



Stronger Together Newsletter

MAY 2023

Note from The Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer

Greetings Pioneer Family,

We made it to the end of the spring semester! So much has happened, and there is so much for everyone to be proud of. In addition to this edition of the Stronger Together newsletter, I want to remind everyone to view the Inaugural State of Inclusive Excellence at SHU address. The address is on the homepage of the [Office for Inclusive Excellence website](#).

As always, thank you for your engagement with and commitment to inclusive excellence at SHU!

With Pioneer pride,

Maurice D. Nelson



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What's Happening in OIE

News and updates from the Office for Inclusive Excellence.

Information Technology Majors Design Interactive Accessibility Map of Campus

The Computer Science program assigns seniors a year-long creative project to identify and address a need in the SHU community. Michael Amato (B.S. '23) and Gage Derrenbacher (B.S. '23) initially set out to address parking issues on campus but soon identified an opportunity to make accessibility resources easier to find.

"Our main goal was to create a user-friendly experience. We wanted to help students and visitors with access to campus while being mindful of diverse needs and our goal of inclusivity," explains Derrenbacher. When they had the opportunity to meet with and learn from SHU's Office for Student Accessibility the scope and purpose of their project solidified. "It was something we became extremely passionate about and thought that there was a need for a resource like this." They were right!



SHU Marketing Department is in the process of launching a new 3-dimensional interactive campus map on the SHU website. The Office for Inclusive Excellence is identifying resources that foster a more inclusive campus for the new maps, including gender inclusive restrooms, lactation rooms and accessibility resources!

Campus Operations and Public Safety were instrumental in providing accurate and comprehensive information to Derrenbacher and Amato's project, which will allow OIE and SHU Marketing to use that data for the new SHU maps.

"Their work not only provides an important resource to our SHU community, it helps set a higher standard for our community. Standardizing the use of accessibility tools is a powerful way build more equitable communities, says Anne Burmeister of OIE. "We are grateful for and proud of their work as SHU students."

Multicultural Center's Inaugural Year-End Ceremony

The Multicultural Center hosted the Inaugural End of the Ceremony back on April 27th at the Edgerton Atrium. During the ceremony, students and graduating seniors who help contribute to our department's goal for inclusive excellence were honored, which included the Donning of Multicultural Stoles Ceremony. Congratulations to the award recipients and graduating seniors!

Rookie of the Year – Katerina Kyrrou

Most Involved – Katherine Ng

Wisdom Wednesday Heroes – Domenic Vecchiarelli & Khadijah “Temi” Sanusi

Work Study of the Year – Briann Wescott

Optimist Award – Kimora Johnson

Social Butterfly – Anabelle Titus

Change Makers – Jonah Savage

Pursuing Excellence – Chnoa Manso Vargas

Spirit Award – Amanda Bonet

Outstanding Senior – Sydney Worthen Jenkins

Outstanding Sophomore – Mariah Dehoyos

Outstanding Junior – Nicole Sperling

Seniors:

Juliette Ochoa

Sydney Worthen Jenkins

Chnoa Manso Vargas

Jonah Savage

Olivia Delgado

Maria Pandolfo

Kimani Long

Oluwatoyosi Adeleke

Theresa Ellison

Briann Wescott

Stephanie Butler

Veronica Adams



Inclusive Excellence in Action



Eleni Mantzaris, Class of 2023

“I was not fully introduced to the Multicultural Center until my senior year at SHU, but I’m extremely glad I was. Being a part of a diverse community has always been important to me, as well as something I am used to. I met so many good people that I would not have otherwise met.”

Lavender Graduation Celebration

Lavender Graduation is a special ceremony that celebrates the achievements and contributions of LGBTQ+ students as they complete their academic journey at Sacred Heart University. Lavender Graduation provides a safe and supportive space for LGBTQ+ graduates to come together, share their stories, and be honored for their accomplishments.



This year’s Lavender Graduation Celebration was coordinated by the SHU Gender Sexuality Alliance (GSA) in partnership with the Multicultural Center. During this event, participants were adorned with lavender cords, symbolizing their pride and solidarity. Lavender Graduation stands as a powerful reminder that diversity, equity and inclusivity are essential elements to foster a sense of belonging for LGBTQ+ students and inspiring future generations to embrace their authentic selves.

Silent Walk of Reflection and Remembrance for George Floyd

A Silent Walk of Reflection and Remembrance was held on Thursday, May 25th in remembrance of the 3rd anniversary of George Floyd's murder. Members of the SHU community congregated on the Campus Field Track at 11:00 a.m. Everyone was asked to set their phone timers to 9:29, as that was the amount of time former police officer, Derek Chauvin, had his knee on George Floyd's neck, and walk around the track in silent reflection.



Following the Silent Walk, Maurice D. Nelson, Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer, and Tammy Petrucelli, Deputy Athletic Director and Senior Woman Administrator gave final remarks and encouraged the SHU community to prioritize anti-racist work in their daily lives. Several members from the SHU community also took the opportunity to share their thoughts and reflections.

In honor of George Floyd and many others, the Silent Walk of Reflection and Remembrance is a chance to come together in solidarity and to reenergize and recommit to our movement and mission for social justice.

Inclusive Excellence

Spotlights-Departments and Clubs

Inclusive excellence initiatives taking place on our campus.

Ram Devineni, creator of *Priya's Shakti*, Speaks at SHU

Sacred Heart University students and staff had a chance to meet filmmaker, publisher and comic series creator Ram Devineni and hear how he has used art to address gender violence. He spoke recently as part of SHU's Human Journey Colloquia Series.

Devineni is the creator of *Priya's Shakti*, India's first comic book that features a female superhero. Devineni discussed the fictional Priya, who is a rape survivor, and he talked about her shakti—which translates to power or strength. He explained how he uses the comic book series to tackle complex problems and reach audiences through art and creative technology.

The idea to create *Priya's Shakti* followed a gang rape on a bus in New Delhi in 2012 that led to public outcry across India, according to the comic series' website. Devineni said he learned then about the country's rape culture, one in which the victims were typically blamed for the crime. "The problem with gender violence in India wasn't a legal problem, but a cultural one," he said. Devineni realized he needed to help change the narrative. "If society doesn't support survivors, then no one will (cont. on page 5)



(cont. from page 4) have the condence to speak out and seek justice," he said.

He created Priya's Shakti, featuring a victim-turned-heroine who resonated with audiences all over the world and captivated young readers. "I wanted to turn victims into survivors and then make them heroes," said Devineni. *Priya's Shakti* now has more than 30 million readers and has generated press coverage worldwide. Since the comic's launch in 2014, the series has evolved and now includes an entire universe of female superheroes based on real people and survivors.

"The State of Antisemitism Today"- "Heart Challenges Hate" Panel

Hate crimes against the Jewish population in the U.S. have been rising, and panelists for Sacred Heart University's recent forum, "The State of Antisemitism Today," said people need to unite and speak out to create change.

The forum was part of the "Heart Challenges Hate" discussion series, open to students, staff and the public. As a Catholic university, SHU speaks out against injustice and violence. "This series works to counter hate and violence with knowledge, information, faith and values," said Michelle Loris, SHU's Catholic Studies chair and moderator for the talk. The panelists discussed Jewish history and the origins of antisemitism, stating that Jewish people have been ostracized and demonized for their faith since ancient times. They referred to antisemitism as the

"oldest hatred, the longest hatred," born because of the Jewish people's belief in and loyalty to one God.

There are steps people can take to combat hatred, such as avoiding cultural stereotyping, educating oneself about different religions and speaking out for others who are oppressed, the panelists said. The American Jewish Committee (AJC) launched a "community of conscience," which is a group of interfaith leaders, partners and members who come together to speak with a common voice when they see acts of hatred aimed at any group, according to Friedman. "While antisemitism is directed at the Jewish community, this is not a problem we have to solve alone," she said.

There is hope, the panelists agreed. Friedman said she sees promise in students she has met through the AJC. "My hope is that as part of AJC, working with incredible partners, that we're able to start changing the dynamic we're seeing in the world today, trying to work together to combat the hate that we're all facing. That is what gives me hope: all of you, our next generation."



Inclusive Excellence in Action



**Annie Wendel, Director, Office of
Community Engagement**

"It is important to incorporate DEIB best practices in the community-building work we do. It ensures that we are pursuing ethical and equitable partnerships, maximizing diverse perspectives, and increasing the capacity for sustainable change. We seek to uplift the community voice, ensuring that even when we work to develop students academically and personally, the needs of the community are met through mutually beneficial relationships."

Disability Pride Campaign

As part of Sacred Heart's Social Justice Week, the Office of Student Accessibility (OSA) promoted a Disability Pride Campaign inviting students, staff, and faculty to disclose and honor their disability. With the help of Professor Nathan Lewis, beautiful artwork was created.

The OSA, supported by the Human Journey Colloquia Series, presented Crip Camp on March 23rd. This Netflix documentary is about the emotional experience of finding community and yourself

for the first time and the power of realizing that a better life is possible through social change. Camp Jened, a ramshackle hippie-run camp "for the handicapped" (a term no longer used), was an environment where people with disabilities were treated as equal members of a community, empowered to make their own decisions, and experienced for the first time the fullness of themselves as human beings. A thoughtful discussion of all participants followed the event.



Inclusive Excellence in

Action



Rima Dael, General Manager, WSHU

"The OIE is a partner to WSHU, helping us better serve communities in Fairfield County. WSHU strives to amplify historically marginalized voices. Learning with the OIE has helped WSHU to embody the Pioneer spirit in all that we do in the community."

Center for Teaching and Learning: 2022-2023 Recap

During the 2022-2023 year, the Center for Teaching and Learning (CTL) hosted three Faculty Learning Communities (FLCs) to engage with books related to equitable and inclusive teaching. SHU full-time and part-time faculty engaged in discussion every 2-3 weeks to explore how the readings translated to their teaching practice and how to foster more inclusive learning environments for our students.

Over 35 instructors participated in at least one of three communities:

- 1) Fall 2022 - What Inclusive Instructors Do (Facilitators: Beth Luoma & Quianna Daniels Smart)
- 2) Spring 2023 - What Inclusive Instructors Do (Facilitators: Lee Morgan & Beth Luoma)
- 3) Spring 2023 - Picture a Professor: Interrupting Biases about Faculty and Increasing Student Learning (Facilitators: Quianna Daniels-Smart & Beth Luoma)

FLC participants frequently commented on the value of regularly reflecting on inclusive teaching in community with colleagues from across disciplines and departments. Be on the lookout for CTL newsletters announcing our 23-24 FLCs!



Inclusive Excellence

Spotlights-Individuals

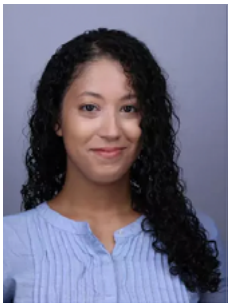
SHU community members prioritizing inclusive excellence in their lives.

Rachel Clarke, The Jackie Robinson Scholarship Recipient

Rachel came to SHU as a transfer student from Norwalk Community College. She quickly learned and utilized the support resources at Sacred Heart, leading to excellence in her studies. Rachel is a Global Studies major interested in travel and learning about new cultures. She challenges herself through course selection and continues to make Dean's list each semester. In addition to academics, Rachel is a member of Delta Zeta and a founding member of Respect the Ability, a group that promotes true inclusion on campus. Due to her hard work and dedication, Rachel received [The Jackie Robinson Foundation Scholarship](#) and will be studying abroad in Dingle this summer.



Jeniece Roman Uses WSHU Reporting Platform to Highlight Indigenous Nations



Jeniece Roman is the WSHU Indigenous Nations reporter, covering the indigenous nations of Connecticut and Long Island. This report, prepared for Earth Week 2023, looks at the partnership between UConn and the Mashantucket Pequot tribe to bring indigenous farming methods to the mainstream. WSHU is reporting for the indigenous community, and not "about" them. Through her engagement with the Mohegan, Mashantucket -Pequot, and Shinnecock nations, not only is Jeniece moving beyond stereotypes, she is building trust with the nations who believe that WSHU is an honest broker when it comes to reporting about them.

Dr. Katie Kroeper Co-Authors Article Aimed to Increase Student Belonging

Dr. Katie Kroeper, SHU Assistant Professor of Psychology, recently co-authored an article that appeared in Science: "Where and with whom does a brief social-belonging intervention promote progress in college?" The paper presents groundbreaking research on a promising approach to increase student belonging and, in turn, mitigate inequality and improve retention rates among college students. In a team-science randomized-controlled experiment involving 26,911 students across 22 diverse institutions, they found that a social-belonging intervention, administered online and requiring less than 30 minutes, demonstrated a significant increase in the rate of students completing their first year as full-time students. The intervention's impact was particularly notable among student groups (cont. on page 8)



(cont. from page 7) that historically progressed at lower rates, highlighting its potential for mitigating inequality and promoting equitable outcomes. Importantly, the study also highlighted the role of the college context, showing that the intervention was effective only when students' groups were provided opportunities to belong on campus.

Dr. Mark Congdon Jr., Earnest A Lynton Award Finalist



Dr. Mark Congdon Jr., Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication Studies, was named as a finalist for Campus Compact's Earnest A Lynton Award for the Scholarship of Engagement! This award recognizes a full-time, pre-tenure faculty member who connects their teaching, research and service to community engagement. [Read more about the Earnest A Lynton award here.](#)

Contact Us

[Visit our webpage](#)

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Email us: inclusiveexcellence@sacredheart.edu

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