incoming Board Chair Chriss Johns and outgoing Board Chair Hilary Brennan '83 discuss AU's decade of growth, the student success movement, and the challenges ahead.

DEPARTMENTS

- | | |
|-----------|--------------------|
| 1 | President's Letter |
| 20 | Athletics |
| 24 | Giving |
| 26 | Books |
| 27 | Remembrances |
| 28 | Investments |
| 29 | Save the Dates |
| 30 | News Briefs |
| 32 | Last Look |

In this edition of the magazine, we introduce readers to a major shift underway throughout Aurora University. There was a time when colleges and universities gauged their own quality in terms of assets and activities. Good institutions had large endowments as well as large, bound collections in their libraries. In a sense, everything was about counting and perceived status. Sometimes this kind of thinking produced an “academic arms race” as colleges vied to build ever-more elaborate structures and to offer increasingly esoteric curricula.

AU and George Williams College never were part of this world. Both were teaching institutions that valued the shaping of character and scholarship. They welcomed all and helped each achieve his or her full potential. Now we build upon this rich tradition in important new ways through our *student success movement*. Our goal in this issue’s cover story is to help you understand exactly what this means for the university we love and the students we serve. I think you will be pleased as you learn more about this work.

Like generations before them, many of today’s AU students arrive on campus filled with aspirations. The pandemic allowed us to see in bright light the challenges that many must overcome during their time at the university. The list is long, ranging from academic under-preparation to financial constraints to overly burdensome family responsibilities to mental health concerns. This often is as true for our graduate and online students as for our traditional undergraduates. As we confront this reality, we want to provide the right combination of support and counsel.

We never want to lower academic standards or to tolerate inappropriate behavior or to look away from injustice. And so we commit ourselves to “leaning in” with the kind of holistic strategies that long have characterized our work together. Then, when the work is complete, we measure results carefully and make improvements. The focus of this evaluative process is on student impact. What do we want our students to learn? Do they fulfill these expectations? To put it simply, we gauge our own effectiveness in light of our students’ success.

I hope that — like me — you find meaning in this purpose. The work is arduous, but when our students succeed ... it is glorious indeed. In the months ahead, we will talk with you honestly about a large need of our own. AU desperately needs a new library. The current structure is badly out-of-date and must be replaced soon. We plan to locate a new building right next to the Kimberly and James Hill Center for Student Success at the front door of the institution. I look forward to asking for your help as we ensure that our students succeed for many years to come. The time is now.

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BUILDING ON STUDENT SUCCESS



A New Center, More Advisors, and a Jumpstart When Students Struggle

Student success has always been at the core of Aurora University. It's been a long-standing tradition to help students recognize their own potential, discover what matters to them, and achieve success in life and work.

But "student success" as a movement is a relatively new idea in higher education. At its core, success involves keeping students enrolled and moving toward graduation in a timely manner and graduating not only with a degree but with the skills to succeed in a career or advanced study.

As the challenges to earning a college degree have multiplied in recent years in no small part due to the wider issues facing young adults — the pandemic, the rising cost of education, student debt, culture wars, and political upheaval — AU has responded.

Within the past year, the university has forged new student success initiatives aimed at fulfilling the promise of a richer future for AU students. The university reorganized its administrative structure to expand the concept of student success and take a holistic approach to serving students. AU increased its mental health offerings to 24/7 access, hired more academic advisors, added new career services, created a program that connects students with alumni working in their fields, enhanced data analytics for tracking outcomes, and opened a new building dedicated to student success.

"At AU, student success means meeting students where they are, walking alongside them, and responding to what's going on in their world and in society," said Jennifer Buckley, AU's senior vice president for student success. "We embrace the students' goals as our goals. Students are at the center of everything we do."

JANUARY JUMPSTART

As the fall 2021 semester got underway, it became clear to professors and advisors that students needed help. Some students were having difficulty taking notes in class, managing their time, or sitting for exams. Others were struggling with anxiety and depression. Some students simply had gotten out of sync balancing their part-time jobs with their academic studies.

"We were in a president's advisory council meeting sharing with each other what we were hearing from students, and these themes started to emerge," said Buckley. "After 18 months, it was clear that the pandemic was taking its toll on our students. We all just connected the dots and decided we needed to do something."

AU's student success team took action and within two months created a series of virtual workshops designed to teach the skills vital to college success and to help students return from winter break recharged and ready to succeed.

The online series "January Jumpstart. Start Strong. Stay Strong." ran for three days prior to the start of the spring 2022 semester. The 12 one-hour virtual workshop topics, taught by AU faculty and staff, addressed the needs students had identified through surveys and focus groups. Topping the list: managing stress and anxiety, improving study skills, landing internships, setting goals, and building connections on campus.

January Jumpstart was an instant hit. It attracted 2,155 students — more than half of the undergraduate population. Ninety-eight percent of students reported the sessions prepared them for the second half of the academic year.

A majority of students said the workshops made them feel more confident in particular when it came to taking class notes, organizing their day, and using Handshake, an interactive platform that allows students to search for jobs and internships as well as connect with employers.

Students had the opportunity to earn a \$500 tuition credit by completing three tasks: participating in three separate January Jumpstart workshops, registering for the spring 2022 semester, and completing the workshop exit survey.

To cover the cost of the tuition discount, AU tapped into the federal Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund for COVID-19. In total, AU awarded the participating students more than \$1 million in pandemic-related financial aid.

"Coming out of the pandemic, the needs of the students had shifted, and we responded quickly to those needs," said J. Andrew Prall, AU's vice president for academic affairs. "This is where AU excels — creating a culture that always puts students first and caring about their future with a singular focus."

"I WANT OTHER STUDENTS TO KNOW THERE'S ALWAYS A WAY TO FIGURE THINGS OUT."

— XIMENA CORTEZ '17

FEELING 'NORMAL'

No matter which workshops the students attended, a common theme emerged, according to the post-workshop surveys. The students liked connecting with others like them who were having similar experiences. They appreciated hearing how their peers felt about handling stress and anxiety, taking exams, and looking for a job. Sharing conversations about what they were all going through made them feel 'normal,' many students said.

"One of the really exciting things to come out of January Jumpstart was the engagement between students in each session," said Buckley. "It was inspiring to see the students responding to one another and creating community."

Some of the specific ways students said the workshops helped them included developing coping strategies, creating an action plan, learning from other students, and discovering untapped campus resources.

Christian Alday '23, a junior majoring in Mathematics/Secondary Education, attended workshops on healthy lifestyle choices, study skills, and time management.

"January Jumpstart was helpful because it gave me some good ideas for making the spring semester less stressful," said Alday. "The workshops helped me figure out new ways to organize my days and achieve my academic goals."

Sophomore **Martha Cruz '24**, who is also majoring in Mathematics/Secondary Education, said the sessions helped her improve her note taking, time management, and overall confidence. "The skills I was taught will forever help me in school," she said.

The workshops boosted students' tenacity and determination. Students expressed an overwhelming improvement in confidence and preparation for the upcoming term. Many students asked AU to make the workshops a regular event before the start of each semester. And, indeed, the student success team is already working to reframe new-student orientation to include similar sessions.

"We expect January Jumpstart to improve student retention rates, graduation rates, and academic achievement," said Buckley. "While it's easy to talk about student success best practices, it takes dedicated intentionality to implement them. It's really an uncharted world for this generation of students. That means we at AU have to be agile, and it presents today a greater challenge than we've ever had."

JANUARY JUMPSTART PARTICIPATION

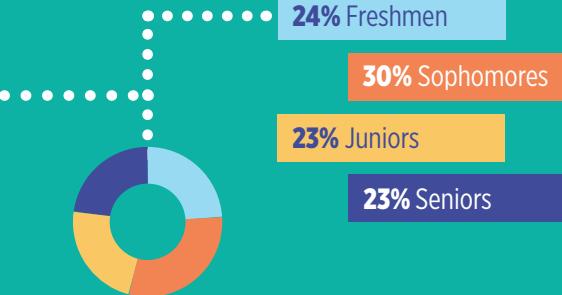


56% OF THE UNDERGRADUATE POPULATION

attended the workshops



\$1.08 MILLION
in tuition relief



TOP 5 MOST POPULAR WORKSHOPS

1. Healthy Lifestyle Choices and Managing Stress and Anxiety
2. Time Management Tips
3. Improving Your Study Skills
4. Test Skills and Tips
5. Internships: What, Why, and How to Land One



98% of students said the sessions helped them prepare for the spring semester



94% expressed improved confidence in prioritizing tasks and developing strategies to avoid procrastination



88% expressed more confidence in achieving the identified workshop goal



87% were likely to recommend the workshops



GIVING THE GIFT OF TIME

One of the most effective and often overlooked resources to advance student success at colleges and universities is alumni. In an initiative aimed at meeting students' needs for career support, AU created the *Sundays @ 7 Career Conversations with Alumni*, an occasional Sunday evening panel focused on career and graduate school topics.

The *Sundays @ 7* program taps AU's network of more than 41,000 alumni, connecting AU students with working professionals. The live, virtual forum allows students to hear from AU alumni about their transitions from college to careers, learn firsthand about the daily details of specific jobs, and gain insights into how to apply to graduate school, including law school or medical school. Students also discover the steps to building their own professional networks.

"Recent graduates are sharing their experience, advice, and wisdom," said Teri Tomaszkiewicz, senior vice president for alumni relations and career services. "We are excited for our students to network with alumni in this way, and we look to expand these opportunities as we continue to fulfill our promise to students."

Since the *Sundays @ 7* program launched in fall 2020, alumni from a wide swath of careers from across the country have taken time to talk to current students about the twists and turns of their own AU experience — from changing

majors to finding internships to eventually navigating the job market.

Speakers have included an analytics manager, athletic trainer, attorney, clinical research project manager, community health worker, family doctor, graphic designer, high school principal, investment officer, lab technician, library social services specialist, marketing manager, physical therapist, recruiter, surgeon, tax specialist, travel nurse, and veterinarian, to name a few.

Participating alumni have hailed from a diverse mix of companies such as Apple Inc., Aya Healthcare, Chicago Cubs, CMC Materials Inc., Meta Platforms Inc. (formerly Facebook), Edward Hines Jr. VA Hospital, Equifax Inc., Heineken N.V., Molson Coors Beverage Company, Newell Brands, Opportunity Finance Network, Rush Copley Medical Center, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital, U.S. Department of Justice, Women's National Basketball Association, and Zurich International.

 "While it would be really cool to give a big donation and have your name on a building or athletic field, time is something everybody has the ability to give," said **Ray Kosmicki '09**, vice president of food safety, quality and regulatory

affairs at Prinova USA, where he oversees 85 employees around the globe. Kosmicki took part in a *Sundays @ 7* event this past September. He told students about his career journey from wanting to be a lawyer when he first arrived at AU, to then switching his major to Health Science, then getting accepted into pharmacy school, and finally finding his niche at Prinova, a food flavor manufacturer and global food ingredient distributor based in Hanover Park, Illinois. He wants AU students interested in health science to realize that there is a bounty of health science jobs that don't necessarily require going to medical school.

"When you're a student, it can be challenging to understand what you can do for a job after you graduate," said Kosmicki. "I had no idea food science even existed when I was a student."

Kosmicki completed his MBA at Loyola University Chicago last year and is looking to establish a pipeline for new and future AU graduates to fill internships and job positions at Prinova. He also plans to take part in a new health science ambassador program at AU that allows AU graduates to shadow professionals working in the field.

"There are lots of ways to have a great impact and contribute to students' success," said Kosmicki. "We all have the ability to give back our time, experience, and knowledge to develop the future leaders of tomorrow."

'AU HELPED ME GET THROUGH MY STRUGGLES'

Ximena Cortez '17, who majored in Computer Science, is a software quality assurance engineer at San Jose, California-based Cisco Systems Inc. She is passionate about promoting diversity and helping underserved communities find the right resources — a focus she shared with students during a *Sundays @ 7* session last October.



As a Latina working in computer science, Cortez didn't have many role models. She struggled her first year at AU juggling a two-hour commute to campus each way, a restaurant job, financial hardship, and immigration issues. With the help of AU professors, student coaches, and financial advisors, she was able to secure a grant and scholarship, quit her restaurant job, and focus on her studies.

Her grades went up. She got more involved on campus as a Spartan ambassador and peer advisor. She also joined the board of AU's Latin American Student Organization and with the help of AU staff started an organization for undocumented students interested in going to college.

"I want other students to know there's always a way to figure things out," said Cortez. "What turned it around for me when I was at AU was getting involved on campus. It got me



out of my comfort zone and made me realize I can do it. AU helped me get through my struggles. I feel very connected to AU and am full of gratitude toward my professors."

For **Kim Rios '11**, it is important to tell AU students that graduating from a small private school has its advantages.

"I want students to use me as a resource," Rios said. "I love talking to people about what I do, and I want to help students see what's possible."

It's one reason Rios participated in the *Sundays @ 7* program from Spain, where she is stationed as a judge advocate in the U.S. Navy Judge Advocate General's Corps. Rios majored in Political Science and English at AU before earning her law degree from DePaul University College of Law in 2014.

"One of the worries I remember having when I was at AU is that not a lot of people had heard of AU, and that it would be hard to be competitive for jobs or graduate school," said Rios. "But, in fact, it was a plus for me. The JAG Corps is purposeful about hiring people with diverse backgrounds and from diverse settings, from small and big schools."

WELLS OF INSPIRATION

Giving students a place to go to envision their dreams is an essential part of student success at AU. The Kimberly and James Hill Center for Student Success, which opened last year, provides the environment for students to build their future.

The 7,000-square-foot building on the southwest edge of campus offers a place for students to receive career guidance, meet employers, and prepare to enter the workforce. Students can practice mock interviews, get a professional headshot taken, and find free, work-appropriate clothing for interviews and internships (see page 12).

Next door is the Wackerlin Center for Faith and Action, where students can go to reflect on their vocation and purpose and walk the outdoor labyrinth.

A third building — a Learning Commons — is planned to be located next to the Hill Center. The three-story Learning Commons will be a highly interactive and flexible space for accessing digital resources, seeking academic support, studying in groups, and socializing between classes. Together with the Hill and Wackerlin Centers, it will support a growing array of student success initiatives.

Meanwhile, faculty continue to play a key role in encouraging and guiding students. Student success in the first year at AU relies on a comprehensive student orientation and the personal attention of faculty and academic advisors to help students choose a major and plan their coursework so they can graduate on time.

"STUDENTS ARE AT THE CENTER OF EVERYTHING WE DO."

— JENNIFER BUCKLEY, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

"What distinguishes AU is the sense of community we have here," said Matthew Kneller, associate professor of communication and director of general education. "Everybody feels we are on the same team, that we are all behind the students. We are all very good at working with students to strike a balance between developing the academic expertise of a specific major and the professional skills needed to adapt to the dynamic and changing job market we live in today."

The required First Year Experience course, for example, helps students make the transition into college. Students take a set of surveys to help them identify their strengths, interests, and values, and they learn about student life activities that can enhance their success. Junior Mentoring, another required course, helps students build professional skills and prepare to enter the workforce or graduate school.

For the past two years, Spartan Summer, a program created in 2021 in response to the pandemic, has offered select courses at no charge to help students stay on track for graduation, prepare for licensing exams or graduate school, acquire more skills, or explore a new area of study. AU's summer school program can also speed time to a degree as well as support students needing help meeting the academic rigors of university life.

While it is still early, AU is showing positive signs in the key student success metrics of retention and graduation rates. The outcomes for total undergraduate enrollment, the freshmen-to-sophomore persistence rate, and the six-year graduation rate improved in the 2020–2021 academic year compared with 2019–2020.

But there is still more to do.

"The reality is that nobody in my generation has experienced what our students have experienced," said Prall. "In the past two years, they have been faced with a global pandemic, challenges to our democracy, social injustice, cultural upheaval, and growing concerns about climate change. As educators, it's a moment that calls for great humility. We can meet the moment in terms of student success by listening carefully to our students."

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MEET THE TEAM



JENNIFER BUCKLEY
Senior Vice President for
Student Success

Most important piece of advice for students: Seek out a support network on campus. These are the people that will help lift you up and point you in the right direction when you need it. They are also the people that will celebrate all your accomplishments. Mentors are critical to student success. We all need these individuals in our life.

Success is ... All about growing yourself. It is taking ownership, responsibility, and action toward a worthy goal or ideal.



CHRIS DE KOK
Director of Leadership Development
for Student Organizations

Most important piece of advice for students: If you're interested in a particular field, start getting involved with it as early as you can. It's never too soon to start building relevant experience.

Success is ... Often more about the journey. Setting goals and working toward them is a great way to stay on track, but it is also important to stay flexible and pay attention to the things you learn along the way.



TORY NAIR
Director of Career Services

Most important piece of advice for students: Take advantage of every opportunity to try something new. You never know what it might lead to and how it will change your life.

Success is ... Defined and achieved differently by everyone, and can change over one's lifetime. However, a true measure of success is living a life you don't feel like you need to escape from.

WHILE THE DRIVE TO SUPPORT STUDENTS IS ACTIVE THROUGHOUT THE AU COMMUNITY, the university has intentionally created a team of experts to focus on the many aspects of success students face during their college journey. The cohort includes a dozen academic advisors, as well as specialty advisors focusing on careers in the health sciences, business internships, student teaching, and social work clinical placements. Here are just a few of the people helping AU students to succeed.



BRYNN SPEH
Dean of Student Success

Most important piece of advice for students: Try new things to discover what works for you. Study in different locations, attend different student organization meetings, take classes in different disciplines.

Success is ... Feeling content with your accomplishments. If you can end the day knowing that you learned from the decisions you made, the things you said, or the tasks you took on, I consider that success.



TERI TOMASZKIEWICZ
Senior Vice President for Alumni
Relations and Career Services

Most important piece of advice for students: Don't wait until your last semester to think about your career path.

Success is ... Doing better today than you did yesterday.



KENDRA TRUDO
Director of Academic Advising

Most important piece of advice for students: Every single moment is preparing you for the next, so choose to see the hardships as something wonderful as you grow. Your dreams are worth fighting for!

Success is ... Honoring your inner compass instead of letting others' expectations guide you.

AS PART OF NATIONAL CAREER MONTH LAST NOVEMBER, AU's Career Services office asked students to share one of their career goals and to explain what inspired their choice. Here's a sampling of what they had to say.



To unapologetically be myself and lead others to do the same.
— Karime Dominguez '22, Social Work



To teach young children and to see their "aha" moments.
— Elizabeth Lueck '23, Early Childhood Special Education



No matter the career path, to help people that don't have the same opportunities I have.
— Aaron Wahrman '23, Marketing



To help to protect everything living on Earth.
— Samuel Brown '25, Criminal Justice, Psychology



After volunteering at a pet expo, I knew my calling was to be a veterinarian and help animals.
— Valeria Garcia '23, Human-Animal Studies, Health Science



Going through physical therapy due to multiple injuries inspired me to study to become a physical therapist.
— Antonio Perez '23, Exercise Science



Being an only child with many younger cousins inspired me to choose elementary education.
— Anyssa Guerrero '24, Elementary Education



To have a healthy work/life balance and encourage others to do the same.
— Isabel Schultz '22, Accounting

WELL SUITED

Spartan Attic Helps Students Dress to Impress

For many students, finding the right professional clothing is a daunting chore. But learning how to dress for work is an important aspect of starting a career.

As part of Aurora University's student success initiative, Spartan Attic expanded and moved into a new space at the Kimberly and James Hill Center for Student Success last year.

The professional-clothing closet for students, established in 2015, has doubled its square footage and more than quadrupled its inventory. Donations arrive weekly from alumni, faculty, staff, and community members. In February, the attic had approximately 160 neckties, 98 dress shirts, 61 suits, 77 blouses, 43 dresses, 64 pairs of shoes, and 17 belts available, plus more in storage.

On average, about 25 to 30 students visit Spartan Attic each week, searching for clothing for a job interview, student teaching, a class presentation, or an athletic team event. Students can shop for work-appropriate clothing for free and talk to advisors about how to put together a professional outfit.

Heather Wilkes '23, a Therapeutic Recreation major, visited Spartan Attic because her job as a restaurant manager required business-casual attire.

"I wasn't sure where to start looking, then I saw an AU Instagram story about Spartan Attic, and I was able to find all the clothing I needed for work there," said Wilkes. "Dressing professionally just gives you more confidence."

For **Kimberly Avelar '23**, an Accounting major, Spartan Attic was the first stop in a whirlwind few hours at the Hill Center for Student Success that led to her landing an internship with tax and audit firm Deloitte.

First, she picked out an interview outfit, got dressed, and walked across the hall to a quiet room to conduct a virtual interview with Deloitte. Then she met with an AU career services staff member to write a thank-you note for the interview. But before she finished her note, she received an offer from Deloitte and changed the thank-you note into an acceptance email. Avelar said she appreciated the one-stop-shopping and left prepared and excited to start her internship.

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Nadia Freitag '25



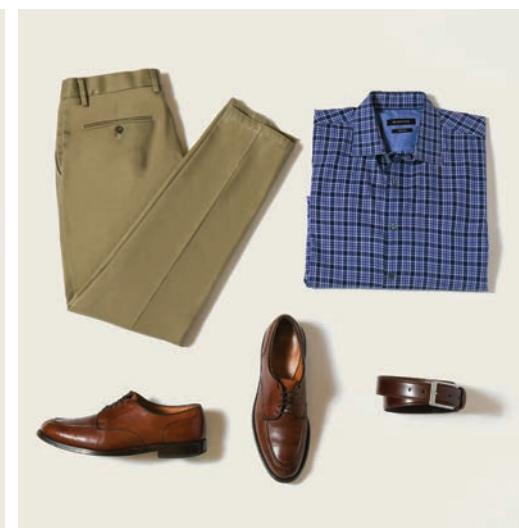
Alexia Bucio '24



Albion Salihu '23



Breanna Dehaan '24



 Since 2015, Spartan Attic has **doubled** its square footage and more than **quadrupled** its inventory.



Jonathan Alcantar '23

 **Donations arrive weekly** from alumni, faculty, staff, and community members.

AU CREATES FAST TRACK TO MEDICAL SCHOOL WITH NEW AGREEMENTS

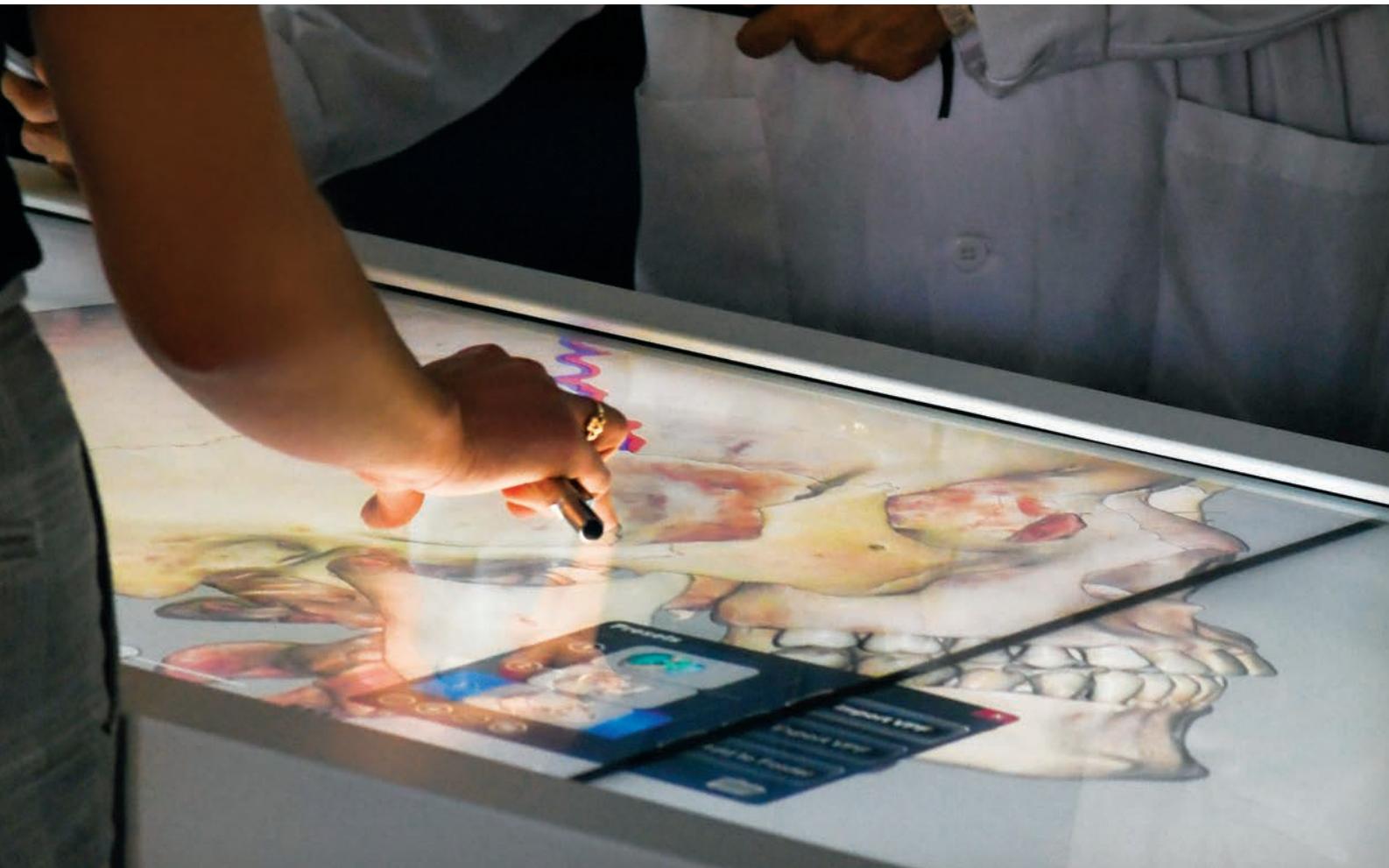
Aurora University's School of Health Science has signed a series of new partnership agreements with medical professional schools, offering AU students an opportunity to gain an edge in the highly competitive process of pursuing a medical degree.

The agreements — which vary by school and require students to meet certain criteria — offer such features as early acceptance after three years of undergraduate work, guaranteed admission, or a guaranteed interview. They span a wide variety of health professions, including physician, pharmacist, dentist, physician assistant, physical therapist, occupational therapist, chiropractor, public health professional, and veterinarian.

"These partnerships not only provide a clear path to professional schools for our students, but also solidify our combined missions to develop well-rounded healthcare practitioners who

PARTNER MEDICAL SCHOOLS

- » **Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine**
Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine, Doctor of Pharmacy, and Doctor of Dental Medicine
- » **Loyola University**
Master of Public Health
- » **Midwestern University (coming in fall 2022)**
All graduate medical programs, including Physician Assistant, Physical Therapist, Occupational Therapist, and Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine
- » **National University of Health Sciences**
Doctor of Chiropractic
- » **Rush University Medical College**
Doctor of Medicine
- » **University of Missouri College of Veterinary Medicine (pending)**



THE HEALTHCARE FIELD IS THE LARGEST SOURCE OF JOBS IN THE U.S. AND RANKS AMONG THE FASTEST-GROWING PROFESSIONS.

lead with compassion, integrity, and inclusivity," said Sarah Radtke, dean of AU's College of Health and Sciences. "We are excited to launch this new initiative and to work with so many outstanding medical schools."

AU launched the School of Health Science last year with an updated curriculum, new faculty, and state-of-the-art equipment, including high-tech, lifelike synthetic human cadavers and an Anatomage Table that provides 3D, interactive digital images of anatomy. The school has built specific tracks so students looking to apply to medical school know what courses they need to take when. A dedicated pre-medical professions advisor also offers one-on-one guidance to help students map out their progression.

The partner schools include Lake Erie College of Osteopathic Medicine, Loyola University, Midwestern University, National University of Health Sciences, and Rush University Medical College. An agreement with the University of Missouri College of Veterinary Medicine is pending.

At Rush, faculty and doctors work hand in hand with AU faculty and advisors to demystify the medical school application process and educate students about the expectations of a successful medical school candidate. Students can participate in mock interviews, receive tips on writing personal statements for their applications, and take courses on preparing for medical school admission exams.

Meanwhile, since not all healthcare careers require medical school, AU also created a new course, Introduction to Healthcare, that educates students about the vast array of jobs in the health field, such as biotechnology research, diagnostic testing, and community health. AU also introduced a Healthcare Administration major for undergraduate students and a healthcare track within the MBA Plus One program that leads to a graduate degree in one year.

A

20
New courses created

4
Synthetic cadavers purchased

6✓
New faculty hired

2 Faculty who are medical doctors

200
Number of health science majors



Hilary K. Brennan, former chair
of the Board of Trustees



Chriss Johns, newly appointed chair
of the Board of Trustees

A View from the Board of Trustees

Incoming Board chair Chriss Johns and outgoing Board chair Hilary K. Brennan '83 discuss Aurora University's decade of growth, the movement to improve student success, and the challenges ahead for higher education.

Chriss Johns, a longtime member of the Aurora University Board of Trustees, was elected chair of the Board this past November. She succeeds **Hilary K. Brennan '83**, who continues as a trustee.

For the past six years, Brennan and Johns have worked closely together on the Board as chair and vice chair, respectively, during a period marked by soaring enrollment and expansion, as well as the unprecedented challenges brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Brennan has served on the Board since 1987 and as chair for two terms, from 2015 to 2021. Johns has served on the Board since 2007 and was vice chair from 2015 until stepping into the Board chair position. She also served as chair of the Educational Affairs Committee for seven years.

Brennan is an expert in board development for nonprofit organizations. She has guided and mentored many governing boards, serving as board president for the YWCA Aurora, Fox Valley United Way, and Mercy Center for Health Care Services. She has been a director of the Community Foundation of the Fox River Valley for 21 years and served as the foundation's board chair from 2006 to 2007. She has also served on the boards of Provena Mercy Medical Center and Aurora Area Interfaith Food Pantry.

Beyond her extensive board work, Brennan was a director of special projects for the Dunham Foundation in Aurora, the director of marketing and development for the YWCA Aurora, and the mid-states regional coordinator for the YWCA USA.

Brennan graduated from Saint Louis University in 1966 with a Bachelor of Science in psychology and from AU in 1983 with a Bachelor of Arts in accounting.

Johns, for her part, is a real estate investor, educator, and artist. She owned and operated MBS Investments LP, a commercial real estate investment partnership in Sugar Grove, Illinois, until her retirement in 2017. Several of her family members are AU alumni, including her son **Bradley Johns '06** and daughter-in-law **Tara Zito Johns '06**.

Johns' father, **C. Tell Coffey '53**, who passed away last year at the age of 91, served on the AU Board of Trustees from 1990 to 1999 and was an emeritus trustee. He was founder of Coffey & Coffey Construction Company, a commercial construction and contracting firm in Aurora that achieved national recognition for developing the industry standard design for hybrid seed corn dryers.

Johns graduated from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign with a Bachelor of Science in education. She spent a summer during college studying art and has continued the creative outlet of painting and creating silk screens in her leisure time.

The following is an edited conversation.

Aurora University: Hilary, you were born in Cleveland and spent time in St. Louis before getting married and moving to Aurora to raise your family. Chriss, you were born in Aurora and now live in Sugar Grove. Tell us about your first recollections of AU.

Chriss Johns: Yes, I grew up in Aurora, just west of campus in the Sans Souci subdivision. Aurora College was a big part of our family history. My dad came from North Carolina to attend Aurora College (before it was renamed Aurora University). He chose to stay in Aurora to start his business and raise his family. Later, in the 1990s, my dad was on the Board, so I was introduced to many people with affiliations to the university. Growing up in Aurora, I rode my bike with friends all over the west side of Aurora and on Aurora College's campus. In high school, my friends and I liked to watch the Aurora College soccer games. Years later, when I had my own children, I was fortunate to employ several AU students as nannies. The father of one of the students was a theology professor at the college.

Hilary K. Brennan: I was living down the street from AU with small children at home. I had a degree from Saint

Louis University in psychology, but thought since I really wanted to work in nonprofit administration that I should learn accounting. AU was just five minutes away, so I came here and got my degree in accounting. I didn't know much about the school, but I had great instructors, and I took the CPA (certified public accountant) exam and passed. I started to get involved in local boards like United Way and was very active in the community. I got to know a lot of administrators and staff from AU through my volunteer work, especially through the YWCA Aurora, which at that time was a leadership development board for women.

AU: Hilary, you've been on the Board 35 years, and Chriss, you've been on the Board for 15 years. What do each of you see as AU's biggest accomplishment during your tenure?



Brennan: At the time I joined the Board in 1987, AU was a sleepy little school, not very visible in the community. Today, you drive down Prairie Street and you're absolutely overwhelmed by the school. It's a showpiece of the community. Our enrollment grew to record numbers, so we were graduating a lot of students from here, and we were just more visible in the community. We also strengthened the university's diversity and in 2016 received federal designation as a Hispanic-Serving Institution, an achievement that I was very proud of when I was chair.

I attribute a lot of that success to AU's president, Dr. [Rebecca L.] Sherrick, because she's a visionary and she's proactive in her thinking. She anticipates problems before they actually occur, and she's just been very instrumental at making this institution a success.

I'm also very proud to say that I am an AU graduate and that I was chair of the Board — the first woman chair, as a matter of fact. And how smart they are to put a second woman chair in place!

Johns: Well, thank you. And I agree with everything Hilary just said. You can't look at the enrollment numbers and

not notice how much we've grown and what a difference we have made in the community. There hasn't been a time that we weren't undergoing a capital project here on the main campus and at George Williams College (in Williams Bay, Wisconsin). The campus is beautiful, and that really enhances the experience for our students and our faculty.

There have been so many great things that have happened since I joined the Board in 2007. But one overarching accomplishment — and it's ongoing — is the ability of all stakeholders to rise to the occasion. We have been through the 2008 financial crisis and its aftermath. That was a very difficult time. And over the past two years, we faced challenges and obstacles from the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet through these hardships, AU has continued to grow.

I just admire the tenacity and the perseverance I see throughout the AU community, not just to survive, but to thrive. So I would say the greatest accomplishment is our ability to thrive despite difficult circumstances. We have been able to do so through the careful allocation of resources and the clear priorities that are driven by our mission.

AU: How do you view the Board's role in supporting AU's student success initiatives?

Brennan: I see supporting student success as our primary role. Educational institutions are here to serve students, and that's always been our focus at AU. In the past few years, we've begun to recognize that students need more than just going to the classroom. They need support in balancing their extracurricular activities, in finding internships, in preparing for graduate school or for careers, in staying physically and mentally healthy, and in discerning their vocation and purpose. The bottom line is: As an institution, you can't have financial stability without student success.

Johns: Yes. I agree. Student success is one of the most important topics we address in our Board meetings, from academic success to extracurricular success. Our focus is on our mission to empower our students to achieve lasting personal and professional success. When we make decisions as a Board, we ask ourselves: How will this decision affect the success of our students? That is the very essence of what we do at AU.

We on the Board look carefully at student success in terms of academic performance, experiential learning opportunities such as internships, and student life — how students experience residence life, social events, athletics, and faith-based activities.

During my time on the Educational Affairs Committee, we relied on assessment results and data to drive our

decisions. One concrete example of seeing the data and taking action is the writing initiative. We looked at the assessment results and saw that student writing wasn't where it should be, so we created a campuswide initiative to improve it. That is just one example of how the university has really risen to the occasion to provide new services.

AU: Chriss, since your retirement from MBS Investments, you've been pursuing your passion for creating art. How do you think your perspective as an artist is informing your new role as chair?

Johns: I wanted to study art when I went to U of I, but my dad advised me not to major in art because he thought I could not make a living as an artist. So I did not pursue art as a profession, but I have kept it up as a hobby and have always been very interested in all things made by humans. I have continually studied painting, design, and silk screening over the past 20 years. Never one to sit still, after I retired, I enrolled in art classes with an artist whose work I admired. I now work full time as a studio artist. Recently, I had the opportunity to have several of my art pieces juried into international exhibits in Philadelphia and San Diego.



As for my perspective as chair, I think that all our life experiences influence how we serve as trustees. Since my degree is in education, I am very aware of the practice of teaching and learning. Watching my fellow art students — many of whom are very successful adults — attempt to learn a new subject matter, and seeing their frustration at not having instantaneous success, that was eye-opening. Resilience is something we have to work at, not just as young college students but as adults as well. Art for me is paradoxical, a source of joy and frustration — but mostly joy. I have seen many artists who were once strictly left-brained in their careers become wonderful creatives. I count myself among them.

AU: What is the best part of the Board chair job?

Johns: My most enjoyable activity in just the few months I've served as chair was to speak at commencement. It was just fun. There is nothing more exciting than to see the faces of the graduates and their families as they celebrate their accomplishments. I remember what it was like to be a college grad, all those feelings one has: excitement, hope, fear, and pride. I see the culmination of all the hard work from everyone — students and their families, faculty, administrators, and trustees — coming to fruition at each graduation. Education changes lives, and never is it more evident than at an Aurora University graduation ceremony.

Brennan: I too find commencement one of the best parts of the job. My son Robert will be graduating with a BA in K-12 Physical Education, and I am excited to present a diploma to a new Brennan AU alum. I feel fortunate to be a part of AU and am proud of all that we have accomplished. The people and the ideas have made this work so fulfilling.

AU: Describe AU's biggest challenge going forward.

Brennan: The long-term impact of the pandemic on higher education is an ongoing challenge. People are looking at all kinds of different ways to get educated. We have to ask ourselves: What are we doing to help students fulfill their educational goals in an efficient manner? We've been looking at some really innovative ways of presenting programs.

Johns: This is a great question, as it is the crux of our responsibility as trustees. We want to be anticipatory in our planning but also nimble enough to make any transition efficiently depending on what the future holds. If nothing else, the COVID-19 pandemic has taught us to expect the unexpected.

There are major demographic changes coming. The population of high school students is shrinking, and that is creating an enrollment challenge for all higher-education institutions. Also, the pandemic accelerated some of the changes that were already underway at colleges and universities, including the increasing appeal of online education. These shifts create risks to sustainability that will need to be carefully addressed.

But overall, I am a very optimistic and hopeful person, so to me the future is promising. We live in a rapidly changing world where there will always be the need for well-trained and competent professionals. We will continue to adjust and address societal shifts, and most importantly, continue to be responsive to meeting the needs of our students.

The Record Breakers: Spartan student-athletes shatter long-standing scoring records in basketball, football



1,878

Career points scored



25 YEARS (1997)

Length of previous record



1,693

Previous record career points



1,000 POINT CLUB

One of 11 players in AU women's basketball history to score more than 1,000 points



4,136

All-time rushing yards



31 YEARS (1990)

Length of previous record



3,691

Previous record all-time rushing yards



62 YARDS

Longest run

JULIE GALAUNER '21, MBA '22 | AU WOMEN'S BASKETBALL ALL-TIME SCORING LEADER

THE SCORE: The shooting guard from Genoa, Illinois, set a new record as AU women's basketball's all-time scoring leader, surpassing the previous record-holder **Dana Lettow Wagner '97**, who had held the top spot for more than two decades.

THE CHALLENGE: As a shy freshman, Gallauner worked hard to push out of her comfort zone to become a leader. She had the scoring record in sight her senior year, when the COVID-19 outbreak forced the Northern Athletics Collegiate Conference to shorten the season and dashed her hopes of reaching her goal. Then the NCAA granted another year of eligibility for all Division III student-athletes, and

Gallauner was thrilled to get another chance, only to face a second setback when she broke her finger at the start of the season and had to sit out several games. She just pushed harder when she got back on the court.

THE MOMENT: Gallauner broke the long-standing record at a home game in December with a driving layup halfway into the fourth quarter. As soon as she scored, she was surrounded by her teammates. "It meant everything to me, just to take that moment," she said. "It was crazy. I was speechless." Gallauner went on to score 14 points in the Spartans 89-74 loss to the University of Wisconsin-Stout and finished the season with a career 1,878 points.

TYRAN BAILEY '21, MS '22 | AU FOOTBALL ALL-TIME RUSHING LEADER

THE SCORE: The Spartan running back from Oswego, Illinois, set a new record as AU football's all-time leading rusher this past October at a home game against Eureka College, besting previous record-holder **Ron Griffin '92**, who had held the top spot since 1990.

THE CHALLENGE: Bailey began playing football in seventh grade — a late start, due to asthma. Growing up, he remembers people saying that he wasn't strong enough to make the team, that he wasn't ready to play. He didn't listen. He worked intensely in drills, in the weight room, and on the playing field. "My goal was to defy the odds and do what most people thought I couldn't do," he said. "My biggest

challenge has been shutting down the outside noise and just focusing on what I do."

THE MOMENT: With just over five minutes left in the third quarter, Bailey made a 19-yard carry into the end zone, scoring a touchdown in the 49-7 win over Eureka College and breaking the 31-year-old rushing record. Bailey finished the season with a career total of 4,136 yards. He also set a new single-game rushing record with 295 yards, topping **Geary Pryor '04**, who had been the career record-holder with 276 yards. Bailey said the records symbolize all the years of hard work and effort he has put into being the best player he can be.

Stepping Away From Golf Spurred Sakamoto to New Heights

Golf is a “home away from home” for Kallie Sakamoto ’22, the place she feels most peaceful and confident. But in her first year as a student-athlete at Aurora University — 2,000 miles from Washougal, Washington, where she was raised — she found herself deeply homesick.

When deciding where to go to college, Sakamoto had only one destination in mind: AU. It was the first and only school she visited. The golf facilities were a step above any of the other schools she had been considering, and she liked that the small class sizes would allow her to get to know her professors.

AU golf coach Justin Wyeth knew that Sakamoto was a talented golfer when he recruited her. But he didn’t expect instant dominance, or the challenges she would soon face.

From the start, Sakamoto demonstrated an unshakable poise on the green, said Wyeth. She maintained a relaxed presence and an uncanny ability to navigate her shots around the course. She was the team’s hardest worker, always listened to coaching, and like all great golfers had the mental resilience on the golf course to overcome bad shots and focus on winning.

In her first year, Sakamoto averaged a score of 79.5 over 10 rounds and was named a Northern Athletics Collegiate Conference Championship medalist, Freshman of the Year, and Player of the Year.



But away from the golf course, Sakamoto felt overwhelmed by the demands of college and the challenges of living on her own. She yearned for home. Her schoolwork suffered and her GPA plummeted. She was stressed, unmotivated — and ready to quit.

One day, Sakamoto called her coach and asked to meet. Wyeth left work immediately. “I could just tell something was wrong,” he said.

Taking a Step Back

Sakamoto told him she was moving back to Washougal. She had her airline ticket booked and was ready to go. Wyeth spent hours listening and talking with her. He kept encouraging her: Don’t give up on your dream. Reconsider and refocus your approach

to school, he told her, then see how you feel.

Sakamoto stayed. She gave up playing golf for a year — one of the hardest things she’s ever done — and concentrated on getting her grades back up.

“The first semester of sophomore year is when I reevaluated myself and who I am as a person,” she said. “I started organizing my thoughts and writing down the things that are important to me. There was a lot of growth that happened that year.”

Playing golf at a high level had been Sakamoto’s dream since she was a child. When she was a toddler, her dad bought her a set of toy golf clubs, then a junior set of clubs when she was 8 years old. She felt connected to her dad on the links. They would spend

hours golfing together, never taking the game too seriously — they simply had fun as father and daughter.

Golf also served as a break from health problems. Sakamoto had heart trouble as a child and frequently suffered from bouts of pneumonia. While playing golf, all these troubles faded away. Eventually, as golf became second nature, Sakamoto’s love for the sport deepened. She won junior tournaments and began to develop confidence in her skills.

‘Greatest Golfer’ in AU History

When Sakamoto returned to the AU women’s golf team her junior year, she was again ranked the top player. She recalled feeling “in the moment,” in control of her body and shot, and amazed that she recovered her form so quickly. She won another Player of the Year award and was named a NACC Scholar-Athlete with a 3.1 cumulative GPA.

With each game, her confidence improved, and it showed.

“From the outside it looks like everything comes easy to her, but her work ethic is just insane,” said Wyeth. “She leads by example. She makes the other players better. They see it doesn’t come easy. They see she works at it. She’s probably the greatest golfer AU has ever had.”

In her AU career to date, Sakamoto has earned meet medalist

honors at the NACC Women’s Golf Championship three times, was named NACC Player of the Year three times, and earned three All-NACC honors. Over 12 rounds this past fall, she posted a league-best 77.75 scoring average with top-five finishes in six of seven events played.

As for AU’s women’s golf team, they have won the NACC title six out of the past eight seasons, including this recent fall 2021 season with a commanding 80-stroke victory.

“If we lose, I’m not going to cry about it,” Sakamoto said. “But first place is always my mission. And when I see my team succeed, and I see the smiles on their faces, it makes me happy because we accomplished our goal.”

Sakamoto graduates this year with a bachelor’s degree in Criminal Justice. She plans to stay an extra year as part of AU’s Criminal Justice Plus One program to earn her master’s degree and play her last year of collegiate golf. Her goal is to work with youth in the juvenile justice system and help children in need.

“You have to know yourself, know how you’ll react to certain situations, and make sure that you’re mentally stable,” she said. “If you can’t handle the situation at the time, then you need to step back. That’s what I’ve learned.”

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SAKAMOTO’S CAREER STATS



Named NACC Women’s Player of the Year in 2018–2019, 2020–2021, 2021–2022



Posted her lowest score, 72 (even par), in 2021



Won three tournaments in the 2021–2022 season



Earned a career average score of 79.8

AURORA UNIVERSITY MARKS 40 YEARS IN THE NCAA

Forty years ago, Aurora University joined the National Collegiate Athletic Association. Since becoming an NCAA member in 1982, AU has seen its student-athletes compete in more than 160 NCAA Division III tournaments, including eight championship appearances in 2021.

The organization, founded in 1906, regulates the rules of college sports and is dedicated to the well-being and lifelong success of college athletes. More than 500,000 college athletes across three divisions compete for 1,100 member schools in all 50 states as well as Washington, D.C., Puerto Rico, and Canada.



Helping Students Realize Their Potential

We take nothing for granted to ensure that our students reach their goals. It means providing the right orientation and advising programs as well as critical academic support resources at the point of readiness. It is hard work, and we would not be able to do it without the generous spirit of parents, friends, and a strong community of alumni.

Because of this, we established the new Fund for Student Success, in which every dollar donated to our rechristened annual fund will help students realize their potential and succeed in the goals that prompted them to select Aurora University in the first place.

The need for enhanced spending on financial aid continues to be a high priority at AU. The university

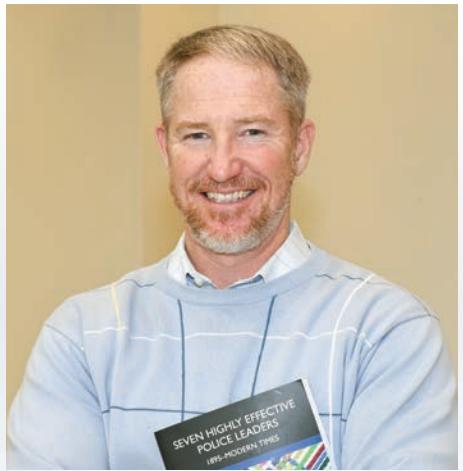
helps fill financial gaps as many students shoulder greater responsibility for paying their own way.

Given the genuine need that many AU undergraduates evidence, we appreciate deeply your scholarship dollars. We encourage you to become a valued member of the team dedicated to ensuring that our university fulfills all of its promises to students for generations to come.

You may make your gift by returning the envelope below or by giving online at aurora.edu/give. For more information, contact Meg Howes, senior vice president for advancement, at **630-844-5256** or mhowes@aurora.edu.

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Kooi's New Book Asks What Makes a Good Police Chief



Penny Harrington, Bill Bratton, Chuck Ramsey, and Chris Magnus — were trailblazers in police reform.

AU: Were you surprised by any of the themes that emerged as you wrote?

Kooi: Yes. When leaders govern by fear, it typically leads to chaos. Police leaders who were effective, I found, catered less toward being very disciplinary and restrictive with their patrol officers. Instead, they encouraged creativity and were transparent with the data in a collaborative way.

AU: Who was the most fascinating figure you wrote about?

Kooi: August Vollmer, the first police chief of Berkeley, California, was one of the most interesting. He is considered the father of police professionalism. He was there at the turn of the 20th century advocating for the job of policing to be more oriented to social work while also pushing for officers to earn their college degrees. He was one of the first to bring in fingerprinting and a polygraph, which later was shown to have flaws, but he was constantly experimenting.

AU: You profiled the first female police chief. Tell us about the role of women in changing policing.

Kooi: Penny Harrington was the first major-city female police chief in U.S. history. She sued the Portland Police Bureau 42 times, half in federal court, in an effort to allow women to be promoted the same way male officers were, and she suffered a great deal as a consequence of her courageous trailblazing efforts.



For a lesson in what makes an effective police chief, Aurora University Professor Brandon Kooi scoured the lives of law enforcement leaders going back more than a century.

What he found were characters that made their marks, not by following old traditions, but by critically pushing for change.

Kooi, professor of criminal justice at AU, wants more people to understand America's imperfect history of police leadership. His new book, "Seven Highly Effective Police Leaders: 1895–Modern Times," ranks the top seven greatest police chiefs in U.S. history and takes a look at law enforcement as it relates to race.

AU spoke with Kooi about his book and what he sees as the future of policing.

Aurora University: How did you settle on these seven particular police leaders to profile?

Brandon Kooi: I chose each leader in the book to showcase important pieces of American history that tie into modern policing. All of these leaders — Teddy Roosevelt, August Vollmer, O.W. Wilson,

I got to personally know Penny as I researched this book. She helped teach some of my classes at AU during the pandemic and even did some mock interview questions with our students. She was very excited to speak with female students who desire careers in policing. She passed away last year, but she had done a lot of work over the past 20 years to really push an increase in women in policing. The research on what women police leaders do for the subculture and the rank and file is promising. They're less likely to use force, less likely to receive civilian complaints, and tend to be more emotionally stable than male police officers.

AU: What do you hope people learn by reading this book?

Kooi: I hope that it gives the perspective that policing is a noble profession that isn't as threatened as some believe. I hear a lot of police leaders saying things like, "I would never let my kid go into this profession." Or, "It's changing too much." The defunding movement has rattled a lot of people, but we are now seeing more reasonable conversations.

The evidence on how to more effectively police our country has been around for decades through the lessons of these seven highly effective leaders. Taking the best strategies from each and entering their leadership lessons into the national consciousness would do wonders for the reform movement.

A



Homer Easley '59, a longtime faculty member and the first professor to teach computer science at Aurora University, passed away in January. He was 85.

Easley was the first member of his family to attend AU, then called Aurora College, and majored in physics. He married fellow student **Pauline (Barton) Easley '59** after graduation, and the couple moved to Baltimore, where he enrolled at Johns Hopkins University to continue his studies.

Not long after, Easley returned to AU and began a 30-year-plus career at the school, teaching physics and mathematics. He earned a master's degree in computer science at Northwestern University and pioneered AU's computer science program, becoming computer science department chair and later dean of information science. He was later named director of development for the university.

AU recognized Easley with the Distinguished Alumni Award in 1992 and the dedication of the Homer Easley Education Center in the John C. Dunham STEM Partnership School in 2014. A man of deep faith, Easley was active in the Aurora Advent Christian Church for more than 50 years.

He is survived by his wife of nearly 66 years, Pauline, children, **David Easley '84** and **Sheryl Frank '87**, and their seven grandchildren, one of whom is enrolled as an AU student.



Roald Berg '56, who returned to his alma mater to teach mathematics and coach men's basketball for more than three decades, passed away in February. He was 87.

Berg majored in mathematics and played basketball at Aurora College, now Aurora University, before earning a Master of Science degree from the University of Florida. He received several National Science Foundation grants.

After teaching and coaching in public high schools in Illinois, Berg joined the AU faculty in 1967. He served as the head men's basketball coach until 1974, winning three conference championships. He also coached women's basketball, men's golf, and cross country.

He retired from AU in 2000 and earned emeritus status. AU recognized Berg with several awards for his influence, leadership, Spartan spirit, and commitment to education. He was inducted into the AU Athletic Hall of Fame in 1988.

An Aurora resident until his death, Berg was a regular visitor to campus, supporting the arts, athletics, alumni events, and fundraising projects. He served as president of the AU Alumni Association for three terms.

Berg is survived by his wife of nearly 66 years, Frances Waldron, whom he met when they were both students at Aurora College, as well as a number of children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren.



Steven Lay '66, a math professor and musician, passed away in March. He was 77.

A native of Los Angeles, Lay graduated from Aurora College, now Aurora University, with majors in mathematics and Bible. He played tennis, sang in the choir, and received Spartan awards for character and scholarship.

After earning an MA and PhD in mathematics from the University of California, Los Angeles, Lay returned to AU in 1971 to begin his teaching career. He served as chair of the math department and director of the New Life Singers, a student ensemble that he initiated. In 1985, he received the Marcus and Mark H. Trumbo Award for Excellence in Teaching.

In 1990, Lay and his family traveled to Japan as missionaries for the Advent Christian Church. Upon returning to the U.S. in 1998, he joined the math faculty at Lee University in Cleveland, Tennessee, where he taught until retiring in 2019.

Along with his brother, **David Lay '62**, who predeceased him, Steven Lay was the second generation of Lay family members to attend AU.

David and Steven's mother, **Florence R. (Ramer) Lay '30**, and father, **Dr. L. Clark Lay '30**, were also alumni. Lay is survived by his wife of 50 years, Ann, and many children and grandchildren.

A



New Residence Hall to Open in August

When students return to campus for the fall 2022 semester, they will be greeted by the first new student residence hall on Aurora University's main campus in a decade.

The five-story building, named West Hall, will offer 70 resident rooms and be home to the university's new Pathways program for college-capable students on the autism spectrum. West Hall will house both students who are in the Pathways program and students who aren't, as part of the

university's mission to enrich campus life through diversity.

The \$20 million project will function as a living and learning center. The Betty Parke Tucker Center for Neurodiversity will be located on the first floor, with offices for the Pathways program staff and educational spaces for Pathways students.

West Hall will include housing and educational support for students with autism.

All of the living and social spaces will tout sensory-supportive elements that include neutral flooring, colors tuned to activity levels, patterns

that limit visual stimuli, adjustable lighting, and quiet study spaces. The interiors are intentionally designed with the goal of alleviating anxiety so that students can focus their energy and emotions on a positive college experience. There will also be study rooms on every floor and a fitness center.

West Hall is scheduled to open in August. AU is welcoming the inaugural class of first-year and transfer students on the autism spectrum into the Pathways program for the 2022–2023 academic year.

The last residence hall to be built on campus was Centennial Hall in 2011. With the addition of West Hall, AU will have capacity to house more than 750 students on the main campus.

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AU Introduces Nursing Program for Career Changers

Aurora University has introduced a direct-entry Master of Science in Nursing program for individuals without a nursing background who want to enter the profession. Students with a bachelor's degree in other fields can earn an MSN in two years and become eligible for their registered-nurse license. The priority application deadline is June 1 for the first cohort starting the fall of 2022.

Experts predict that Illinois and the nation will require an ever-growing number of nurses in the decades ahead. AU is committed to helping meet this predicted nursing shortage.

Illinois Awards AU Teacher Residency Grant to Promote Diversity

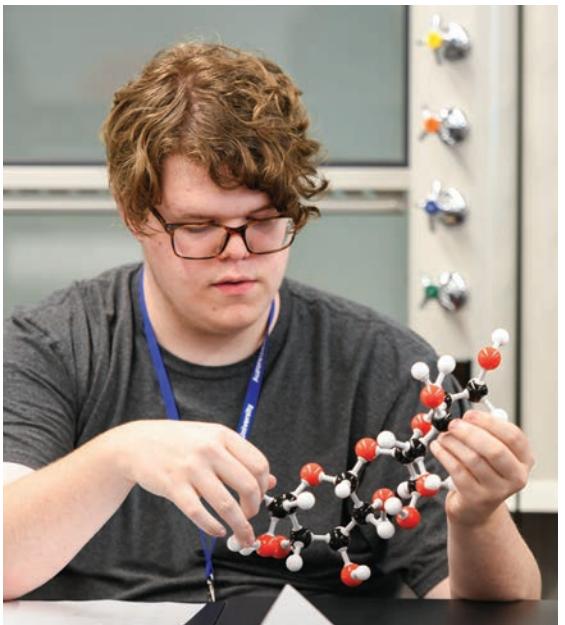
Aurora University was named a recipient of a state grant aimed at increasing the number and the diversity of teachers in Illinois.

The \$250,000 Teacher Residency Grant awarded by the Illinois State Board of Education will allow AU, in collaboration with West Aurora School District 129, to create and implement a pathway for diverse students enrolled in AU's Master of Arts in Teaching Plus One program to receive their initial teaching licenses.

Eligible students will receive student-teaching placements and a teaching position within District 129 upon graduation, as well as hourly pay for student teaching, a monthly housing allowance, and a signing bonus. The MAT Plus One program at AU allows students with an undergraduate degree to earn a master's degree in teaching in one year.

The goal of the grant is to remove barriers to education, increase diversity in the teacher workforce, and address teacher shortages in Illinois.

AU is one of only four institutions in Illinois to receive the ISBE grant. Aubrey Brammar Southall, assistant professor of education and chair of secondary education at AU, served as the lead grant writer and facilitator for this project and worked closely with **Valerie McCall EdD '18**, director of educational equity for West Aurora School District 129, who is the lead collaborator from the district.



Camp Spartan Debuts for Pre-College Students

Aurora University has launched a new summer camp designed to help pre-college students prepare for college and experience campus.

The Camp Spartan College Preparation Program, which runs from July 10 to 22, offers noncredit academic courses, college preparation classes, and social activities on AU's main campus. The camp is designed for high school students and recent high school graduates interested in getting a preview of college life.

AU is also offering for the second consecutive year a summer camp for students with autism spectrum disorder. The Camp Spartan Pathways College Preparation Program for Students with ASD helps high school sophomores, juniors, and seniors as well as recent high school graduates who are college bound to develop the executive functioning skills needed to succeed in college. The program is designed and staffed by experts in the field of autism.

The goal of both Camp Spartan programs is to build a bridge for students as they transition to college.

GWC Brings New Meaning to Alternative Spring Break

The uncertainty of travel conditions did not stop the George Williams College student life team from developing an alternative spring break program. Rather than taking students out of state to participate in community service and learn firsthand about social issues, GWC sponsored a "service staycation," allowing students to give back and build connections around the local Walworth County, Wisconsin, community.

The students unloaded a shipment from Feeding America and helped prepare for community distribution at the Walworth County Food and Diaper Bank, assisted with the beautification of the community kitchen and



food and clothes pantry of the Twin Oaks Shelter for the Homeless, worked with the New Beginnings APPV domestic abuse relief shelter, removed brush in restoration areas for Kishwauketo Nature Conservancy, and planted a community garden at Seeds of Hope. They also took a midweek break to sightsee at the Milwaukee Public Museum and tap trees to make maple syrup.

Over the span of five days, these students embodied the GWC spirit of service to others, built connections within the community, and created lasting memories and friendships through team activities.

DePaul, Marquette Law Schools Partner with AU

Aurora University has entered into agreements with two prominent law schools to offer AU undergraduate students a boost to pursuing a law degree.

DePaul University College of Law will guarantee a direct path to admission and a minimum \$12,000 scholarship per academic year to as many as three qualified AU seniors. To kick off the new partnership, 16 AU students and two AU faculty members visited DePaul in Chicago this past February, where they met the law school's dean, as well as professors and current law students. They also toured the campus and participated in a mock law class.

Meanwhile, at Marquette University Law School, AU is taking part in a 3+3 program that allows highly motivated AU undergraduate students the opportunity to earn their combined bachelor's and law degrees in as little as six years.

Traditionally, earning a law degree requires four years of undergraduate studies and three years of law school. AU students who meet the admissions standards at Marquette can be admitted to the law school prior to completion of their bachelor's degree. The first-year law school curriculum dually counts toward the final year of their undergraduate degree and year one of law school.

The AU-Marquette Law School partnership also encourages AU students interested in careers in law to visit the Marquette campus in Milwaukee, meet law school faculty, attend and observe a class, and talk with current law students.

"We are very excited to announce these partnerships with DePaul and Marquette," said Toby Arquette, dean of AU's College of Liberal Arts and Business. "The agreements create a pathway to success for students from AU seeking to pursue an exciting career in the legal profession."

Stitches IN TIME

At lunchtime every week during the fall semester, seven women gathered at the Schingoethe Center of Aurora University to knit.

This was more than a knitting circle. The AU professors and staff members came together as part of the Tempestry Project, a worldwide effort to spark a conversation about climate change by capturing local daily temperature changes in the colored threads of a tapestry.

Natasha Ritsma, director of the Schingoethe Center and instructor of museum studies, assigned each knitter one of seven key years in AU history, ranging from AU's founding as Mendota College in 1893 to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020.

"Climate change is a complex global issue," said Ritsma. "One way to get the conversation started is to look at changing temperatures, not through graphs and charts but through a community knitting project. 'Tempestries' are an accessible way for people to visualize climate data. They also foster community building by connecting friends, artists, teachers, crafters, scientists, activists, and nature lovers around a conversation about environmental awareness."

Each tapestry the AU women knitted captured one year of climate data with 365 rows of stitches — one row for each day of the year. The color of yarn in each row represented that day's highest temperature, based on publicly available climate data from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The colors spanned

dark blue for the coldest days to bright red for the hottest.

The finished "Tempestries" were displayed side by side at the Schingoethe Center this past winter and spring as part of the "eARTH tones" exhibit featuring artists' responses to pressing environmental concerns.

"My mother taught me to knit when I was very young, but I didn't keep up with it until recently," said Marie Bennett, adjunct instructor of flute and flute ensemble. "I have loved getting back into knitting. And the Tempestry Project was a great way to branch out, and to meet other knitters on campus."

Melody Ulin, visit coordinator and enrollment assistant, added, "I took part in this project because it forced me to do something really out of my comfort zone. My late father was a fiber artist, and this was a way for me to pay homage to him. I also had the opportunity to strengthen some friendships and start some new ones."

The Tempestry Project was started in Washington state in 2017 by three friends as a way to inspire communities to document their local temperatures. The art collaborative sells kits, including the yarn, to groups and organizations around the world.

"It has been a long time since I completed a knitting project," said Kim Williams, adjunct instructor of biology and health science. "The opportunity to visually represent Aurora's climate change data to the community at large was inspiring. I believe this is a great way to communicate science."

A



Front row, left to right: Melody Ulin, Libby Escobedo, Jan Strom
Second row, left to right: Denise Hatcher, Natasha Ritsma, Marie Bennett, Kim Williams

Knitting Important Dates in AU History

1893

AU founded as Mendota College

1912

College moves to Aurora, Illinois

1930

Aurora College begins training elementary and secondary school teachers

1947

Evening degree program serves veterans returning from WWII

1985

Aurora College becomes Aurora University

2000

Rebecca L. Sherrick inaugurated as first woman president of AU

2020

COVID-19 pandemic reaches the U.S.



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