



**METRO STATE
UNIVERSITY**

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buzz

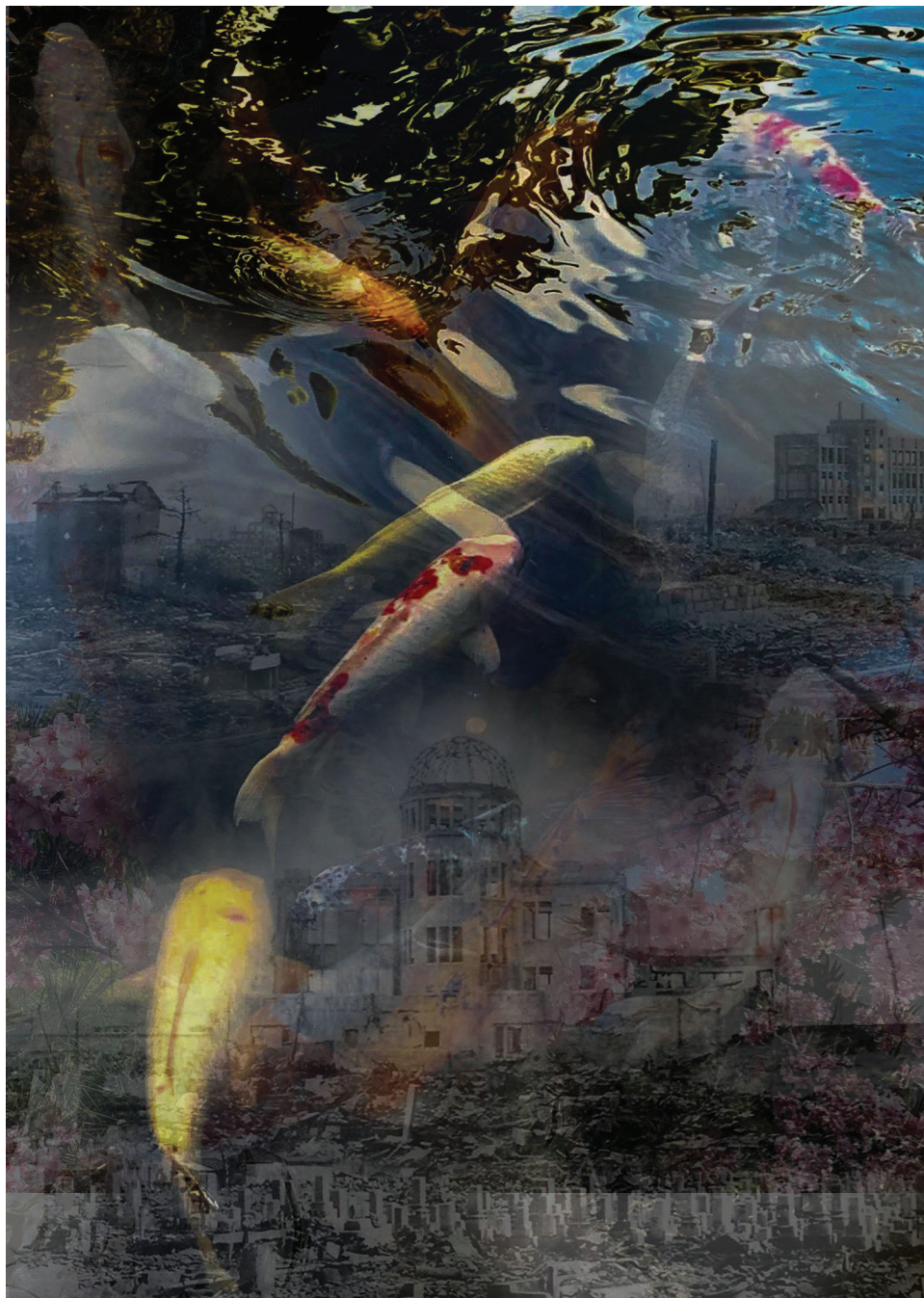
**College of
Individualized
Studies
alumni**

**Changing
careers
midstream**

**Tameka Jones '14
and
Blake Govro '17**



SPRING 2023 | Volume 15 No. 2



REFLECTING

2022, digital print
Hana Yonekawa '22



Photo by Andy King

Office Hours

WITH GINNY ARTHUR //////////////////////////////////////

Dear Alumni,

It feels as though it was only a few weeks ago when I wrote to you to share our convocation theme for 2022-23, and here we are at the end of another academic year. Last fall, our university community embarked on a journey to strengthen our commitment to radical inclusivity and make Metro State a place where all our students, alums, staff, and faculty feel a sense of belonging. To that end, we have hosted gatherings, lectures, and events to offer opportunities for all of us to learn with and from each other. As we move forward in our work to create a university that lives up to our ideal of anti-racism, inclusion, and belonging, you are always welcome to join us at events and gatherings that support our learning journey.

As part of our ongoing work, we have also started to examine our university's mission, vision, and values. A team of faculty, students, staff, and alums has been working over the last year to think about what contemporary/adult learners will need from Metro State in the future—examining ways to ease the transfer path from a 2-year college to Metro State, and identifying the needs of the changing job market so that Metro State graduates are prepared not only for the immediate future but for a lifetime of growth.

We have also been thinking about the way people view higher education. Metro State has always presented a unique opportunity for students to complement their strengths

and skills with a rigorous academic foundation to design the next step in their careers. Many current perceptions about higher-ed as too expensive, time-consuming, and irrelevant are inaccurate about Metro State. We are working to develop a strategic plan that reflects our unique place in the higher-ed landscape. I am grateful for the many alums who shared their thoughts about the university's future by completing a survey in April. I ask that you continue to be champions for Metro State and share your story of transformation with everyone thinking about the value of a university degree.

In this issue of *buzz*, you will read about Metro State College of Individualized Studies grads Tameka Jones and Blake Govro, who came to Metro State with considerable experience and were able to use their skills and experience to design degrees that helped them move forward toward their goals.

I look forward to seeing you at campus events this summer and fall and your continued partnership and support as we create a university that meets the needs of students and our community now and for the future.

Sincerely,

Virginia Arthur

Virginia "Ginny" Arthur, JD
President

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Photo by Maija Photography

Alumni Association

WITH SHAHBAZ SHAH //////////////////////////////////////

Dear Metro State Alumni,

As a member of the Membership Committee, I wanted to take a moment to invite you to get involved with our alumni network. Our committee is dedicated to engaging with graduates like you and finding ways to make your experience as a member of our community even more rewarding.

There are many ways to get involved, whether it's by joining a committee, attending events, or simply staying connected through social media. One of the most exciting opportunities we have right now is the chance to serve on the Membership Committee itself. As a member, you'll have the chance to help shape our alumni outreach and engagement efforts, while also working alongside other dedicated graduates who share your passion for Metro State.

Of course, there are many other ways to get involved as well. Our LinkedIn Group, Metro State University Alumni Network, is a great resource for networking and professional development, while Metro State Connect provides access to a wide range of job opportunities, career resources, and more. We also host regular events throughout

the year, including alumni networking events, fundraising drives, and community service projects.

As a Metro State University Alumni Association Alumni Board member, I also want to thank all our alumni donors for their continued support of Metro State. Your contributions make it possible for us to provide scholarships, fund important research initiatives, and maintain our status as one of the top universities in the country.

I hope you feel inspired to get involved with our alumni network and take advantage of all the opportunities available to you. Whether you're looking to give back, connect with old friends, or further your career, there's never been a better time to get involved. I look forward to hearing from you soon and working together to make our alumni network stronger than ever.

Best regards,

Shahbaz Shah '15
Metro State University Alumni Board



Help alumni and students explore new jobs and careers: Join Metro State Connect metrostate.peoplegrove.com



Join the Metro State University Alumni Network Group on LinkedIn [linkedin.com/groups/12522694/](https://www.linkedin.com/groups/12522694/)

The Alumni Professional Development Fund

Alumni graduating with degrees in in-demand fields often delay starting their careers because of licensure or testing fees. Members of the alumni board had a big idea: Making small grants to help recent grads launch their careers! On Give to the Max Day 2022, alumni, friends, staff, and faculty stepped up to raise \$10,000 to launch the Alumni Professional Development fund. The fund will make small one-time grants of \$500 or less to graduates of the last five years to use for certifications, testing, or professional dues.

Tom Krueger '17, who envisioned the fund, said, "Being an alum of Metro State is really powerful because when you're here, you're with so many amazing students, then we go out to the world, and we do our amazing work. We are excited about the Professional

Development Fund because when we think of Metro State as alumni, we think about all the ways that Metro State works to interrupt inequity, but after graduation, alumni often face costs entering the workforce—things like tests for certification and professional dues for organizations. And we want to be able to, as alumni who have walked that, be able to raise some funds so that it is not a barrier for anyone to share their gifts in the workforce after graduating from Metro State."

Applications to receive a grant from the Alumni Professional Development Fund will open in October 2023. Watch for a notification in the alumni e-newsletter.

To help sustain this work, you can make a gift at metrostate.edu/give/give-now

Metro State improves on strong social mobility index rankings: #1 in Minnesota and 22nd nationally

CollegeNet's 2022 Social Mobility Index rankings continue to affirm Metro State University's effectiveness at improving the economic outcomes for our students. Once again ranked at the top for Minnesota four-year institutions, Metro State also climbed into the top 1.6% nationally among the 1,414 ranked institutions.

The index is a measure of a college or university's success in elevating students from low-income strata into the middle class by five years after graduation. Given the growing acknowledgement of the urgency of reducing economic disparities, the continuing success of Metro State's model reflected in independent rankings is a heartening positive, particularly after the intense focus on student support and outcomes that has grown during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Furthermore, in Georgetown University's Center on Education and the Workforce return on investment analysis for 4,500 U.S. Colleges, Metro State ranks in the top 9.5% (429/4,500), calculated by comparing additional lifetime earnings by the investment in the cost of attendance.

Metro State recognizes the importance and significance that education plays in the lives of minority and first-generation college students. While there will always remain room for improvement, Metro State, and indeed Minnesota State as a whole, remain one of our state's most powerful tools in the fight against systemic inequities.



Vice President Kamala Harris on stage at Metro State University.

Metro State welcomed Vice President Kamala Harris

Metro State University welcomed Vice President of the United States Kamala Harris to our Saint Paul campus on Saturday, October 22, 2022, for a roundtable discussion with Minnesota Lieutenant Governor Peggy Flanagan and “She Pivots” podcast host Emily Tisch Sussman. The event was held in Metro State’s Founders Hall Auditorium and was scheduled as part of a push to highlight important issues before the November 8 midterm election. The audience consisted of Metro State students and invited guests. The visit attracted the attention of several national and local media outlets showcasing Metro State’s commitment to civic engagement.

Many thanks to Metro State’s faculty, staff, students, and volunteers who helped make the day successful!



Student organizations representatives in attendance (Left to right):

Maria Villalvazo, Lim Chan, President Ginny Arthur, Pierre Young '21, Janice Hawkins '23, Alyssia Bell '23, Tristan Skoglund '20

Alumni spotlight

TAMEKA JONES AND BLAKE GOVRO //////////////////////////////////////



Changing mid-stream

Tameka Jones '14 and Blake Govro '17 take an individualized path to new careers

By Matthew Spillum '06

One of the most important roles Metro State University plays in the lives of its students is facilitator; helping our students as contemporary learners take their previous educational credits and lived experience and providing an avenue for growth that they might not have otherwise seen. For many of our students, Metro State is where the raw material of what they have done is forged into the path of their dreams. Alumni Tameka Jones '14 and Blake Govro '17 are two great examples of the transformational power of a Metro State education.

For Tameka Jones, Metro State came after having graduated from Saint Paul College. "The first time

I graduated in 2002, with the certification in esthetics, then I went back and graduated with my AA degree in 2012." Jones' second associate degree was intended as a transfer degree to get into Metro State. As an esthetician, Jones was able to put her passion to work, while also working with groups of youth. "I came in as a makeup artist, but I also developed a curriculum and facilitated groups for girls grades five through 12. So I was trying to figure out: how do I mix the two and get a degree from that, because makeup artistry is my passion?"

Jones found that answer in Metro State's College of Individualized Studies. "I found out through Saint Paul College that the Individualized Studies program would



Left: Tameka Jones at the Lip Esteem storefront in Saint Paul, MN.

Middle: The Lip Esteem storefront and headquarters in Saint Paul's Rondo neighborhood.

Right: Lip Esteem gluten-free, cruelty free cosmetics



allow me to create my own career path. Because I wanted to do something creative, as a makeup artist, and also have that youth development focus, I knew I wanted to figure out how to make both work for me at one time, instead of getting two degrees.”

Blake Govro had been working as a welder for years when his wife, who was in the midst of a master’s program, asked him if he had ever thought about going back to school. “When I got out of the military, I didn’t have a direction that I was really going to go,” says Govro. “I ended up getting an administrative job at the University of Minnesota ... and then I wanted to do something different, so I went to Saint Paul College and got my welding diploma.”

Govro had been working for some time as a welder at Johnson Screens in New Brighton when his wife’s question came. “Metro State had an information session around then, so I came and visited campus. My plan at the time was to do a business administration type of

degree, but I happened to have a conversation with an advisor for the Individualized Studies program, and he talked to me about what the program offered. Coming in, I had bits of education from different places, I had military experience, work experience, and I just thought it would be great to try to bring all that stuff together.”

While many midlife changes of focus seem to emphasize what is new and different about the change in direction, Jones and Govro both found ways to integrate their hard-earned life experiences and valuable knowledge into a fulfilling career path that acknowledged and valued their unique journeys. As an institution that focuses on making transfers as seamless as possible while also offering robust credit for prior learning, Metro State provides an ideal partner for those seeking a change that honors their whole self.

“What’s exciting about Metro State is that no matter if you are a first-time student or a transfer student from another college, you find a path to your educational

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

“Metro State allowed me to feel like an adult in a student atmosphere. I was already a mom; I already had experiences outside of Metro State. I didn’t want to come into a school where I felt like someone was watching over me. Here, I stood in what I knew.” — Tameka Jones

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 9

goals,” says Jones. “Metro State allowed me to feel like an adult in a student atmosphere. I was already a mom; I already had experiences outside of Metro State. I didn’t want to come into a school where I felt like someone was watching over me. Here, I stood in what I knew. People allowed me to take my experiences and expand on them.”

That expansion has been a resounding success. Since graduating in 2014, Jones started her own business in 2020, Lip Esteem, located in Saint Paul’s Rondo neighborhood, selling plant-based, gluten-free, cruelty-free lipstick and makeup products. She and her business were featured on an episode of “Small Business Revolution,” an original series produced by Twin Cities media production company Deluxe that streams on Hulu. The episode is also available on YouTube. And all during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Similarly, Govro forged a path that wove together the strands of his life to that point. For him, Metro State “allowed me to pull so much of my experience together. And especially since I wanted to focus on manufacturing operations management, to pull my welding experience, as well as my technical



Blake Govro and co-worker on site at Johnson Screens.

school credits, my military leadership experience, and things like that.”

This ability to bring together the elements of his journey to that point as well as his picture of where he wanted to go gave Govro the opportunity to tailor his program specifically for his goal. As an operational excellence manager at Johnson Screens, he can bring both his understanding of the work done

on the floor and his understanding of business principles and practices to bear to get the most out of himself and others for his company.

Both Jones and Govro demonstrate the power of a Metro State education to create the change in their lives that they want to work toward. The kind of power that sees Metro State continue to rank highly in CollegeNet’s Social Mobility Index, measuring the ability

“Coming in, I had bits of education from different places, I had military experience, work experience, and I just thought it would be great to try to bring all that stuff together.” — Blake Govro

Thinking about changing your career?

Metro State University is here to help you at every stage of your career. From adding a new skill to enrolling in a new degree program, Metro State has programs and options for you. Learn more about how you can design a major that helps you design your future.

Explore academic majors and degree programs at metrostate.edu/academics/programs

Visit the Career Center on our website for informational videos, log into Handshake the Metro State job board, or to schedule an appointment with a career counselor. metrostate.edu/career

Apply for the scholarship for Metro State Alumni seeking a second or graduate degree. The Alumni Association Scholarship applications open in Spring 2024.

of higher education institutions to help graduates move from lower to middle income strata. In 2022's index, Metro State ranked 22nd in the country, and first in Minnesota, placing in the top 1.6% of all ranked institutions.

Jones and Govro also demonstrate the qualities of the empowered lifelong learners that Metro State has always served. "I like to think I keep learning constantly," says Govro. "It's part of my job to learn different tools related to continuous improvement, different problem-solving methods. I pretty much always have a book or two on my desk."

Similarly, business owner Jones continues to learn to, in her words, be "the best boss, because I've had not good bosses. What I want to do is to try to always be in a place where I'm calm, not running at high anxiety all the time. Then I can listen to the people that work for me, pay them an adequate wage, and help them continue to learn as they grow ... For me, being a good boss is about being happy and content where I am and having people in my environment that are happy and content where they are."

For those interested in making that change in mid-stream and furthering their education, Jones and Govro have similar advice. "If that is something that you are even considering," says Govro, "just go for it. Just get out there, start to explore it, start to take some classes. You don't have to commit to the whole thing all at once but start to take a look and see what develops."

"What I would say to those interested is that it is important to stand in what you want to do and allow yourself to come to a place that encourages you to be who you are," says Jones. "You don't have to feel alone; there are many avenues in which you can have community or family at Metro State, so I would encourage you to give it a try."

Facilitating meaningful life changes for our students is certainly one of the most rewarding things Metro State does. As an alum, if you find yourself craving the kind of change described here, you can find what Metro State can offer you at our Graduate Students page metrostate.edu/gradschool.



Blake Govro on site at Johnson Screens

President's outstanding graduates

Each semester, members of the faculty and academic advisors nominate undergraduate and graduate students from their respective colleges to be recognized at the President's Outstanding Student Award reception. The students celebrated their awards with family, friends and the university community at a reception held on December 2, 2022, on the Saint Paul campus. It was the first in-person reception held since December 2019.



Back row: Jason Emrick, Vanessa Morin, Stephanie Becken, Bukola Okulaja, Logan Johnson **Middle Row:** Maychee Mua, Malena Vang, Birgitta Anderson, Akuvi Akoumany, Malia Stone, Sara Johannes **Front row:** President Ginny Arthur, Erica Mattice, Melissa Goranowski, Provost Amy Gort

FALL 2022 RECIPIENTS

Undergraduate Degree Award Recipients

Akuvi Akoumany, *College of Nursing and Health Science, Nursing Science*
Birgitta Anderson, *School of Urban Education, Urban Elementary Education*
Jason Emrick, *College of Liberal Arts, Creative Writing*
Bukola Okulaja, *College of Individualized Studies, Culinary Arts Entrepreneurship*
Vanessa Morin, *College of Management, Human Resource Management*
Maychee Mua, *College of Community Studies and Public Affairs, Human Services in Leadership Administration*
Malia Stone, *College of Sciences, Biology*

Graduate Degree Award Recipients

Melissa Goranowski, *College of Nursing Health, Master of Nursing Science*
Logan Johnson, *College of Sciences, Master in Cyber Operations*
Malena Vang, *College of Liberal Arts Master in Technical Communication*
Sara Johannes, *College of Individualized Studies, Culinary Entrepreneurship Education*
Stephanie Becken, *College of Community Studies, and Public Affairs, Master of Public and Nonprofit Administration*
Erica H. Mattice, *College of Management, Master of Business Administration*

Ways to give

“By earning my bachelor’s degree, I can be one step closer to becoming a Marine Corps Officer. This is important to me because, as a first-generation student, I will be able to show my family, as well as other students, that we can do it. We can work hard and reach our goals.” — Kelsey Xiong ’22, Accounting Major

Gifts to the Metro Fund are important because they provide seed money for new projects that support students, like emergency grants for students and small financial awards to support creativity and excellence like the art purchase award at the front of this magazine. We will put your gift to work to find innovative ways to support students and to enhance the student and alumni experience. Alumni giving is an important vote of confidence in Metro Students and the university. Your gift makes a difference.

Sustaining gifts:

Become a sustaining donor: provide continuing support to

Metro State students through a regular monthly gift. To set up a commitment of \$5 or more per month from a credit or debit card or electronic funds transfer (EFT), please go to our online giving page and check the box next to “Make this a monthly gift.”

Memorial/Honor Gifts:

Honor an important person in your life. When you make a gift, simply include a note indicating the name of the person(s) you wish to honor along with their address(es). Unless you specify otherwise, we will send them or their family a special note of acknowledgment. You can easily provide this information via our online giving page.

Legacy Giving

Your legacy can help shape the future of Metro State University. There are many ways to make a planned gift to Metro State—all of which demonstrate an intentional and lasting commitment to the university and can lessen the tax burden for you and your family. Your planned gift enables Metro State to honor its tradition of serving the unmet educational needs of the Twin Cities, as we prepare to meet and master the future, advantaging our graduates and enriching our communities. Learn more about the ways and benefits of legacy giving. For more information visit metrostate.giftlegacy.com.

Making a Gift

There are many ways to make a gift to the Metro State University Foundation. Choose what works best for you.

Online: Make a gift online with your credit card at metrostate.edu/give/give-now. You can make a one-time contribution or set up a monthly gift.

Check or EFT (Electronic Funds Transfer): Send a check for a one-time gift or a voided check to set up a monthly gift via electronic funds transfer (EFT).

Legacy Giving: You can make sure your family is taken care of while also making a significant gift to the Metro State University Foundation. To learn more about leaving a legacy, visit metrostate.giftlegacy.com.

Making a Difference //////////////

Change the World, Your Way

Community Faculty Member Amanda Richards Leaves a Legacy of Empowerment to the Students of Metro State

By Matthew Spillum '06

From her room at the Mayo Clinic, which she had beat the late December 2022 blizzard to from the Twin Cities, Amanda Richards is a steady calm presence one can feel even through the screen of a Zoom call. Perhaps this stems from decades of experience as a counselor and therapist, or from her long service as an instructor at Metro State. Or from her many years battling the cancer that she'd thought she'd beat, and that had her in the room she sat in while we talked.

In May of 2021, Amanda Richards had been given a 5-year, all-clear bill of health after her initial cancer diagnosis years before, but that good news was soon supplanted by an emergency room visit in August, and the news that her cancer had returned with a vengeance. "In February of this year, my oncologist at the Mayo Clinic said to me that this was one of the most aggressive cancers she's ever dealt with, and asked me if I wanted to continue treatment ... I said sure, let's try one more thing."

Despite being, as she put it, "in really bad shape," and having what had seemed like a reprieve ended in dramatic fashion, Richards reached out to friends and

family to apprise them of this situation. "One of my friends, Kate Lehmann, said that she knew someone who had had a living wake, and it had been a really cool experience, and would I be okay if she organized one for me. I was hugely honored by that."

Lehmann reached out to others among Richards' friends to organize the event, enlisting the assistance of Therissa Libby (Metro State) and Tina Sacin (St. Cloud State), along with Edwards, to plan and publicize the event. More than 75 people from all over the globe, including Okinawa, attended and/or participated. Richards was not content, however, to leave things at celebrating her own life, telling her friends, "by the way, I want to establish, as part of my legacy, a scholarship at Metro State."

Her own educational experience had been made possible, as she notes, through financial aid. "I appreciate that I got my undergrad through scholarships. My family could not afford to send me to college, so I worked my butt off and got scholarships, and got a good education that really enabled me to do other things educationally." Richards learned in her undergraduate years the difficulties of being a working college student. "I worked while I went to school;

"I appreciate that I got my undergrad through scholarships. My family could not afford to send me to college, so I worked my butt off and got scholarships, and got a good education that really enabled me to do other things educationally." — Amanda Richards

I made \$12 a week, and I could spend \$10 at the grocery store, so I had a little money left over every week to save for other things ... any little thing could put me in a financial crisis. I don't regret any of that, because I place a really high value on education, but that's a pretty hard way to get through school, and I know that there are students at Metro in similar situations. I thought, if we could make it easier for somebody, that would be huge."

With initial plans for a bequest laid out at the living wake, Richards' friends rallied to make that dream a reality, raising an initial \$55,000 to start the scholarship, after a \$25,000 match. Of course, an endowed bequest takes time to mature and is awarded after the person they honor has died. Enter Richards' former co-worker and longtime friend Weston Edwards.

Edwards first met Richards when he became her supervisor at Pride Institute. As a person new to supervising, and with an experienced colleague who didn't gladly suffer inexperience, Edwards notes that they didn't seem destined to be fast friends at first. "We've joked about this a couple of times. She approached me like, 'who is this young kid and who does he think he is?'" Over time, though, they became quite close, to the point where Richards calls him her "brother from another mother," and Edwards refers to them as "work spouses." Though they did not stay colleagues through that entire time, they remained close friends for 25 years, an important anchor for Edwards: "I'm a classic introvert, if not even a hermit, and so for me to stay in contact with someone is also a measure of my respect for them."

As the living wake took place and Richards announced to her gathered friends that this scholarship bequest was what she wished her legacy to be, the realities of setting up such a fund were just beginning to

There was this sense of urgency to get this fund up and running because we wanted to have that opportunity to celebrate it while she was still with us." — Rachel Hughes

manifest. Rachel Hughes, associate vice president of advancement at Metro State, notes that "it was a really unique situation, because Amanda is dying of cancer. In my professional career, it was the first time I'd heard from somebody with this kind of urgency ... usually when we're talking about bequests with people, it's years out—and we want it to be years out. There was this sense of urgency to get this fund up and running because we wanted to have that opportunity to celebrate it while she was still with us."

With the scholarship in the process of being set up, and funding sitting at around the initial amount designated in Amanda's bequest, Amanda was treating Weston to birthday lunch. "I had expressed at the living wake how much Amanda meant to me. How I know that I am a better clinician and better person for having known and worked with her for 25 years. It was so important to help this dream be funded, and so I offered a \$25,000 matching donation at lunch that day as an expression of my love and concern for her."

Hughes was surprised, but happy to help make this happen. "He (Edwards) and I spoke, and he wanted to help establish the fund and get a scholarship out as quickly as possible. Within weeks we had more than \$50,000 total, which enabled us to give out the first scholarship in the fall (of 2022)." Edwards provided for a passthrough scholarship for this award in the fall, and the matching gifts will establish the endowed

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You can help Amanda Richards change the world!

Just announced – Another friend of Amanda's has offered a match to encourage others to contribute to her scholarship fund. After seeing the first scholarship awarded to Zahra, Amanda is dreaming bigger. She would love to grow the endowment to provide the biggest scholarship possible — hoping to fully fund a student for one year. This matching gift donor wants to help make this possible. The donor, who prefers to remain anonymous, will match each gift dollar for dollar up to \$25,000. Make your gift today using the enclosed envelope or visit metrostate.edu/give/give-now and select (Amanda Richards) Change the World Endowed Scholarship in the designation box. Thank you for honoring Amanda by supporting the students who will carry on her legacy.

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 13

scholarship, which will provide scholarships into perpetuity—and keep Amanda’s legacy alive.

The immediate funding provided the opportunity for Richards’ husband and children to review the scholarship applications, and for both Richards and Edwards to meet the first recipient, Zahra Omar. This proved to be as much of a gift as Edwards had hoped, as Richards was able to directly connect with this former student of hers that she knows will go on to have a great impact. “I think that she (Zahra) is an excellent student. I mean, when students show up for class, I can tell if they’ve done the reading or not, but she would finish my sentences when I was teaching because she was so well prepared every time. So when I found out she was the first recipient, I was thrilled, because it is really nice to know that I’ve had an interaction with the student who was awarded the first scholarship, but also who is so well positioned to go out there and effectively change the world.”

Edwards was also impressed by the recipient. “What stands out for me is what Amanda is all about in her scholarship: underserved populations, representation, both as students and professionals. The goal of the scholarship is to provide resources to those underserved populations both as future clinicians and as clinicians serving future populations, and in that sense, Zahra is just a perfect match.”

“What stands out for me is what Amanda is all about in her scholarship: underserved populations, representation, both as students and professionals. The goal of the scholarship is to provide resources to those underserved populations both as future clinicians and as clinicians serving future populations, and in that sense, Zahra is just a perfect match.” — Weston Edwards

As the process goes forward, there are ongoing efforts to provide funding so that awards can continue through the time, three years, when the fund would typically be maturing before being available for disbursement. In hoping that those efforts are successful, here is an excerpt from Weston Edwards’ piece “Ode to Amanda Richards,” presented at her living wake, “One of Amanda’s favorite quotes is from ‘Alice in Wonderland’ where the Queen says to Alice, ‘Why, sometimes I’ve believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast.’ I am dreaming the impossible with you.”

Launching a World Changer

Zahra Omar ’23 Receives the First Change the World Scholarship

It is often those who understand what it is to need help who make the most capable helpers. Zahra Omar, the initial recipient of the Change the World Scholarship and future graduate of the Master of Science in Co-occurring Disorders Counseling program, is no stranger to that understanding.

Having received her bachelor’s degree in 2006 from the University of Mary Washington in Virginia, Omar moved to Minnesota to attend BLIND, Incorporated’s training programs. As a legally blind person, Omar needed to figure out how to function as a working adult before she

could apply her academic knowledge. “I said to myself, ‘goodness, you have an undergraduate degree, but you need to learn how to go around and figure things out,’” says Omar.

Living and working in the Twin Cities with people with developmental disabilities might have been enough for Omar, save for her desire to help with her native Somali community and that community’s stigma towards confronting issues of mental illness and substance abuse. “I have a family who have experienced mental illness and substance use problems. In fact, before I joined the

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Weston Edwards, Zahra Omar, Amanda Richards

Photo by Jeff Achen

(Co-occurring Disorders Counseling) program, my cousin committed suicide in the Netherlands after struggling with alcohol use and depression,” she says. “And I just needed to help people and figure out what in the Somali community creates this stigma and try to help remove it.”

Entering Metro State’s Co-occurring Disorders Counseling program, Omar had the pleasure of working with Professor Amanda Richards in her first semester. “I have great memories of her. Just very helpful, really great in knowledge and experience of the subject matter, and willing to work with students like me to help with accommodations. I also really appreciated the cultural competency emphasis in the program. I learned a lot from Amanda Richards with regards to the importance of cultural awareness in service delivery.”

As to the Change the World Scholarship, Omar recalls feeling unsure about applying. “I heard about it last summer, and at first I thought maybe other people would apply and get it, so I didn’t apply right away. And then I saw the notice about it again and I thought, ‘OK, maybe I have to take a shot here.’”

The process, she notes, was “great. Submitting prior work and projects instead of making a new project made it easier to complete the application. I also really liked the focus on cultural competency. Coming from Somalia originally, and also having worked in the disability

advocacy field before, as well as my own experience with disability, it all fit and tied together.” Reflecting on the process as other students might experience it, Omar reminds them “to really not feel discouraged, but just apply. It is a great process, and you never know if you will be selected.”

As the first Somali student in her graduate program, she is also encouraged by others in her community coming into the field. “There has been a need for work in this area in the Somali community, and I’m focusing my master’s project on getting the recovery experiences of Somali Americans: what has their recovery experience been like, how does their recovery help them participate in community, in family, in religion? What does recovery mean to them?”

“I also really appreciated the cultural competency emphasis in the program. I learned a lot from Amanda Richards with regards to the importance of cultural awareness in service delivery.”

— Zahra Omar

News and notes

Anis Ahmetovic '21, Farmington, recently took the oath of office as a police officer with the Rosemount Police Department. Previously, Ahmetovic was a community service officer for the City of Duluth.

Chuck Aoki '15, Ann Arbor, MI, a three-time Paralympian and three-time Paralympic medalist (2 silver, 1 bronze) in Wheelchair Rugby, married Liz Gregory on December 17, 2022, in Minneapolis. Aoki and Gregory met at a wheelchair rugby tournament and the couple will continue to be actively involved in the sport on a national level.

Jessica Barthel '16, Elk River, recently became an economic developer with Sherburne County. Prior to this role, Barthel worked as a nursing assistant for Guardian Angels, and as manager of Pullman Place Cooperative. She is excited to be in this new role and to serve her community.



Jill Bemis '79, Oakdale, was voted top nature photographer from the City of Maplewood. Bemis's winning picture was of a rabbit with its tongue sticking out. Photos were submitted of parks, preserves, and open spaces within the City of Maplewood.



Joy Bodin '93, Brainerd, was recently named as president of Hennepin Technical College. Bodin had been serving as interim president of Hennepin Technical College since June 2022. Prior to this appointment, Bodin served as vice president of academic and student affairs at Central Lakes College in Brainerd.

Brielle Bredsten '13, Aikin, recently became the business reporter for the Duluth News Tribune. Bredsten is an award-winning professional writer, photographer, and editor.

Jeremiah Ellis '20, Saint Paul, received the 2022 David Gebhard Award from the Minnesota Chapter of the Society of Architectural Historians. This award recognizes outstanding publications on Minnesota's architectural history. Ellis's research documented the original clubhouse at the Sterling Club, which was designed in 1923 by African American architect Clarence Wigington.

Bailey Ethier '22, Osceola, WI, is currently the editor of East Side Unified, a newsletter focusing on housing justice.

Annmari Florest '03, Carver, was recently named CEO of Range Mental Health Center. Florest has been with Range Mental Health Center since 2018, and previously served as an outpatient therapist and clinical director.

Dan Freiberg '18, Coon Rapids, was recently promoted to sergeant with the Coon Rapids Police Department.



Hannah Furney '22, Minneapolis, was accepted by Partners in Policymaking for a nine-month statewide training in disability advocacy. Furney is interested in accessible, affordable housing, and competitive and inclusive employment.

Millite Gebremichael '12, Rosemount, was recently the recipient of Minnesota State's Outstanding Service Award, recognizing teams and/or individuals that provide outstanding campus service. Gebremichael received the award from Bill Maki, vice chancellor of finance for Minnesota State.

Peter Gillen '92, Minneapolis, retired after a career as an adjunct professor at Augsburg College, and as a controller at two different corporations. Gillen is now 82 years old, and enjoyed his time at Metro State University, where he earned a Master of Arts in Management and Administration in 1992.

Note: All towns are in Minnesota unless otherwise noted

Frank Grass '85, Columbia, MO, serves as a volunteer with the Missouri Employer Support to the National Guard and Reserve. Grass also serves as a senior mentor in support of senior military officer courses at the US Army War College.

Brook Hansen '22, Champlin, is a partner with Adams-Hansen & Associates, an investment advisement brokerage. Hansen has been a speaker and trainer for the Tax Reduction Institute and has won numerous awards in the field of Business Ethics.

Joseph Hatch '12, Minneapolis, was recently selected to be city administrator for the City of Newport. Prior to this role, Hatch was the human resources and business operations director for the City of Minneapolis.

Axel Henry '95, Saint Paul, was selected by Mayor Melvin Carter to be the next chief of police for the City of Saint Paul. Henry spent 25 years with the Saint Paul Police Department. Prior to this promotion, Henry was commander of the Narcotics, Financial Intelligence, and Human Trafficking Division.

Adam Jacobson '05, Eagan, was recently promoted to captain with the Coon Rapids Police Department. Jacobson was an Eagan police explorer for seven years and community service officer for the Bloomington Police Department for two years. Jacobson has been with the Coon Rapids Police Department since 2005.

Mark Janey '92, Malta, NY, retired from the Air Force after 30 years of service. Janey also volunteers on several committees for Grassland Bird Trust, and on the executive committee for Albany Chapter of the Adirondack Mountain Club.



Andrea Jenkins '99, Minneapolis, was recently featured in Out.com's Out100 list of LGBTQ+ activists, politicians, nonprofit leaders, and physicians. Jenkins is currently on the city council for the City of Minneapolis. Five years ago, Jenkins became the first transgender African American woman elected to office in the nation.



Kristin Johnson '05, Edina, recently published a novel called, "Fearless: A middle grade adventure story." Johnson has published nine books for children. Among numerous literary awards, Johnson is a two-time winner of the Loft Literary Center's Shabo Award for picture books. Johnson's books can be found at Barnes & Noble and online.



Mindy Johnson '92, Toluca Lake, CA, recently was the recipient of the June Foray Annie Award. This award is given to individuals who have made a significant and benevolent or charitable impact on the art and industry of animation. Johnson continues to do research on the earliest women in animation and cinema for the Academy of Motion Picture Museum.

Sandra Johnson '09, Jordan, was recently elected to be on the city council for the City of Jordan.

Todd Johnson '13, Rochester, was recently welcomed as a new teacher of economics, business communication, and career planning with the Chatfield School District. For the past 20 years, Dr. Johnson has taught in higher education. Prior to this new role, Dr. Johnson directed and taught in an educational enrichment cooperative in Rochester.



Thulani Jwacu '05, Minneapolis, recently became the director of youth science at the Science Museum of Minnesota.

Carrie Kappel '13, Champlin, was recently featured on MPR News with Angela Davis. Kappel is a nurse and graduate of Metro State University's Alcohol and Drug Counseling Program. Currently, Kappel is the manager of operations and addiction services for Allina Health.

Andrew Laughlin '21, Duluth, was welcomed by St. Luke's Anesthesiology Associates as a certified registered nurse anesthetist.

Angela McCarthy '10, Bemidji, was recently welcomed to the sleep medicine team at Sanford Health in Bemidji. McCarthy is a certified nurse practitioner and collaborates with physicians to meet the health care needs of adult patients.

Mohamud Mohamud '21, Minneapolis, recently became the digital marketing specialist at Metro State University. Prior to this role, Mohamud was paid media specialist at Cars.com. Mohamud has extensive experience in digital marketing, and he is excited to serve Metro State University in this capacity.

News and notes

Peter Nordquist '01, Bemidji, recently made three trips to Ukraine to provide humanitarian aid. Nordquist is working with doctors in Minneapolis to provide prosthetics to Ukrainians who have lost limbs in the war.



Betty Passick '96, Oakdale, Passick's most recent book, "The Black Bag of Dr. Wiltse, Murder on the Prairie," was honored with the Top Notable Indies Book Award from Shelf Media Group.

Note: All towns are in Minnesota unless otherwise noted

Peyton Pollard '20, Saint Paul, was recently featured on MPR News with Angela Davis. Pollard is a graduate of the MANE Baccalaureate Nursing Program at Metro State University. She is currently working as an ICU nurse and a peer support group convener for the Minnesota Nurses Peer Support Network.

Laura Purfeerst '08, was recently named CFO of the Year by the Minneapolis/St. Paul Business Journal. Purfeerst is the chief financial officer at Lifeworks Services, Inc.

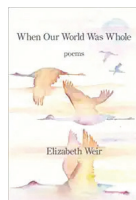
Walken Schweigert '13, Saint Paul, was recently highlighted at the Kennedy Center in Washington, DC, for artistic achievement in opera. Schweigert is a graduate of the College of Individualized Studies at Metro State University.

Nicole Sindelar '13, Farmington, currently owns the Hastings Golf Club and Hastings Public House. Sindelar is also on the Board of Trustees for the Hastings Chamber of Commerce, YMCA and Dakota Country Historical Society.

Nicholas Thorn '07, Menasha, WI, was recently named Chief of Police for the Menasha Police Department. Thorn joined the police department in 2009 as a patrol officer and was a patrol lieutenant, before becoming investigative lieutenant in 2019.

Ijeoma Jane Ugochukwu '19, Saint Cloud, recently joined the team at Essential Health-Duluth Clinic, as a certified nurse practitioner specializing in nephrology.

Elizabeth Weir '97, Wayzata, recently published her second poetry book, "When Our World Was Whole." Weir recently did a reading for her new book to various book groups and had a book launch event. You can find Weir's books online or anywhere books are sold.



In Memoriam

Darlene Anderson '96, Woodbury

Lowell Anderson '78, Belle Vista, AR

Waltraud Baecker '77, Minneapolis

Frank Ball '92, Fort Ripley

Bruce Broman '82, Elk River

Richard Deck '94, Superior, WI

Ronald Enders '75, Oakdale

Kitty Engle '93, Rosemount

Marilyn Hanson Hickok '75, Edina

Susan Honsvall, Staff Emerita, Stillwater

Daiane Hottz '15, Inver Grove Heights

Eleanor Hunsberger '82, Minnetonka

Richard Johns '79, Eden Prairie

Jean Koski '80, Plymouth

Patricia Kovaleski '79, New Port Richey, FL

Catherine Maloney '74, Brooklyn Park

Patricia Mascia '85, Siren, WI

Jack McGowan, Retired Metro State Professor, Saint Paul

Michael Miller '16, Chanhassen

Bruce Nelson '83, Laurel, MD

Susan Peterson '98, Hanover

Jimmie Rose '88, Bayport

William Walsh '76, Saint Louis Park

Donald Waltz '04, Minneapolis

Share your news

Starting a business? Getting a promotion? Retiring? Share your big news with us, and you may see yourself in *buzz* magazine. Email your news item and a photograph of yourself to alumni.relations@metrostate.edu.



Faculty spotlight

Excellence in teaching and advising

Join us in congratulating Metro State faculty who have been recognized by the MN State Board of Trustees. The 2023 Board of Trustees Awards for Excellence acknowledge and provide system-wide recognition for consistently superior professional achievement of our college and university teaching and service faculty.



Educator of the Year

Derrick Crim '97

Derrick Crim, human services faculty, was selected as an Educator of the Year. Dr. Crim embraces innovative teaching approaches that maximize skill and empathy development and include equity-focused content, all with the aim of preparing students to enter the field of addiction counseling.



Gemma Punti

Gemma Punti, individualized and interdisciplinary studies faculty, was selected as an Outstanding Educator. Dr. Punti led the work to implement student-defined program learning goals in individualized degree plans, a major innovation, and excels in culturally responsive teaching.



Khaled Rabieh

Khaled Rabieh, computer science and cybersecurity faculty, was selected as an Outstanding Educator. An innovative and engaging teacher, Dr. Rabieh has opened opportunities for students, contributing to the development of a recently launched master's degree in cyber operations and securing grants that support underrepresented students.



Kate Ries

Kate Ries, natural sciences faculty, was selected as an Outstanding Educator. Dr. Ries co-facilitated the Chemistry Foundation program that improved course success rates by providing extra support sessions and encouraging a growth mindset and sense of belonging in her teaching.



Outstanding Service Faculty

Ping Wang '84

Ping Wang, college of science academic advisor, was selected as an Outstanding Service Faculty. Recipient of all Metro State's advising awards, Wang has built programs and relationships to successfully recruit and support Asian American students and has helped advance equity and inclusion in many ways.



From the Director

KRISTINE HANSEN //////////////////////////////////////

One of the great perks of being the alumni relations director at Metro State is being part of commencement. The beats to each ceremony are familiar, the procession, the remarks by dignitaries, the moment the provost requests, usually in vain, that the audience refrain from applause and cheers until all the graduates have crossed the stage. Graduates cross the stage in mortar boards and fancy shoes that express their personalities which cannot be contained by the uniformity of the cap and gown. The joy of celebrating commencement carries from the stage and into the arms of friends and family gathered to share in the celebration of achievement. I look forward to the familiar celebration ushering students from one stage of their lives to the next.

At the heart of this communal ceremony, however, is the celebration of individual achievement and growth. Metro State was founded to help people achieve their career and life goals. In the early days there were no grades or classes, there were competencies. A chance for learners to use what they had learned through their work, military service, or life experience to gain college credit. Each program was individualized for the learner. Although we now have grades and formal classes, providing students with the skills and tools that complement their learning styles, experiences and goals has been a

recipe for success at Metro State for more than 50 years. And it works!

Once again, our university has been ranked the best university in Minnesota in social mobility. The best in the state at helping people use their strengths and talents to move to a more economically advantageous circumstance. As a university, we can feel proud, but we are not the whole story. This has been true in every iteration of Metro State. The university has changed and grown over time, but our students are the real story. They are doers who are willing to skip Netflix binges on a rainy day to work on a group project, the dreamers who have an idea for what their future can look like and who can turn that idea into reality, and they are the believers who look at the world as it is and want to make change, not just for themselves, but for their communities.

You are part of the Metro State story. We are a university because of you, and as we welcome each graduating class into the next stage in their Metro State story, we are all cheering, celebrating, and looking forward to seeing what they do next.

Stay Well,

Kristine Hansen '07
Director of Alumni Relations

Refer a student

As a Metro State alum, you know the power of earning a degree. You can share your experience with a prospective student, and they will get a bonus and you will get Metro State gear! Here is how it works:

Visit metrostate.edu/alumni and complete the student referral form on the websites.

After your student referral completes the admissions process, a member of the admissions staff will send them a letter to sign permitting Metro State to release their enrollment status to you (tell them to watch their email for this release form.)

After they return the release and enroll in a class for the fall term, a \$100 referral award will be sent to their student account.

You and the student you referred are invited to join Metro State Connect, our alumni-to-student connection platform for networking, career exploration, and mentoring. It is easy to get started; visit metrostate.peoplegrove.com to start connecting today. We will send you and your student periodic communications to enhance your Metro State experience.

Get Involved



Real Life Careers in IT



Student Networking Night



Breakfast at the Capitol on Zoom



Fall Fest



Day of service honoring Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

Each year Metro State holds dozens of lectures, panel discussions, celebrations of culture, and volunteer opportunities. You can stay up to date by subscribing to the alumni e-newsletter. Visit metrostate.edu/alumni to stay up to date.



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