

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

# DEAN'S REPORT

2024

SOUTHERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY  
EDWARDSVILLE

# Q&A

## WITH DEAN KEVIN LEONARD, PHD

### Q WHAT WERE THE HIGHLIGHTS OF THE 2023-2024 ACADEMIC YEAR?

**A** This academic year was an exciting one for the College. In the fall, we launched our new master's degree program in forensic sciences—our first new graduate degree program in more than five years. This program will meet the needs of students and employers in our region, particularly the Illinois State Police. We celebrated the 25th anniversary of the Black Theatre Workshop. And we hosted the largest Honors Day in the College's history, recognizing the achievements of more than 325 students.

### Q HOW HAS CAS FACILITATED ACADEMIC OPPORTUNITIES FOR UNDERSERVED POPULATIONS IN THE PAST YEAR?

**A** The College worked with the Upward Bound programs in Collinsville and East St. Louis to offer a credit-bearing course for high school students in those programs. Nicole Dixon, a graduate student in the Department of English Language and Literature, taught ENG 112 – Introduction to Literature: Why Stories Matter.

### Q WHAT IS THE COLLEGE DOING TO SUPPORT AND MAINTAIN THE SAFETY OF EXISTING FACILITIES AND EQUIPMENT FOR CAS PROGRAMS?

**A** CAS has increased staffing to enhance the safety of our facilities. The Department of Art and Design hired Joy Hitchcock to maintain and repair studio equipment and to provide safety training for students, staff and faculty. SIUE has also committed to upgrading the equipment in the broadcast studio in the Department of Mass Communications. The University has committed \$400,000 toward this project. The College is working to raise \$300,000 to unlock \$300,000 of additional funds.

### Q WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FORWARD TO IN 2024-2025?

**A** The coming year promises to be another great year for CAS! For the first time, all new first-year students will be able to declare their majors when they enter the University. This will help foster a sense of belonging among new students, and we hope that it will make it easier for students to graduate in four years.

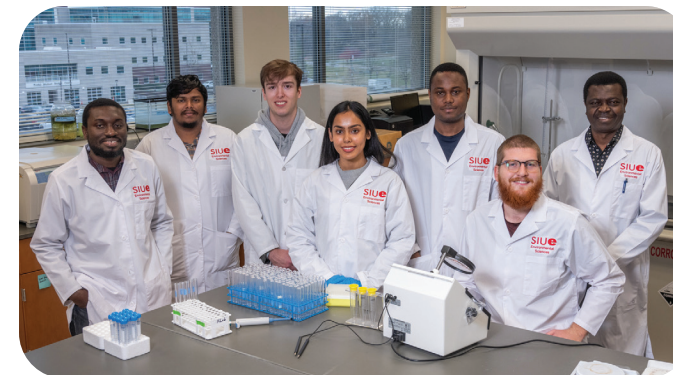


## About the College of Arts and Sciences

**The College of Arts and Sciences (CAS) is committed to a mission of intellectual transformation for our students in which they explore a rich tapestry of ideas, experiences and people.**

CAS fulfills this mission with our exceptional teacher-scholars who provide innovative experiential learning opportunities; our excellent degree programs; and the outstanding liberal arts and sciences foundation we provide for undergraduate students across the University.

CAS promotes scholarly and creative activity, community engagement and public service, and cultural and arts programming, all of the finest quality.



The CAS Anti-Racism, Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (ADEI) Committee was formed in response to the 2020-2025 CAS Strategic Plan, with the goal of ensuring the College meets its commitment to improving the recruitment and retention of diverse students, faculty and staff. The committee is comprised of 16 faculty and staff with various lengths of tenure from 13 departments and programs.

Last year, the committee focused on reviewing the recommendations of the SIUE Anti-Racism Task Force (ARTF) and creating its own recommendation for CAS to align with the strategic plan goals. This year, the committee is shifting its focus to the implementation of the recommendations, including:

- Working with the CAS Congress to make the ADEI committee permanent
- Reviewing the CAS operating papers to ensure alignment with its ADEI goals
- Developing a mentoring program focused on professional development and belonging for staff and faculty of color
- Gathering qualitative data through student focus groups to ensure student success efforts across the College reflect the needs of all students and achieve improved retention outcomes

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The highlight of chairing this committee is working alongside dedicated and resourceful faculty and staff who are equity leaders committed to a shared vision of the College as a truly anti-racist, diverse, equitable and inclusive community.

— TISHA BROOKS, PHD  
CAS Associate Dean

Associate Professor, Department of English Language and Literature  
CAS ADEI Committee Chair

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I hope that the work we do will create a more inclusive and thriving environment of learning and exploration.

The committee is working to yield better pathways for ongoing communication and create tools to help us turn people's shared wisdom and concerns into the initiatives and practical actions that will demonstrate a genuine commitment for positive change.

— TORI WALTERS  
Office Support Specialist  
Department of Philosophy

Faculty and Staff Mentoring Subcommittee Co-Chair

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## Breaking Barriers and Unveiling LGBTQ+ Narratives

For more than 25 years, Gary Hicks, PhD, professor in the Department of Mass Communications, has studied the LGBTQ+ community and how its history, along with other marginalized communities, have been shaped by the mass media. As a member of the LGBTQ+ community, Hicks' research projects have included studies on the act of outing by the press, public opinion of the LGBTQ+ community through time and its coverage by the press, and analyses of how media products were used to reach out to the community during the AIDS crisis. He has contributed encyclopedia entries published by Oxford University Press on stereotypes and beliefs about the LGBTQ+ community as perpetuated through mass media.

Hicks' research has been recognized internationally—he has received awards at international conferences and his work has been highlighted in a series produced by the National Geographic channel. While he is proud of the fact that his work has been spotlighted on a global scale, Hicks remains committed to SIUE's teacher/scholar model. He encourages his students to live a life of intellectual curiosity and finds great appreciation for the opportunities to educate and inform them about the often overlooked history of the LGBTQ+ community.

"I teach a course on social justice and the LGBTQ+ community in the University's John Martinson Honors Program," he said. "Usually

about half of the class identify as members of the LGBTQ+ community, yet most know very little about our history, how oppressed we were, and what we endured at the hands of the powerful in society who either wanted us to be hidden away or, in some extreme cases, to be eliminated altogether.

"Young people who have never experienced this type of discrimination need to know about the ones who paved the way for them," he added. "They also need to understand clearly that the fight for complete inclusion is far from over."

In January 2023, Hicks was awarded the William and Margaret Going Endowed Professorship Award, the most distinguished faculty award of the SIUE College of Arts and Sciences. The award is presented to a faculty member who has produced outstanding scholarship and connected that scholarship in fundamental ways to their teaching and transformed students' lives.

As part of the award recognition, Hicks led a lecture presentation for the SIUE community last spring.

"Having the honor to present my research was humbling, of course, but also so exciting," said Hicks. "My research not only belongs in a rather niche area of scholarship but can also be seen as controversial.

I found the audience to not only be receptive to my work but also really engaged with it."

“ I am passionate about my research because it allows me to educate those who identify as LGBTQ+, as well as those who do not, about the power held by mass media to both stigmatize marginalized communities and move them toward inclusivity. — GARY HICKS, PHD Professor, Department of Mass Communications ”

## Arts & Issues Spotlights SIUE Alumnus

For 39 years, SIUE's *Arts & Issues* series has showcased some of the world's finest artists. Each season, thought-provoking speakers inspire people of all ages and backgrounds. Dometi Pongo, BA business administration '11, returned to SIUE last spring and shared his story as an *Arts & Issues* presenter.

Pongo is a news host and correspondent for MTV and hosts MTV's "True Life Crime." While on campus, he took the time to also talk with current students about his exciting and fulfilling career, and how his career journey started in finance and then shifted to entertainment industry.

### Q HOW DID SIUE PLAY A PART IN WHERE YOU ARE TODAY WITH YOUR CAREER?

A SIUE played a massive role in where I am today. I co-founded a student organization called One Mic Poetry. As a business major, that space afforded me a rare opportunity to dive fully into my creative passions and connect with the student body. I wrote and recorded poetry and released several mixtapes on campus. I didn't know it then, but those live bi-weekly open mics my friends and I organized were the training ground for my live hosting skills.

### Q WHAT WAS IT LIKE TO COME BACK TO YOUR ALMA MATER AND SPEAK TO CURRENT STUDENTS?

A It was beyond inspiring talking to young folks who are in the same situation I was in 10-plus years ago. When I was performing on campus, I could only dream of having access to someone who had been where I wanted to go, or who had seen a world that I only caught glimpses of in the media. To be on the other side of the dream was as surreal as it was affirming and fulfilling. I can't wait to come back to campus again soon.

### Q WHAT ADVICE DID YOU HAVE FOR CURRENT STUDENTS?

A Study the people you admire and the disciplines that interest you, immersing yourself in the world you want to operate in is a key step in manifesting that reality for yourself. Find out what your true passions and interests are and lean into them. Give them as much of your time and energy as you can spare.



Photo: Diamond DDP LLC



# 25 years

OF BLACK THEATRE WORKSHOP



One night in the former Tower Lake apartments, students from varying ethnicities worked together to write and present a manifesto to the late William "Bill" Grivna (1943-2022), professor emeritus in the Department of Theater and Dance. The proclamation addressed the Black students' feelings of being overlooked when it came to castings for shows at the University. It was a way to amplify their voices and tell the stories they yearned to be shared.

Little did the students know, Grivna already had plans in the works addressing the concerns they had brought up. Grivna brought along Lisa Colbert (1969-2002), assistant professor in the Department of Theater and Dance, and the two became the creative force behind SIUE's Black Theatre Workshop (BTW).

"Lisa looked like us. She could relate to us," said Myah Maedell, one of the founding students of BTW. "She was just amazing. Lisa gave us the space to voice our opinions and pour our hearts out."

Colbert worked with the students in creating the first BTW production in 1999 entitled "Chronicles in Black History: Unfolding," a testimony to the strength and resilience of African Americans, marking the start of a lasting legacy of Black theater at SIUE.

"The cool thing about BTW is that it is never just for theater majors, or even just for Black folks," said Kathryn Bentley, MFA, associate professor in the Department of Theater and Dance, director of Black Studies at SIUE and BTW artistic director. "BTW is an opportunity for anyone to tell stories from the Black perspective, through the Black lens, highlighting various multicultural works in Black theater."

Bentley, who has served as artistic director of BTW since 2005, recalls the many powerful performances that BTW has put on over the years, including pieces highlighting individual stories such as the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and the tragic killing of Trayvon Martin.

This year's show "Legacy," held February 20-25, brought together current BTW students and alumni for encapsulating performances highlighting the impact BTW has had in its 25 years at SIUE. The production featured mostly original work with scenes written and performed by current students. Nineteen BTW alumni also joined the performances contributing as workshop facilitators, writers, choreographers and directors. The week's performances concluded with a heartfelt tribute honoring BTW co-founder Colbert.



"Lisa was a firm believer in 'Sankofa', meaning to go back and retrieve your past," said Maedell. "You cannot go forward unless you go back and remember how the people before you paved the way for you. That's what I would like to see happen for BTW."

Because Bentley is retiring this summer, the 2024 BTW was her last as artistic director. Guiding the program for the last 19 years has tremendously influenced and impacted her tenure at SIUE. Her departure is bittersweet.

"I get very emotional, because I am just so grateful that I have gotten to experience BTW with so many students and have seen how I have been part of their development," said Bentley. "I am excited to see where BTW goes and how it grows."

Geovanday Jones, MFA, assistant professor of theater and dance and associate artistic director of BTW, will ensure the BTW legacy continues until a new BTW artistic director is named.





## Kimberly Archer's Journey in Music and Composition

Growing up, music and education were the family business for Kimberly Archer, DMA. Her mother's passion for folk and alternative music and her father's teaching background gave Archer insight into the basic elements of music at an early age. When Archer started to pursue her career, she realized that she not only wanted to teach music but also compose her own.

The Department of Music professor of theory and composition has had a successful career, including having many commissioned and published works, showcasing her talent in numerous national and internal performances, and earning SIUE's highest academic ranking of Distinguished Research Professor.



The pinnacle of her career was when she was selected by "The President's Own" United States Marine Band to compose an original fanfare to underscore the program for Joe Biden's Presidential Inauguration ceremony in 2021. She entitled her work "Fanfare Politeia," translated from Plato's Greek term for "Republic."

"The whole experience was unexpected and like being in a wonderful dream," said Archer. "The Marine Band is one of the best symphonic bands in the world, so I felt like I had to keep pinching myself to be sure this was real."

Due to COVID-19 restrictions and unexpected delays, Archer had very limited time to compose the piece before the inauguration and could not be there in person to hear her piece come to life. She uses the hardships of that momentous occasion to encourage her students to welcome the unforeseen challenges that are inevitable in composition.

"I think the process of facing frustration and uncertainty and working through them is what makes us capable artists and interesting humans," she said. "Being a composer requires a lot of attention to detail and many, many hours of focused, intense effort. Music doesn't suddenly appear in a finished form; it's the result of a million single little decisions, one on top of the next. It's hard work and takes a big commitment, but it's also possible for those willing to put in the time and effort."

# Remembering JOHNETTA HALEY



The Department of Music hosted a tribute concert last spring in honor of Johnetta Randolph Haley (1923-2021), celebrating the emerita music professor, musician, former administrator, community leader and civil rights activist.

The Dunham Hall Theater rang melodic sounds as a demonstration of Haley's dedication to nurturing talent and fostering artistic excellence. Performances included the SIUE University Orchestra, under the direction of maestro Michael Mishra, DA; professor in the Department of Music, internationally acclaimed pianist Stan Ford, SIUE alumnus and a 2011 CAS Hall of Fame inductee (pictured below); the Legend Singers from St. Louis; former SIUE music student and Johnetta Haley Scholarship recipient Adaron "Pops" Jackson; and former SIUE Professor of Music Reggie Thomas and his wife Mardra Thomas.

Haley earned a master's in music education from SIUE in 1972 and joined the Department of Music faculty that same year. She attained the rank of associate professor in 1978 and then professor in 1984. Haley served as director of the SIUE East St. Louis Center (East St. Louis campus) for more than 10 years. She was named professor emerita upon her retirement in 1993. In recognition of her work at SIUE and her many contributions to the East St. Louis community, SIUE named a scholarship program in her honor that supports the enrollment of students who are underrepresented in their anticipated fields of study.

The Johnetta Haley Tribute Concert was a testament to the power of one individual to inspire, educate and elevate countless lives. Haley's legacy continues to resonate, carried forth by everyone who was touched by her remarkable spirit.





## EZRA TEMKO: Cultivating Social Change

Ezra Temko, PhD, assistant professor in the Department of Sociology, teaches with intentionality to create a classroom environment that facilitates experiential, relevant, transferable and transformative learning. Temko received the SIUE 2023 Teaching Excellence Award and was named an inaugural Interdisciplinary Research and Informatics Scholarship (IRIS) Center Faculty Fellow.



### Q WHAT ARE YOUR MAIN RESEARCH AREAS?

**A** I study the change-making world of cultural politics, specifically with practical implications for changing symbolic politics, addressing structural power and realizing social justice. A lot of my research focuses on public policy and social change.

The values and ideals I was raised with have a stark disconnect from the breadth, depth of suffering and dehumanization in our world. I want to translate humanity's empathy into support for policy and respect for people who live up to those ideals.

### Q WHAT DO YOU HOPE THE STUDENTS IN YOUR CLASSES TAKE FROM YOUR TEACHINGS?

**A** I want students to come away empowered with knowledge and skills that assist them in fulfilling their own potential and being active citizens in their communities prepared and motivated to make the world more vibrant and just. I want them to have the skills, tools and knowledge to analyze our social world with accuracy and understanding, and to leave with enriched multicultural competency. I want to foster their curiosity as lifelong learners.



## CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE: CAS Honors Day Convocation

Each spring, CAS recognizes student achievement during the annual Honors Day Convocation. In 2024, CAS presented nearly 400 different scholarships and awards to 327 students.

The event, which is the largest single gathering outside of commencement that recognizes student achievement, brings faculty, staff, donors, family and friends together to celebrate the many student accomplishments in the College.

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We look forward to each year's convocation to congratulate and applaud our student honorees on a job well done! The ceremony represents a celebration of both the outstanding achievements of our students and the generosity of the sponsors whose donations make these scholarships and awards possible.

— KEVIN LEONARD, PHD  
Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

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## Senior Biological Sciences Student Recognized as Golden Opportunity Scholar

Senior biological sciences student Mary-Margaret Benware was named a Golden Opportunity Scholar by the Golden Opportunity Scholars Institute, a collaborative program of the American Society of Agronomy, Crop Science Society of America, and Soil Science Society of America (ASA-CSSA-SSSA). This international recognition is given to 20 students to encourage them to pursue their passion to enter the agronomy, crop, soil or environmental sciences professions.

Through her educational experiences and the skills she has developed at SIUE, Benware plans to become a research scientist and is excited to contribute to discoveries that protect ecosystems and preserve natural resources.

“I decided to study ecology because I love learning about how organisms relate to each other as well as to their environment,” Benware said. “I want to use this knowledge to protect and restore ecosystems. I also want to contribute to research that reduces the impact of humans on the environment, creating a healthier planet for future generations.”



# CAS BY THE NUMBERS



**625** Bachelor's Degrees  
Awarded 2023

**180** Master's Degrees  
Awarded 2023



**1,901** Undergraduate  
Majors

**418** Graduate  
Students



**391** Scholarships  
& Awards

**327** Student Honorees  
2024 CAS Honors Day



**39** Active External  
Grants

**\$5,848,908** Total External  
Grant Funding