PERSPECTIVE (NOUN) — A PARTICULAR ATTITUDE TOWARD OR WAY OF REGARDING SOMETHING
I’m not a huge fan of absolutes. If someone asks me my favorite movie or book or song, no single title rises to the top. Instead, there’s a veritable armada of contenders, challenging each other on criteria based not only on quality, but also on any given day’s weather, my schedule and what mood my wife was in that morning.

Likewise, however much my family and I move—and we move a lot—we can never bring myself to say goodbye. My wife and I are tumbleweeds. We are entirely dedicated to each other, but when it comes to addresses, we tend to get a seven-year itch. It has nothing to do with not liking where we are or even the fear of missing out on something better. It’s just curiosity. It starts as a simple thought—What’s it like on the other side of that mountain?—that takes root and grows into a tinnitus of wondering that can only be cured by wandering.

What if we sail as far as we can see? What will we see then? I think this aspect of my own nature is a huge part of why I have so enjoyed editing Sacred Heart University Magazine—surrounding myself and interacting daily with people whose knowledge that nothing is absolute is fuel for their pioneering spirit. Embracing uncertainty takes courage, but it’s where all the great stories reside.

Isaac Asimov once noted that the phrase most commonly uttered at the dawn of any discovery is not a boastful “Eureka!” but rather a quiet and curious “That’s funny …” Eureka! is an endpoint. That’s funny … is just the beginning.

The truth is nothing is ever what it seems. True pioneers don’t avoid that. They walk straight into it. Folks like Brian Dolan, who learned firsthand how illusion can spiral into unimaginable loss and is determined to illuminate the invisible (“The House Never Loses,” page 32). Or Amanda Palma, whose work detonates the illusion of a black-and-white world, injecting a most vibrant palette of colors (“The Art of Science,” page 36). Or Larry Wielk, SHU’s dean of students for the past 27 years, who saw in “the little college that could” a University that did, and does, and forever will (“Larry Wielk Has Left the Building,” page 42).

Indeed, in this issue we celebrate the 60th anniversary of this little college that could. Our Forward, Leading and Spirit sections—usually home to smaller, more news-related stories—in this issue take the opportunity of this anniversary to reflect on how the University has grown in size and stature, reach and influence, over the years.

Lastly, just as every exit is an entrance somewhere else, sometimes it feels right to begin with an ending. This is my last issue as editor of Sacred Heart University Magazine. The publication will carry on, of course, and in good hands—just not mine. The work here has been an absolute joy, and I’ve no doubt I’ll miss it very much. But still, I’m not saying goodbye. I’m just curious about what’s over those mountains. And there’s only one way to find out.

So, from one pioneer to another, let’s begin.
**FORWARD**

"THE VERY LEAST YOU CAN DO IN YOUR LIFE IS FIGURE OUT WHAT YOU HOPE FOR. AND THE MOST YOU CAN DO IS LIVE INSIDE THAT HOPE. NOT ADMIRE IT FROM A DISTANCE BUT LIVE RIGHT IN IT, UNDER ITS ROOF."

BARBARA KINGSOLVER

We are Pioneers. Forward is where we go.

LIKE NEVER BEFORE IN OUR 60-YEAR HISTORY, Sacred Heart University is in a position to lead—regionally, nationally and internationally. In fact, the New England Commission of Higher Education described our progress over the past decade as “remarkable, historic and impressive.” This drive to lead is inspired by our students who graduate steeped in the Pioneer Spirit and ready to serve the world. SHU alumni are not only educated to think and act and build meaningful careers but also guided to develop a strong moral compass and sense of responsibility to society.

Today, with your investment you can propel Sacred Heart into an even brighter future and foster our Pioneer Spirit for decades to come.

Join us on the Pioneer Journey and learn more about the Now We Lead Campaign – sacredheart.edu/nowwelead

$150 MILLION GOAL | $95 MILLION RAISED TO DATE

MODERN UNIVERSITY. MODERN AMENITIES. AS ON-CAMPUS HOUSING CONTINUES TO GROW AT SHU, SO DOES THE CAMPUS COMMUNITY.

MACKENZIE MILBURY ’27 knew what she wanted in a college, a fact that became crystal clear with each school she visited after her Sacred Heart campus tour. “I’d say, ‘I like it … but it’s not Sacred Heart,’” says the New Hampshire high school valedictorian. “My mom and dad said, ‘You don’t talk about other schools like this.’ It’s a sentiment that is music to the ears of Pam Pillo ’07, ’18, assistant vice president of undergraduate admissions—and an increasingly familiar refrain. ➜

ALL ABOUT DIRECTION

BY MEREDITH GUINNESS

We are Pioneers. Forward is where we go.
Sixty years after opening its doors, SHU has built a reputation for having the world-class facilities and accolade-garnering programs to attract a diverse and distinctive student body from across the country and around the world.

In short, it’s a good time to be a Pioneer.

“Our growth and development have been unmatched by our peers,” says Pillo. “We are a top choice for many students.” That’s quite a change from the early days. When Associate Dean Michelle Loris ’70 was one of the first students to pursue a degree from Sacred Heart in the 1960s, SHU was often the only choice for the children of working-class families and immigrants who populated the pews of the Diocese of Bridgeport.

But knowing the connection between higher education and social mobility, the Most Rev. Bishop Walter Curtis recruited an esteemed group of laypeople to lead the higher ed campus he aspirationally insisted on deeming a “University” from its inception. The first nine professors—including Walter Conley, SHU’s first president, with ties to respected, established institutions, such as Marquette and Loyola universities, and Maurice O’Sullivan and William Ready, who listed Seton Hall and Stanford on their curricula vitae—challenged students to become involved, whether in debates in the classroom or in community service, creating an atmosphere Loris remembers as “incredibly inspiring and dynamic.” More than just access to social mobility, the nascent University extended an invitation to become fully realized citizens of the world.

“A lot of the staff really took care of students,” recalls Chiqui Guiribitey, a Cuban immigrant who was also in the class of 1970, leading to a 36-year career as an ESL teacher at Bridgeport’s Central High School. “They were concerned for us. Everybody was very caring.”

That foundation continues as a guiding principle, even as the school has moved from being a local commuter college to a University ranked nationally in The Princeton Review, U.S. News & World Report, Colleges of Distinction and others.

“hu’s history has been a study in intentional growth. In 1972, a bachelor’s degree program joined the associate degree in secretarial studies and, by 1977, the University had its first graduate degree program in business administration. A mere decade later—a metaphor for the speed with which SHU was growing—the school had an accelerated MBA.

By 1981, SHU was distinguished enough to present an honorary degree to then-Vice President George H.W. Bush, and shortly thereafter Pathways to Progress, the first-ever capital campaign, met a $4 million goal.

By the 1990s, SHU created its first master plan and, in 1994, Merton Hall welcomed residential students, ushering in a whole new era of growth that continues today: two more residence halls will open in popular Pioneer Village next spring, about a year after the opening of the dazzling Martire Family Arena in January 2023.

“It’s been the vision of a lot of people taking risks.’

That was then

‘It’s been the vision of a lot of people taking risks.’
Responding to its guiding mission, Sacred Heart continues to pioneer educational principles and programs that not only equate education with social mobility, but with greater independence and social responsibility. Case in point: SHU’s dual degree programs that create a clear pathway and seamless plan of study for admitted undergrads to get their master’s-level degrees. Seeing a continued rise in the need for graduate degrees in many industries, but aware of the financial strain such an academic path presents, SHU has created 40 dual degree programs that allow students to obtain both a bachelor’s and a master’s in less time than traditional programs. Today between 40 and 50 percent of the incoming class are enrolled in advanced degree programs. The Welch College of Business & Technology, housed in the former GE headquarters, is another example of SHU’s unique ability to respond to the future. “It’s about the next thing that will help the institution thrive,” says Fiorentino. “It’s been very creative. No idea is off the table.” It’s that willingness to consider all ideas that led to the founding of SHU in Dingle, the University’s satellite campus on the remote southern west coast of Ireland. Born in 2004 of an idea from a few faculty members with European ties, the campus now offers an immersive Irish studies program as well as course development programs in business, biology, communications, social work—and even an option for nursing students, who often can’t fit study abroad into
‘There’s a homey environment... it’s really well set up for athletes.’

ELEESE SHILLINGFORD ’27

A student’s time at college is more than just the books of course. “We recruit each incoming class by embracing the term ‘triangulation,’” says Jim Barquinero, senior vice president for enrollment. That is, a lot of work is put into clarifying not only the academic and student life components of Sacred Heart’s current appeal, but also a “wildcard element” that may vary student to student—perhaps SHU’s suburban location, or its Catholic roots sprouting catholic inclusivity, or word of mouth or even families dedicated to the school that gave earlier generations their start.

And, of course, there’s growing national recognition of SHU athletics. Consider Eleese Shillingford ’27 of Alpharetta, GA. Growing up in the metro Atlanta region, the “Canter Kid,” as she was known, made a name for herself on the equestrian circuit, winning the Zone 10 Maclay Regionals in Florida in 2022. When it came time to look at colleges, the self-starter—in addition to her academic and athletic pursuits, Shillingford hosts the YouTube channel @eleese_s with nearly 10,000 subscribers and a line of merchandise all her own—emailed every DI equestrian coach in the country. Sacred Heart Coach Tiffany Hajdasz immediately stood out from the pack—or herd, as the case may be. “You could tell she cared,” recalls Shillingford. “It was not all about winning. She wanted something good for the team.”

That good feeling only got better when she and her dad toured campus. “There’s a homey environment,” says the freshman. “And the athletic program? It’s beyond. The lift rooms, the physical therapy people right here, the emphasis on mental health. It’s really well set up for athletes.”

With conference championships and NCAA berths now the norm, that expansive and thriving DI program has meant not only a need for top athletic venues and state-of-the-art infrastructures for athletics, says Barquinero; it requires a strategic plan for concurrent growth of the infrastructure across campus. Pioneer success on the field, court, rink and links has helped SHU get noticed and draw from a wider pool of applicants who, though not athletes themselves, know of the University’s successes and want to be a part of a vibrant, lively campus. The class of 2027 includes students from 33 states and 14 countries, and SHU recruiters are now seeing strong new interest from undergrads like Milbury in northern New England and growing name recognition and applications from the Maryland-Delaware-Virginia area, Florida, Texas and California.

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SHU-IN-DINGLE AFFORDS UNDERGRADS—EVEN NURSING STUDENTS—the opportunity to study abroad in one of Earth’s most beautifully rustic settings.

HOME IS WHERE THE HEART IS.

most meaningful things we can give our students. You can apply those skills to problem-solving, to listening, to effective speaking, to defending arguments. It makes you a better friend, parent and employer.”

their challenging class and clinical schedules.

“We found innovative ways to put the student experience first,” Fiorentino says, an explanation as true to the many programs Sacred Heart offers as it is to the University itself.

It’s the sort of thing you hear from anyone whose motivation is the mission—which is the secret to Sacred Heart’s ability to stay true to its roots even in the modern world. SHU ensures its programs and initiatives respond to industry needs while, at the same time, creating a “culture of service” and allowing students to take time to explore their options before committing to a major, says Associate Provost Amanda Moras.

“It’s not just about the first job,” she says. “It’s about finding your path. It’s about the fifth job, too.”

Central to that vision is the Catholic intellectual tradition—education with an interdisciplinary grounding in the liberal arts that keeps Pioneers mission driven. “There’s a lot of pressure to pick a major and get a job,” Moras says, “but a foundation in the liberal arts is one of the most meaningful things we can give our students. You can apply those skills to problem-solving, to listening, to effective speaking, to defending arguments. It makes you a better friend, parent and employer.”
A S THE UNIVERSITY attracts a more diverse group of students, SHU continues to expand programming in and outside of the classroom, including opening the Multicultural Center and the Sexuality and Gender Equity (SAGE) Center that celebrates and supports SHU’s LGBTQ+ community. And in recent years, SHU has also seen a resurgence of first-generation students, the exact cohort of students it was originally founded to serve, Moras says. “It’s difficult to define the ‘typical SHU student’ now,” she says. And that’s exactly what SHU leadership wants: a campus that provides the top-notch faculty and facilities, programs and atmosphere that make all sorts of students put a SHU acceptance letter at the top of their wish list.

“We have found a way to accommodate all kinds of people who want to call this their home,” says Dean of Students Denise Tiberio. “It’s welcoming and accommodating, and that courses through the whole student body.”

“IT’S DIFFICULT TO DEFINE THE ‘TYPICAL SHU STUDENT’ NOW.” — ASSOCIATE PROVOST AMANDA MORAS

OPEN DOOR POLICY

One notion never forgotten at SHU: that leading is, by definition, about others.

BY KIMBERLY SWARTZ

HOLDING THE DOOR ISN’T JUST AN ACT OF COURTESY. IT’S A WAY OF LIFE.

THERE IS NOTHING NOBLE IN BEING SUPERIOR TO YOUR FELLOW MAN; TRUE NOBILITY IS BEING SUPERIOR TO YOUR FORMER SELF.”

— ERNEST HEMINGWAY
We’re helping to guide what innovation otherwise may never have had.

Local young people a chance they was finally accessible, giving a degree would still be hard, but education. The work to earn a social mobility through previously exclusive access surrounding area, providing open a door for the working class and immigrant families of Bridgeport and to which students will go to hold a door for someone—anyone—friend, faculty, family or stranger.

That simple act of courtesy, a gesture demonstrating daily, seems to set the tone at Sacred Heart, where individual responsibility meets inclusive opportunity. It is a physical manifestation of mission, a daily practice connecting today’s SHU community to its origins, and it reminds everyone here that our purpose as Pioneers is to open the way forward for all.

Fast forward 60 years and the University is still known for holding doors open—both figuratively and literally. A faculty member could be walking toward a building door, still tens of yards away, head down, phone in hand, typing away at an email, and a student will stop to hold the door and wait. And wait until that professor looks up from what she’s doing, sees the student, accepts the kindness with a smile, and a daily ritual as common on campus as breathing will have been practiced. Visitors to campus often remark on the nearly gymnastic lengths to which students will go to hold a door for someone—anyone—friend, faculty, family or stranger.

That sort of targeted work, providing a National Institutes of Health grant, spends her time developing research to determine how early language processing difficulties can be detected in toddlers, using behavioral techniques like eye tracking and neurobiological measurements, specifically electroencephalography.

“A gesture demonstrating daily, seems to set the tone at Sacred Heart, where individual responsibility meets inclusive opportunity. It is a physical manifestation of mission, a daily practice connecting today’s SHU community to its origins, and it reminds everyone here that our purpose as Pioneers is to open the way forward for all.”

Axe, for example, education professor Darcy Ronan. The former classroom science teacher and curriculum leader works in the Isabelle Farrington College of Education & Human Development, preparing teacher candidates to teach science at the elementary and secondary levels.

Witnessing the ubiquity of computer science in the modern world while noting its absence in early formative education, Ronan and her former colleague, the late Cenk Erdil, secured the largest grant in SHU history: $5.1 million to train schoolteachers to better understand computer science and its importance in early education. Partnering with faculty at Quinnipiac University, Ronan is committed to ensuring elementary school teachers can adequately apply computer science in grade school lessons.

“We’re helping to guide what innovation and projects can come in the future.” Ronan says. It’s an open door for the teachers she educates, for the students they teach and for the field of computer science as a whole.

That sort of targeted work, providing expansive impact, is not only emblematic of a school, innovative in its inception, that has grown to achieve national ranking and recognition, it’s also exactly the sort of work earning the attention of major bodies funding cutting-edge research. In the last five years, the University has doubled the amount of grant awards and funding for research projects that it receives from organizations such as the National Science Foundation, Health Resources and Services Administration and others.

Projects like that of speech-language pathology professor Elizabeth Simmons in the College of Health Professions highlight just one of the many innovative research investigations conducted at the University. When Simmons was a clinician out in the field, she worked with toddlers who had language delays and other development conditions and saw firsthand the impact the delays had on their families.

Visit after visit, Simmons would hear the same thing from parents: “I wish I did something sooner” or “What did I do wrong?” The truth, of course, was that the parents had done nothing wrong. But their innate sense of guilt struck Simmons. She returned to school to earn her Ph.D. and now, thanks to a National Institutes of Health grant, spends her time developing research to determine how early language processing difficulties can be detected in toddlers, using behavioral techniques like eye tracking and neurobiological measurements, specifically electroencephalography.

“I want to help these parents,” she says. “I want to identify which toddlers will be at risk for long-term language problems so we can intervene as early as possible.”

While such mission-driven exploration has defined the Pioneer experience almost from the start, Assistant Provost for Research & Sponsored Programs Funda Alp credits one College of Arts & Sciences faculty member in particular for creating a pathway for research at the University.

Biology professor Jennifer Mattei, who passed away this past December, was driven by a personal curiosity that found its mission in a devotion to stewardship of the natural world, says her student-turned-colleague, biology professor Jo-Marie Kasinak ’11. Mattei’s Project Limulus research started in the late 1990s and has been integral to saving the shoreline from coastal erosion and preventing the horseshoe crab population from dwindling. Dedicated to the concept of “citizen science,” Mattei used her research to engage the public, educating them on the importance of the horseshoe crab, a creature that existed side-by-side with the dinosaurs and is now vital to the production of vaccines. It was this work that led Connecticut’s General Assembly to pass House Bill No. 6484 this past June. Thanks to her tireless commitment to sustainability, it is now illegal to hand-harvest horseshoe crabs or their eggs in the waters of Connecticut.

What’s more, in a highly competitive and male-dominated field, Mattei paved the way for female scientists like Kasinak, who has now assumed the helm of Project Limulus, keeping its work and mission moving forward after Mattei’s passing. “She pushed me to pursue research and a career in academia,” Kasinak recalls of her mentor, colleague and friend. Jennifer helped me find my passion for research and showed me the power of informal science education.”

Matti’s was a life dedicated to holding the door open—for science, her students, her colleagues and the environment. Her acts of strength and kindness led to a better world.

The establishment of Sacred Heart University as a manifestation of the inclusivity and outreach inspired by the Second Vatican Council initially served to provide open a door for the working class and immigrant families of Bridgeport and the surrounding area, providing previously exclusive access to social mobility through education. The work to earn a degree would still be hard, but was finally accessible, giving local young people a chance they otherwise may never have had.
Ethics, fully funded a trip sending six SHU students to England to attend the Oxford Consortium for Human Rights, an association that hosts annual workshops for students with different areas of focus in human rights.

Stiltner believes that learning is more impactful when the classroom is connected to the outside world, particularly when it involves traveling abroad where students meet and learn from a diverse group of people. “I believe that all people have their part to play in advancing respect for human rights, so it’s an honor to shepherd SHU students in an opportunity to develop their confidence and expertise to be human rights activists in their professions and their communities,” he says.

It takes a community that believes in the value of human rights to uphold and maintain them in society. It’s the responsibility that we each have as humans,” notes student Jaqueline Gonzalez ‘25, returning from the consortium, recognizing, as it were, that sometimes we need to hold the door for those we can’t even see.

‘We live in a vibrant, yet in many ways rural community.’

The Dingle Peninsula in County Kerry, Ireland, is home to Sacred Heart’s satellite campus, SHU in Dingle. The region is famous for its breathtakingly rugged beauty. It is also, however, somewhat remote when it comes to emergency situations, the nearest emergency department being almost an hour away. “We live in a vibrant, yet in many ways, rural community, and despite having wonderful medical services available to us, we can find ourselves vulnerable to certain emergency medical responses,” explains Gary Delaney, executive director and company secretary of SHU in Dingle and resident of Dingle.

Recognizing a need, SHU administrators helped to provide and install seven highly technologically advanced automated external defibrillators (AEDs), strategically placed throughout the community, and will shortly provide training to a wide element of the Dingle community on the use of the devices. This initial stage could, in time, lead to the establishment of a community first responder group.

While not as immediately dramatic as a cardiac arrest, the struggle for fundamental human rights extinguishes hope—and often life—daily in all corners of the world. That is why Brian Stiltner and Christine Susienka, professors of philosophy, theology and religious studies, through the support of the Hersher Institute for Applied Rights in Philosophy and Religion, are embarking on a project that will provide a way for students to gain a better understanding of human rights and the importance of advocating for them.

‘We live in a vibrant, yet in many ways rural community.’
THE COMMUNITY HELPERS

TILL, THERE ARE those we can see. That we must see. That we cannot overlook. Those right here in our own backyard.

The Horizons at SHU program has held its doors open to Bridgeport youths for the last 12 years. The nonprofit agency provides innovative year-round programming and academic enrichment to underserved Bridgeport K-8 students. Offering community, connection and a wide array of services to children and their families, "the Horizons at SHU community is restorative, powerful and dedicated to showing children that learning is joyful, mysterious, collaborative and fun,” says Ashley Nechaev, executive director of Horizons at SHU. With significant backing from the state, local partners and the City of Bridgeport, the program prepares elementary and middle school students with the necessary tools to be confident, successful learners in high school and beyond.

And, much like how Horizons at SHU helps young people set themselves up for success, the Jack Welch College of Business & Technology’s Center for Nonprofits does the same for local nonprofits. Established in 2002 as a way for MBA students to develop practical skills while making a real-world difference, students create business plans for local nonprofits so the agencies can better achieve their goals and tackle challenges without the high costs of consultants. Of late, the center has expanded its services to nonprofit organizations through webinars, an annual conference and three nonprofit leadership development groups.

Over the years, students have crafted easy-to-follow road maps for the nonprofits, offered advice about how to run social media campaigns, created plans on how to increase public awareness and suggested ways to fundraise better, all while working closely with the organizations’ directors and CEOs—a doorway to success for both the nonprofits and the students.

Staying true to its roots and mission, the University remains dedicated to opening doors for students of all backgrounds, cultures and identities. Sacred Heart’s Office for Inclusive Excellence (OIE) is a testament to this. A variety of organizations and initiatives fall under OIE, such as the Multicultural Center, a space on campus established to connect and create a sense of community for underrepresented students, and the Sexuality and Gender Equity Center, a centralized safe and welcoming atmosphere where queer members of the community can gather. The office also develops anti-discrimination and discriminatory harassment policy and procedures, offers bias management interventions and provides educational resources and inclusive language for the University community to learn from.

“As a Vatican II university, we strongly believe in inclusion and the dignity and worth of every human being,” says Francis X.R. Origanti, senior vice president of mission & culture. “Equality implies treating everyone as if their experiences are the same.”

equality implies treating everyone as if their experiences are the same.'
The outsized talent of

NY’CEARA PRYOR

Though she be but little, she is fierce

5’3”
Ny’ceara Pryor, a native of Baltimore, MD, has spent her whole life playing basketball—though not always to the standard for which she is now known. In the beginning, the first grader just had fun on the court, surrounded by both boys and girls with more enthusiasm than talent, all dressed in oversized jerseys and untied laces. But time moves on, kids develop, and a confused Pryor soon found herself watching her teammates pass her on the court, wondering why she hadn’t yet found her stride.

The Pryors are an “extremely close-knit family.” So it was only natural for a confused young Ny’ceara to turn to her father for guidance. “My dad told me to distinguish between being the best and trying my best,” she recalls, reciting his lesson. “You’re not going to be the greatest player your first time doing it, but you gotta keep staying with it.” That really stuck with me.”

With the support of her entire household, the young athlete eventually began to improve. Building muscle and moving faster, she caught up with those peers who had passed her before. Suddenly she was the one passing them. The more she found her footing, the more she found her home on the court, until her relationship with the sport became all-consuming.

The next several years of her adolescence were dedicated to basketball. “I started really training and taking it super seriously,” says Pryor, who received her first offer from college scouts in the beginning of her ninth-grade year. It was an early recognition of both her talent and success, setting the tone for everything that’s come after. “From there you have to keep grinding,” she says. Or “keep staying with it,” as her father taught her. Refusing to slow down, Pryor focused on nothing but improving her game.

Eventually, after entertaining numerous offers from universities all over the country, Pryor chose Sacred Heart as her new “family” for the next four years. And once again, she immediately redefined what it means to be a freshman student-athlete. In her first year of college, Pryor became not only the first player in program history, but in league history, to be simultaneously named NEC Player of the Year, Defensive Player of the Year and Rookie of the Year.

And yet, her physical height aside, somehow none of this is surprising once you meet her. Indeed, her outsized presence is so evident that after only six games, Sacred Heart women’s basketball head coach Jessica Mannetti, approached Pryor about advancing as team captain. Mannetti saw in Pryor “a person of high character,” possessing the ability to prioritize the needs of the team. “She is selfless and humble,” Mannetti says. “She never wants to have the spotlight or be given a credit, because...”
she cares more about the success of others than she does of herself.

Understandably, Pryor had her concerns about the role. New to both college and play at the D1 level, she worried about what the position would mean to the friendships she was beginning to build with her teammates—particularly as a young leader amongst her older peers. “Coming in as a freshman, I didn’t want to step on anybody’s toes,” she recalls.

But her father’s lesson continued to resonate long after those days of running aimlessly for the ball, and Pryor once again found herself distinguishing between “being the best and trying her best.”

She focused on the most important part of growing a successful team. “When you play on a team, you have to trust whoever has the ball no matter what,” she explains. And so Pryor set about earning the trust of her teammates by putting her trust in them.

It paid off. “I think she does a wonderful job leading our team,” says Ciara Brannon ’24, a senior teammate and now a close friend of Pryor’s. “She is a great leader and role model.”

Mannetti has coached numerous players in the same challenging role, and even she’s noticed the ways in which the team has grown stronger since Pryor took on the position. “Being a leader amongst peers is a challenge, because there is always a balance you have to find between friendship and accountability,” she says. “But her teammates respond so well to her because she invests in getting to know them and making sure that she is always trying to stay positive and supportive even through the hardest times.”

Perhaps her natural capacity for leadership shouldn’t come as such a surprise, however. Because while her father’s words ring ever-present in her ears, her mother serves as the role model for Pryor that defines what leadership looks like. Tamika Pryor has been an elementary school teacher for as long as Pryor can remember. She recalls visiting her mother in the classroom. “I saw that all the kids thought of her like a second mother,” Pryor says. “She changed a lot of people’s lives by teaching. So that’s what I want to do.”

To that end, Pryor is currently a sophomore in Sacred Heart’s Isabelle Farrington College of Education & Human Development, where she majors in interdisciplinary studies. Keeping her passion for sports aligned with her fervor for education, Pryor sees herself teaching physical education or even sports communication as a way to finally combine both halves of her life.

Julianne Howard, Pryor’s mathematics professor, teaching young teachers how to teach math, says the student-athlete is on the right path. “Ny is one of the few students who perfectly balances her academics with her athletic career,” she says.

From the moment they met, the professor could sense her student was comfortable in the role of a leader. “Ny is a team player both on and off the court,” she says. “She’s a fast learner, so during group work she’s the one found teaching others who are struggling. She’s very patient with her peers.”

It’s a talent that may be uncommon, but not unsurprising for someone like Pryor for whom relationships—whether with friends or family, classmates, colleagues or coaches—are the glue that keeps any team together.

To that end, there’s one practice she never misses.

At the end of every week, Pryor pulls her phone from a scuffed scarlet red SHU backpack and makes a call home to Baltimore. Smiling back at her via FaceTime are her parents and siblings, rooting for her from several states away. Here, in the reassuring comfort of her family’s gaze, with her sneakers kicked off and her jersey in the closet, the young team captain, conference all-star and campus celebrity gets to be something more than a Google search result, more than a “triple threat,” “dominant force” or even a “top defender.”

She gets to be a small part of something great. She is a daughter once again. A sister. She is the Ny’ceara Pryor she’s always been. And that’s more than enough.
A funny thing happened between a rock and a hard place.

No, seriously …
A Roamin’ Catholic.

Growing up, long ago, back when I had hair and dinosaurs roamed the Earth, it seemed everyone I knew, young or old, had a mental Rolodex of jokes to share, organized by content and their appropriateness—or inappropriateness—for any given situation or audience. Kids traded “Mom jokes” on the playground as ribbing insults at best friends. Teens told their worst “dad jokes,” commiserating over the awkwardness of parents.

Admittedly, there were plenty that relied on racial or cultural stereotypes, but often enough, those jokes were told by members of the very race or culture in question. My best friend was of Polish descent and never arrived at our door without a “Pollock” joke to share. My own catalogue of Irish jokes borders on limitless. Why don’t we hear them anymore?

It isn’t that we’ve lost our sense of humor. Countless memes and short vids fill social media accounts with puns, one-liners, pranks and witty observations on the absurdity of life. Streaming services have categories dedicated to stand-up observations on the absurdity of life. Streaming services have categories dedicated to stand-up observations on the absurdity of life. Streaming services have categories dedicated to stand-up observations on the absurdity of life. Streaming services have categories dedicated to stand-up observations on the absurdity of life. Streaming services have categories dedicated to stand-up observations on the absurdity of life. Streaming services have categories dedicated to stand-up observations on the absurdity of life.

Some blame cancel culture, but I’m not buying it. There may be some jokes that aren’t told as freely anymore, but that’s not necessarily a bad thing. Empathy and humor are not mutually exclusive, and if the only jokes you know are those that come at another’s expense, then there are larger issues to address.

But more to the point, joke-telling’s decline long predates cancel culture, or political correctness, or whatever term may be used to dismissively deride intentional empathy. In May of 2005, the New York Times published an article titled “Seriously, the Joke Is Dead.” Nearly a decade before that, during the April 27, 1996, broadcast of A Prairie Home Companion, show host Garrison Keillor sang, “People don’t tell jokes the way they used to / I used to hear jokes all the time / I heard ‘em at the barber, from the waitress at the café / I never hear ‘em now, I don’t know why.” To right the wrong, I have my suspicions about what’s going on.

For a start, laughter is a scary business—just ask anyone who does it professionally. And look at the words they use for a weak performance. A bad comic doesn’t “fail.” They die on stage. They bomb. Catastrophic words for the simple shortcoming of just not being funny enough. If that’s what happens to the professionals, what hope do we mere mortals have?

And so, as with all things that are difficult or scary, we let someone else do it for us. Everyone has heard someone say, “I can’t tell a joke,” or “I always ruin a punchline.” Social media absolves us of those concerns—not only of getting the joke right, but of the joke even being funny in the first place. Like it or not, laugh or not, it’s someone else’s humor.

But it does remind us that we are a community. You must read social cues to tell a joke. Say, “A lawyer, a politician and a vampire walk into a bar…” and you will see your compatriot’s pupils dilate in anticipation of the punchline to come. Then, of course, there is something beautifully naked about sharing what you think is funny and hoping it doesn’t prove you a fool. It’s saying “I love you” with no certainty of an “I love you, too.” The practice is interactive in the most intensely present sense. That risk, with the shared reward of unsung public laughter, is every bit as much an exercise in community as is the breaking of bread.

I don’t know which came first, the chicken who crossed the road or the egg that scrambled to ketchup—these days of division and distance or the silence where a good groaner used to reside. Then, of course, there is something beautifully naked about sharing what you think is funny and hoping it doesn’t prove you a fool.

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I don’t know which came first, the chicken who crossed the road or the egg that scrambled to ketchup—these days of division and distance or the silence where a good groaner used to reside—but I can’t help noticing the more out of practice we get with sitting and talking with people, with reading social cues, with risking ourselves even just a little, the more we lose of the best that makes us human.
It’s not just that people don’t tell jokes the way they used to. People don’t talk the way they used to.

Why do you never hear jokes about pizza?

They’re all too cheesy.

The Mayo Clinic offers a long list of both the short-term and long-term benefits of laughter, including organ stimulation, lowered heart rate and blood pressure, muscle relaxation, the release of neuropeptides that aid the immune system, pain relief, endorphin release, immunity, the release of neuropeptides that aid the immune system, pain relief, endorphin release, the short-term and long-term benefits of laughter, including organ stimulation, lowered heart rate and blood pressure, muscle relaxation, the release of neuropeptides that aid the immune system, pain relief, endorphin release, the short-term and long-term benefits of laughter, including organ stimulation, lowered heart rate and blood pressure, muscle relaxation, the release of neuropeptides that aid the immune system, pain relief, endorphin release, the short-term and long-term benefits of laughter, including organ stimulation, lowered heart rate and blood pressure, muscle relaxation, the release of neuropeptides that aid the immune system, pain relief, endorphin release.

The thing to understand is this: a joke is more than just the best medicine. It’s an act of defiance, a statement of strength. It is evidence, even if only subconscious, of strength in numbers—all of them—of community. Which is why, when Coffee’s captors kept their prisoners isolated in order to break their spirits, those prisoners would tap out jokes to each other in Morse code through the very walls that separated them.

And I think I know why. A 1989 study by the University of Maryland found that people are 30 times more likely to laugh in the company of others than they are alone. Laughter, it would seem, is not only a sign of personal strength. It is evidence, even if only subconscious, of strength in numbers—that is, of community. Which is why, when Coffee’s captors kept their prisoners isolated in order to break their spirits, those prisoners would tap out jokes to each other in Morse code through the very walls that separated them.

As humor goes, that’s not a more succinct summary of Life’s absurdity than a joke, nor the element of surprise—the pun we didn’t anticipate, the punchline we expect least but appreciate most. As such, I can’t imagine a better thumbnail proxy for Life than a joke, not a more succinct summary of Life’s absurdity than a punchline. As humor goes, that’s not always comfortable.

But then, neither is Life. And owning that fact, exercising the dexterity required to separate humor from horror, however disproportionate the ratios, is the flex of Life’s survivors. The condemned man who tells the firing squad he doesn’t want a cigarette because he’s trying to quit is someone commandeering complete emotional control of a situation. Firefighters and ER medics navigate their days relying on streaks of humor so dark they redefine the laws of gravity. Far from being a sign of callous insensitivity, humor—particularly when it seems least likely—is often a sign of indefatigable humanity.

We can turn this around. We can come back together. Even with practice it may take time to regain the courage to laugh (the secret to comedy is timing, after all). But as social networks prove to themselves to be anything but, as the political arena feels more like a death match than democracy, as the darkness would have us believe it’s all there is, I would argue there is no better time than now to ask:

When does a dad joke become a dad joke?

Isn’t that the point of telling a joke? To connect person and person? ...You must read social cues to tell a joke.

Knock-knock.

(Who’s there?)

It is.

You might have to trust me on this, but that last one slays at a Morse code convention.

The thing to understand is this: a joke is a story. And like all stories, whether real or imagined, factual or fictional, tragic or comic, they transport us. They lift us from our world to another. Even the most tragic circumstances, writes Gerald Coffee in his memoir Beyond Survival, “It helps us shake our heads clear, get our feet back under us and restore our sense of balance and purpose. Humor is integral to our peace of mind and ability to go beyond survival.”

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For me, however, in the cushion of first-world comfort and observation, I love humor for its perspective. A joke works because of the element of surprise—the pun we didn’t anticipate, the punchline we expect least but appreciate most. As such, I can’t imagine a better thumbnail proxy for Life than a joke, not a more succinct summary of Life’s absurdity than a punchline. As humor goes, that’s not always comfortable.

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THE HOUSE NEVER LOSES

AST FALL, nine years after his graduation, Brian Dolan returned to Sacred Heart to take over the Collegiate Recovery Program, a facility that supports students battling addiction. Quite a lot had changed in the years since he last crossed the campus, but if there was any disorientation or anxiety, it had nothing to do with the new buildings or a shifting map. “There were a lot of tough memories here I had to face,” he recalls of the day.

He managed to join a game of basketball that was shy a player. It felt good to be back. Settling in amidst the familiar sounds—the shouts for passes and the thud of the ball against the backboard—Dolan tuned in to the students’ conversation. The subject? The NBA season. Nothing peculiar there. After a while, though, Dolan began to notice something strange. The invisible scourge of problem gambling, and one man who’s shifting the odds.

The invisible scourge of problem gambling,

and one man who’s shifting the odds.

by dan rober

ILLUSTRATION BY BRIAN STAUFFER

by tomas weber
Americans have placed in bets states where billions that since 2018. Number of legal.

This breathtaking expansion has a worrying dimension. There have been reports of college gamblers abusing and harassing athletes after losing money—and that includes when their team wins. In the first year of legalization, calls to Connecticut’s problem gambling hotline were up 203 percent, and many of the callers were college students.

Dolan sees the numbers as alarming. But when he looks to ascribe responsibility, blame falls on more than just the bookies and casinos and online platforms. While gambling advertising sells the thrill and adrenaline that come with winning, the truth is the risk of losing is ever present. Indeed, the very structure of a bet requires that most who gamble will lose. But they’re not just losing a game. They’re losing their money—some are forfeiting pocket money—but more than a few are losing their rent, their tuition, their homes. Soon gambling took over his life. Often, Dolan finds particularly alarming is the sports industry’s complicity. “Not only are the bookies and casinos spreading awareness of the problem. During his work, and he’s bringing speakers to campus, trying to normalize recovery across campus.”

But also, my job is connecting students with other people in the recovery community, trying to normalize recovery across campus.”

Thanks to Dolan, a support structure now exists that can include those who may be problem gamblers. “When I was a student, we were never told about problem gambling,” he says. Now, Dolan is saying out loud what people have been too nervous to hear. Problem gambling is real, and it is dangerous, he says. And we should not be afraid to face it.

“I got to a point where I was really close to dying.’

Dolan has now settled back in on campus, where everything has changed—including him. This time around, Dolan’s winning. He’s received a grant from the State of Connecticut for his work, and he’s bringing speakers to campus, spreading awareness of the problem. During his time away, the dragon that nearly killed him became a frightening ordeal. Dolan has now settled back in on campus, where everything has changed—including him. This time around, Dolan’s winning. He’s received a grant from the State of Connecticut for his work, and he’s bringing speakers to campus, spreading awareness of the problem. During his time away, the dragon that nearly killed him became a frightening ordeal. Arriving in Fairfield from the Berkshires in 2009, he began to experiment with drink and drugs. To fund the habit, he started betting on sports.

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Now, as the director of the Collegiate Recovery Program, Dolan can finally walk around campus with a clear head and an empowering purpose. He spends his time supporting SHU students who have found themselves in that terrifying place he knows all too well. “I would never have thought that I’d be doing this work,” he says. “I’m super passionate about it. It’s something that I live and breathe.”

‘I got to a point where I was really close to dying.’
A collaboration between the College of Health Professions and SHU’s Art and Design shows that life isn’t so black-and-white after all.
Our Confetti-Colored
human skulls are frozen, mid-somersault, on an ecru wall in a busy hall at Sacred Heart University’s College of Health Professions. Remused students stop in their tracks and tip their heads to the side, trying to process a piece of art that brings to mind both a medical appointment and a party.

Keeping company with the tumbling skulls is a collection of eight torsos displaying rib cages tinted violet, green, teal and pink. Nearby, a larger-than-life electric blue cranium ponders paint-splatter stars, while seven teal vertebrae caterpillar-climb to the base of a purple-tinged skull. Across the way, a stack of three craniums, colored like crazy quilts, grin.

The artwork has the power to yank viewers completely out of their comfort zone, transporting them to a place where neon meets bone, where the dread of a negative medical diagnosis assumes fiesta tones, where for-practitioners’-eyes-only X-ray images meet the back-pack-toting public.

The intent of the exhibit is not only to fascinate, but also to educate viewers about the significance of radiography, a discipline born in 1895 when German physicist Wilhelm Conrad Roentgen discovered the X-ray.

Students who study radiography at SHU are trained in the technical administration of radiation, the use of imaging equipment and patient care.

The art installation was envisioned to do double duty: add color to the College’s walls and promote the radiography department. A desire for art anchored in radiographs—images produced by X-rays—led to the expertise of Mary Treschitta, an associate professor in SHU’s art and design department. Treschitta suggested transforming black-and-white radiographs into pop art, a style of modern art characterized by the use of bold colors.

Treschitta, who also serves as an internship coordinator, recognized that the project would make a great semester-long internship for the fall of 2022. She proposed it to Amanda Palma, a SHU honors student pursuing a graphic design major and a digital marketing minor. A native of Yonkers, NY, Palma says she has loved making art since she was a kid, but it took a high school graphic design class to make her realize she wanted to pursue that discipline as a career.

Set to graduate in 2024, she is presently an intern for SHU’s visual communications department as well as for Product Ventures, an agency that creates product and packaging designs for Fortune 500 companies.

Palma’s website, apalma.designs.com, offers a glimpse into her creative psyche. Her online gallery includes fanciful images like a steampunk-inspired ice cream sundae and a stylized stiletto-heel pump cradling a rainbow-frosted cupcake.

“She’s a student who thinks outside the box. I needed that kind of thinker, who wasn’t fearful,” Treschitta says.

But the 21-year-old admits she actually was kind of fearful when first approached about the project.

“I was nervous because I knew nothing about radiography or pop art, and I’m not really a ‘sciency’ person at all,” she admits.

Treschitta gave Palma a few parameters and one directive: “Surprise me.”

“I just said, ‘Get color in there. Use a strong color palette,’” she recounts.

Vibrant colors are a signature of Palma’s work, a tool she employs to show her audience a brighter, more hopeful existence.

“I feel like the world we live in is so not colorful. Colors, they make me happy, so I like bringing colors to other people. It’s like bringing them joy,” she explains.

The internship started out with a distinct lack of color, though. Palma sifted through X-ray image after black-and-white X-ray image on Google and in Adobe Stock, scrolling until she found ones that appealed to her. She then splashed attention-grabbing colors and special effects onto rib cages, femurs and skulls, using Adobe Photoshop. Each of her initial set of about 35 images took roughly an hour and a half to complete, she estimates.

“I was just making them colorful and into art,” Palma recalls, but in reviewing the work as a team, the idea developed so that each structural area of the brain would be represented by

Under the Skin
“This really highlights that we’re all the same underneath,” says Radiography Program Director Ludie Tyrann.

<!-- Image links -->

THE ART OF SCIENCE
its own color in the radiographs that featured a human skull.

The thought was that emphasizing the delineations of the body structure would help spotlight the educational component in the visual appeal of the art.

Back to the digital drawing board Palma went, labeled brain diagrams in hand. Once her images passed muster, the team selected those that represented a variety of body parts and a comprehensive color spectrum.

They had them printed on a thin, plastic substrate and hung without frames to give the artwork a modern look. The size of the pieces varies but they’re all big—5x3, 4x3—their dimensions measured in feet.

They dubbed the collection Radiography-Art Department Art—RAD Art for short.

Six of Palma’s pieces hang in a first-floor hallway in the Science Wing of the Academic Building where the health sciences department is housed. Four more brighten the walls of the radiography classroom, and one can be found in the X-ray lab.

An art opening was held in April. Palma says she was overwhelmed by the number of people who attended and by the positive response to her work.

“One of the radiography students said to me, ‘We only ever see things in black-and-white, because they’re X-rays. It’s so nice to walk in here every day and see things in color now,’” she recalls.

Christina Gunther, chair and assistant professor for SHU’s health sciences department, says the exhibit does much more than beautify drab walls: It emphasizes that X-ray imaging is an art.

“Our health and lives depend on the skill of the technologists,” she points out.

Radiography Program Director Ludie Tyran sees the work as something more than just a pop of color in an otherwise sterile environment. For her, the installation exemplifies the need for equity and inclusion by reminding viewers there is no biological difference between races.

“Underneath that tissue, underneath that skin and our muscles, we all look like that,” she explains. “This really highlights that we’re all the same underneath.”

Kelly de la Rocha is a freelance writer living in Farmington, CT. Her work has been featured in more than 60 magazines and newspapers in the US and abroad. Reach her at delarochakelly@gmail.com.
Larry Wielk has left the building.

It would be impossible to pack all of Larry Wielk’s 27 years as dean of students into a few pages. It would be unthinkable to let him go without trying.
In any good character-driven film,
that first glimpse of the hero is crucial. Doesn’t matter if it’s comedy or drama. What matters is that the scene is written, performed and edited with surgical precision. The structure is simple: the hero arrives, assesses a situation, deals with the immediate crisis and just then, as they exit the room or climb back into the squad car, someone asks a question and the hero responds. Both what they say in that moment and how they say it establish who this person is for everything that follows.

It’s 1996 and Larry Wielk is sitting with Sacred Heart’s search committee, interviewing for the newly posted role of dean of students. The conversation is going well. As VP and dean of students at Albertus Magnus College, he certainly has the qualifications. Having grown up locally, he’s aware calm that tells you if fire were licking his heels, Larry Wielk would reach down and light a cigar.

That’s Larry Wielk for you. Bone dry delivery of the ironically unironic, effortlessly emanating a self-assured, self-aware calm that tells you if fire were licking his heels, Larry Wielk would reach down and light a cigar.

Sarcastic.”

That’s Larry Wielk for you. Bone dry delivery of the ironically unironic, effortlessly emanating a self-assured, self-aware calm that tells you if fire were licking his heels, Larry Wielk would reach down and light a cigar.

End scene. Cut to opening credits.

During Wielk’s first week on the job—before his cof-fice had even found its home on his desk—the new dean of students was tasked with securing emergency housing for roughly 200 returning upperclassmen whose dormitories were still under construction. Compounding the issue was a freshman bed shortage, requiring Wielk to convert every study lounge in the freshman halls to triples to meet the de-mand—the construction for which was completed only days before move-in with the furniture arriving only hours before the freshmen themselves. That baptism by fire foreshadowed the challenges of forecasting the University’s growth every incoming freshmen. There would be acquisitions and develop-ments—some coming as logical progressions of growth, but others arising as opportunities that once seemed so far-fetched, they ran in a word?” It’s one of those interview questions that’s as much about who Larry Wielk is as much as Wielk’s interview hinted at the nature of the hero responds. Both what they say in that moment and how they say it establish who this person is for everything that follows.

Larry Wielk and Sacred Heart. This past August, 27 years after the prologue above, that story finally came to a close with Wielk’s retirement. And what a story it’s been, with high stakes and adventure right from the outset.

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“We kept imagining plateaus that just weren’t there,” Wielk recalls. “Early on, I remember us agreeing that 3,000 [full-time students] was where we should be.”

That number has been in the rearview mirror for decades now, in no small part due to Wielk and the work he’s put into cultivating the Pioneer student experience. When he first came to the job in 1996, prospective students touring the University found a school bursting with music and am-bition, but little in the way of the facilities and amenities that

LARRY CELEBRATES WITH STUDENTS AND STAFF
AT THE SENIOR BRUNCH IN 2017.
lost while simultaneously keeping the bass and drums on tempo, Wielk has used his position to touch every department in the University personally, keeping them all focused on what should be the primary mission of any institution of higher learning: the student.

"I'm a firm believer in attending as many things [on campus] as possible," Wielk says. Living by example, it's not only the plays, performing arts and sporting events he's regularly seen at, but also the Freshman Experience seminar he taught for the last six years—a weekly opportunity to, as he says, "engage students in class, on their terms."

Of course, there once was a time when no one was attending anything on campus. In a classic Third Act twist to the story, after more than two decades on the job serving both the daily needs of the students and the larger vision of the University, having helped move the University from "the little engine that could" to presuming its recognition in various college polls, having cultivated a true sense of community as fundamental to the student experience—there came a year called 2020. And everything seemed to hang in the balance.

Once again, Wielk, with his rare capacity to separate emotion from the task at hand, ensured that the Office of the Dean of Students served as the University's key conduit to the students. "I know a lot of parents who had students at other universities," Cautin recalls. "We were far more communicative about what was going on and how we were dealing with it than other schools. It really helped keep us together," she says. "And a lot of that—most of it, really—is down to Larry."

"I think we did as well as, if not better, than most," Wielk says of those days. He's quick to point out that there's no nostalgia for the time in question. But there is a degree of pride felt in how he and everyone around him understood that the job doesn't exist just for the good days. Juggling the competing challenges of keeping remote students engaged in their work and each other, ongoing testing, quarantines and clinics and, above all, intuitively recognizing the connection between community and communication, left everyone involved exhausted, he admits, but of course it's our response to adversity that defines us. Perhaps seeing that, seeing so evidently how his own commitment to the students was shared by all around him, is what allowed him the reassurance to retire. "You never want to stay too long," he says. "That never ends well."

And he fully knows he's leaving the office in good hands. "The transition will be seamless," Wielk says of the decision to elevate Tiberio, his long-time assistant and associate, to replace him. Her move from associate dean for the last five years to dean of students as of this past August was the right and obvious thing to do.

But there is one last thing Larry Wielk wants to add to our conversation before it—and his time on campus—comes to a close.

"It's a 20-minute commute from my house to campus," he says. "And in 27 years of making that trip, never did I ever want to turn around and not come to work. Never," he says again. "Not once."

Which, as a final image, with the hero looking back over the road he's traveled, makes for a pretty happy ending. Roll the credits. Raise the lights.
BY ELIZABETH KOSCINSKI

THE PAST FEW YEARS have been a tour-de-force for this once small commuter school. Pioneers have won championships, been named conference players of the year and played in NCAA tournaments. They’ve maintained GPAs, built friendships and kept training commitments. A few even earned themselves a spot in the press.

At the helm is Judy Ann Riccio. With 19 years at the University, Riccio has witnessed SHU’s rise within DI and, since 2021, when she made history as the first woman in the role of SHU athletics director, Riccio has cultivated a culture of mutual support and presence among the 33 teams. She was recently appointed to the NCAA Division I Football Championship Subdivision Oversight Committee, whose goal is to enhance the student-athlete experience both academically and athletically.

“The atmosphere of support starts at the top,” says Riccio. “From President Petillo to faculty, staff and fellow students, everyone comes out to support our teams. You’ll often see other sports’ teams in the stands cheering each other on.”

She leads by example and is not only seen at sporting events, but often in the audience for other student events. “From President Petillo to faculty, staff and fellow students, everyone comes out to support our teams. You’ll often see other sports’ teams in the stands cheering each other on.”

The Pioneer women’s basketball team clinched the Northeast Conference (NEC) championship this past season by not only winning the conference title and representing in the NCAA March Madness tournament, but by winning the first game—a feat never accomplished by another NEC women’s basketball team.

Freshman Captain Ny’ceara Pryor (see story, page 20) led the team to the NEC tournament, picking up the title of NEC Player of the Year, NEC Defensive Player of the Year, NEC Rookie of the Year, MBWA (Metropolitan Basketball Writers Association) Rookie of the Year, WER (World Exposure Report) Mid Major Player of the Year, NEC All-Tournament Team, All-NEC (Northeast Conference) First Team and NEC Tournament MVP along the way.

“Our school has become an easy sell,” says Jesus Manetti, head coach of the women’s basketball team. “All we have to do is get recruits to campus, and SHU does the rest.”

She credits Riccio with much of the success that SHU athletics has enjoyed recently. “Judy Ann has done a great job uniting the programs and provides consistent support. She’s built a family.” Riccio has recently added a “cost of attendance” allowance for full-scholarship students on the women’s and men’s basketball teams. While athletic scholarships pay for tuition, room and board and books, students often need help buying other essentials for college. The $2,500 allowance helps them succeed as students.

Manetti has built a family of her own in the team. While she has a source of recruiting in Barcelona, she works with a network of schools and coaches concentrated from Virginia northward. “We recruit players who are really good people and will fit with our culture,” she says.

“Basketball is a family,” says Rachel Giovannini ’24, NEC Championship Tournament MVP for women’s bowling. “We just clicked as a team. Sometimes you need to balance between being friends and being teammates. While we’re bowling, we’re teammates, and we bring each other back to the moment.”

Lydia Welter ’23, who was named the women’s lacrosse NEC Offensive Player of the Year and NEC Tournament MVP, adds, “One of my favorite things about the SHU athletic community is walking around in the Pitt Center on your way to practice and having other athletes hype you up or give you team some motivation. The culture embodies values of respect, pride and gratitude. Additionally, within the lacrosse team and SHU athletics, the familial culture extends to mentorship and personal development, supporting each other beyond our college athletic careers.”

“I believe the secret to our recent success is the buy-in of the teams and their commitment to holding each other accountable,” says Matt McGreevy, head coach of both men’s and women’s golf teams. The men’s team was last year’s NEC champions. “These students work very hard and want to achieve their goals so badly. Our staff is committed to helping them in any way they can. The student-athletes care about one another. It is an exciting time to be at SHU. Our athletes are proud to be here.”

“Sacred Heart loves international athletes,” says Chantal El Chaart ’24, a resident of Abu Dhabi in the United Arab Emirates, NEC Player of the Year for women’s golf and a member of this year’s NEC championship team. “From my coaches to my teammates and my professors, everyone rallies to help you...
"Sacred Heart is different," says Patrick Egan, who took over as head coach of men's baseball this past season. "The culture of the athletics program matches the culture of the University. You see the support from the top down. The coaches all support each other, and the teams come out and root for each other."

Senior Sam Mongelli joined the ranks of Pioneers in the pros when he was selected by the Los Angeles Dodgers in round 10 of the First-Year Player Draft. Meanwhile, Jason Foley and Zack Short took the field for the Detroit Tigers this past season.

SHU football coach Mark Nofri is no stranger to having his athletes play in the pros. Just this past year saw Julius Chestnut sign with the Tennessee Titans, J.D. DiRenzo sign with the Carolina Panthers and Josh Sokol sign with the Minnesota Vikings. All three former Pios were members of the 2021 NEC championship team.

"We work with student financial aid, admissions, student life—the whole University system comes together to support our athletes," says Nofri. "Being a student-athlete isn’t easy."

Nofri recruits players within a five-hour radius of SHU. "We encompass the best states for high school football that way. We have all of New England, plus New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania." He isn’t just looking for the superstar players either. "I want that kid who may not have the raw talent of his teammates, but just lives for football. I want that passion."

"I think the secret to SHU athletic success is the family we build and everyone buying in and playing for each other and not just playing as an individual, always helping each other and wanting the best from the person that you play alongside," says Malik Grant ’24, who was also a member of the ’21 championship team. "SHU football is a brotherhood."

SHU men’s hockey alum Marc Johnstone ’21 recently joined the class of 2017’s Justin Danforth as a member of the National Hockey League. While Danforth has been with the Columbus Blue Jackets since 2021, Johnstone signed with the Pittsburgh Penguins this past July. "Marc’s leadership quality was off the charts," says men’s hockey head coach C.J. Marotolo. "He endears himself to everyone by being the ultimate teammate."

The best is yet to come for SHU men’s and women’s hockey teams, Marotolo predicts. The opening of the Martire Family Arena elevated the hockey program exponentially. "Our teams had never played a true home game before, and never had home ice to practice on in the summer," he explains. "The future is bright for SHU hockey players and fans."
BEFORE IT WAS HOME TO STUDENTS FROM 40 COUNTRIES AND 46 STATES, DISTRICTS AND TERRITORIES, before the grants and the accolades and the national recognition, before women’s basketball or Division I football or any conference championships; before the College of Health Professions or the Radiography Department or Department of Art & Design; before the dormitories or the amenities or the service programs for both students and the local community alike; before all of that, there was a little school with a pioneering vision, a forward-leading spirit and a whole lot of heart.

FROM THE ARCHIVE

ON THE FIELD

- National Championship: 1
- NEC Rookies of the Year: 3
- Team Conference Championships: 4
- Coaches of the Year: 6
- NEC Scholar-Athletes of the Year: 6
- Players of the Year: 7
- All-Regions: 8
- All-Americans: 12
- All-Conference Selections: 86

IN THE CLASSROOM

- Overall Student-Athlete GPA: 3.39
- NEILA All-Academic Team Members: 8
- AHCA Scholar-Athlete Honors: 11
- ITA Division I Academic Award Winners: 13
- Winter NEC Honor Roll Members: 219
- Spring MAAC All-Academic Team Members: 50
- Spring NEC Honor Roll Members: 247
- Percent of Student-Athletes Talled 3.0 GPA or Better: 80%
- Percent of Teams Talled an Average GPA of 3.0 or Better: 97%
- Winter NEC Honor Roll Members: 157
- Fall NEC Honor Roll Members: 219

Student-athletes at Sacred Heart rise to face challenges on a daily basis—balancing their academic work with the demands of practices, extra workouts, games both at home and on the road and the sheer pressure to perform is physically and mentally taxing. Doing so, this past 2022–23 season has seen SHU teams earn some impressive numbers: four team conference championships, 86 all-conference selections, 12 all-Americans, eight all-regions, seven players of the year, six coaches of the year, three NEC rookies of the year and six NEC scholar-athletes of the year.

All of that while never losing sight of why they are in college in the first place. Student-athletes total a 3.39 overall GPA, with 80% of athletes tallying 3.0 or higher and 47% making Dean’s List. SHU athletes also garnered 219 fall NEC honor roll members, 157 winter NEC honor roll members, 247 spring NEC honor roll members, 50 spring MAAC (Metro Atlantic Athletic Conference) all-academic team members, 13 ITA (Intercollegiate Tennis Association) Division I Academic Award winners, eight NEILA (New England Intercollegiate Lacrosse Association) all-academic team members, 11 AHCA (American Hockey Coaches Association) scholar-athlete honors and winter and spring CSCAA (College Swimming Coaches Association of America) scholar All-America team honors.

In all, it tells the story of how the men and women who represent SHU on the playing field wear their passion as part of their uniform and have established themselves firmly in the realm of champions.

BY THE NUMBERS
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www.sacredheart.edu/seasontickets

Come see your NEC women’s basketball champions in action!