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Growth in SLU’s Neighborhood

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In this issue of *Universitas*, you will find stories about some of the most important happenings at the University — initiatives that advance our strategic priorities; spotlights on our academic enterprise: researchers, students and classes; and our efforts to ensure that Midtown St. Louis flourishes well into the next century.

This year has been filled with great accomplishments as well as difficult decisions. Some of these decisions were painful as they directly impacted our community. It is understandable to be conflicted about the real-life impacts of our budget reductions while we talk of investing in the future of SLU. Yet, if we intend to make a difference, we must continue to build a university that continues to attract, educate and inspire young people with sharp minds and great hearts. Our mission is woven through each part of this magazine and as always, the motivation for all that we do is the commitment to our community. I’m confident that the SLU community is resilient, tightknit and blessed.

Three years ago, I was entrusted with ensuring a bold future for the University — for the Billiken community. We must innovate, grow, elevate excellence, become a source of wisdom, encouragement and inspiration. Our mission is woven throughout each part of this magazine and as always, the motivation for all that we do is the commitment to our community. May God bless you, May God bless you,

Dr. Fred P. Pestello

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**UNIVERSITAS**

**VOLUME 43, ISSUE 2**

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**ON THE COVER**

Grand Hall, at the northwest corner of Grand Boulevard and Laclede Avenue, under construction. Photo by Steve Dolan

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Meet the New Billiken Mascot

The new Billiken mascot debuted at halftime during the Jan. 25 men's basketball game. The costume reflects the feedback from the mascot poll that SLU conducted last fall, when 17,000 people voted on their opinions in an online survey. The results informed the decisions to color the Billiken all white with a sculpted tuft of hair, relatively short frock and open but intense eyes with small, alert eyes.

“People are really passionate about the Billiken,” University President Dr. Fred P. Pestello said. “This fall, members of our community asked for a platform to voice their opinions, and we listened. The new version of the mascot is the result of a collaborative process. It’s the way it ought to be.”

PHOTO BY BILL BARRETT
SLU Program Seeks Efficiency and Effectiveness

Saint Louis University’s strategic plan, “Magis,” calls for SLU to “foster a culture of excellence, effectiveness and efficiency deeply rooted in our institutional mission and Catholic, Jesuit values.” With this in mind, the University has launched a multi-year program known as Magis Operational Excellence.

The most extensive review of administrative and academic operations in University history, the program seeks to transform SLU into an efficient and effective organization. The program also will identify opportunities for cost savings and revenue growth that can be invested in strategic priorities, such as strengthening academic programs, enhancing research initiatives and keeping a SLU education within reach for all qualified students.

Led by a steering committee that includes faculty, staff and student representatives, the effort has been open, inclusive and collaborative — involving thousands of members of the SLU community. Following a rigorous four-month review, the University identified 25 focus areas for improvement. These focus areas include academics, enrollment, fundraising, facilities, research, travel, among other areas. Teams of faculty and staff are being formed to develop options to enhance each area of improvement.

Another focus area is a reinvention of SLU’s academic enterprise. The overarching goal of this initiative is to achieve cost savings in ways that also elevate the quality of instruction at the University and enhance students’ experiences. Led by the University’s provost in collaboration with the academic deans, work on this major initiative will take place over a one- to three-year period.

SLU’s focus on operational excellence comes at a time when the landscape of higher education in the United States is rapidly changing, and universities across the country are being called to make college more affordable, more accessible and more responsive to the needs of employers. The challenges are compounded in the Midwest, where the number of high school graduates is declining.

While financially strong, SLU is not immune to these mounting pressures. Without significant changes, the University is predicting annual losses in the range of $10–$20 million — about 2 percent of the University’s overall budget — through 2018 and beyond. Over time, this program is expected to generate $40–80 million in cost savings and new revenues.

For the latest on the program, visit slu.edu/operational-excellence.

Med Students Celebrate Match Into Residency Programs

In March, fourth-year students from the School of Medicine learned of their assignments via the National Residency Match Program, which annually matches students with their choice for residency. This year’s class matched into programs that included Yale, Harvard, Mayo Clinic, Northwestern, Vanderbilt, Case Western Reserve, Stanford and UCLA, as well as programs at SMH Health Saint Louis University Hospital and SMH Health Cardinal Glennon Children’s Hospital.

“We were pleased with the excellent positions and programs our students obtained,” said Dr. L. James Willmore (A&S ’64, Med ’68), associate dean for admissions and student affairs at the School of Medicine. “Saint Louis University medical students typically get placements in strong residency programs, and this year is no different.”

Alumna and National Higher Education Leader will be the May Commencement Speaker

SLU alumna and president of the University of Texas at El Paso, Dr. Diana Natalicio (A&S ’61), will return to Saint Louis University in May to deliver the commencement address to SLU’s 2017 spring graduates. The ceremony begins at 9 a.m. Saturday, May 20, in Chaifetz Arena.

 Included among Time magazine’s 100 most influential people in the world, Natalicio has been president of the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) since 1988. During her tenure as president, UTEP’s enrollment has grown from nearly 15,000 to more than 25,000 students, who reflect the demographics of the Paso del Norte region from which 90 percent of them come. More than 80 percent are Mexican American, and another 5 percent commute to the campus from Ciudad Juarez, Mexico.

Following her commencement address, Natalicio will receive an honorary doctor of science from the University. SLU will also bestow honorary doctorates on John Padberg, S.J., Rev. Starsky Wilson and Richard McClure.

Padberg, also a SLU alumnus (A&S ’49, Grad ’54), most recently served as director of the Institute of Jesuit Sources, which publishes primary source materials and original works in Jesuit spirituality and history. He has strong ties to SLU; from 1964 to 1973, he was a professor of history and academic vice president. Padberg also was president of Weston School of Theology in Cambridge, Massachusetts. McClure and Wilson co-chaired the Ferguson Commission, which was appointed by Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon in November 2014 to study and recommend actions to address the underlying causes of social unrest in the St. Louis region. McClure most recently was president of Unigroup, a $1.7 billion asset-owned specialized transportation and relocation company. He retired in 2014 and now runs Spero Advisers. Wilson is president and CEO of the Deaconess Foundation, a faith-based, grant-making organization devoted to making child well-being a civic priority in the St. Louis region. He also is pastor of Saint John’s Church.

Bicentennial Celebration to Begin with Mass under the Arch

Saint Louis University will begin the celebration of its 200-year anniversary with a Mass under St. Louis’ Gateway Arch on Saturday, Sept. 23. The outdoor Mass will begin at 5:30 p.m. Attendees will be invited to stay on the Arch grounds following Mass to enjoy a special fireworks display and other family-friendly activities.

St. Louis Archbishop Robert J. Carlson will be the presider and homilist. Ronald Mercier, S.J., provincial of the Jesuits’ Central and Southern Province, will be the principal concelebrant.

The bicentennial Mass will be one of the major events on the renovated Arch grounds. Originally known as Saint Louis Academy, SLU’s first location was in a small home located on what is now the Arch grounds.

“This is a fitting place to launch our bicentennial events,” said Dr. Ellen Harshman (Grad Ed ’78, Law ’92), dean emerita and director of bicentennial planning. “We are truly marking this milestone where it all began.”

The Mass falls during SLU’s annual Homecoming and Family Weekend. It is open to alumni, their families and the public. It is the first of numerous events that are planned for SLU’s 15-month bicentennial celebration.
SLU’s Highest Teaching Honor Goes to Paul Bracher

D plans have been set for the presentation of the 2017 St. Louis Literary Award. Author Margaret Atwood will receive the award during a ceremony at the Sheldon Concert Hall on Sept. 19. The award is given to an author for outstanding achievement in literature. The award will be presented by the St. Louis University Library Associates, a group of faculty and staff members who support the library’s mission to provide resources and services for students, faculty, and staff.

Margaret Atwood to Receive the 2017 St. Louis Literary Award

The Saint Louis University Library Associates selected Margaret Atwood to receive the 2017 St. Louis Literary Award. For more than 50 years, Atwood has moved seamlessly from genre to genre. She is best known for her fiction, including *The Handmaid’s Tale*, *Cat’s Eye* and *Oranges and Sunshine*. Her most recent novel, * Hag-Seed*, is a retelling of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. The award ceremony will be Tuesday, Sept. 19, at the Sheldon Concert Hall. For more information, visit lib.slu.edu/about/associates.

ON CAMPUS

New Administrators and Deans

Dr. Jonathan Smith

Dr. Jonathan Smith was named president of Saint Louis University in 2016. He previously served as the University's vice president for diversity and community engagement. Smith came to SLU in 2015 as the University’s first special assistant to the president for diversity and community engagement. In this role, he works to further the University's commitment to making SLU more diverse, more equitable and more inclusive, said Dr. Jonathan Smith, vice president for diversity and community engagement. “This, I think, is what our mission calls us to do.”

Dr. Paul Bracher, assistant professor of chemistry, received the 2016 Nancy McNeil Ring Award for excellence in teaching. Established in 1986 and named for the University’s first dean of women, the award is presented by SLU’s chapter of Alpha Sigma Nu, the international Jesuit honor society, to a faculty member who displays special dedication to students in and out of the classroom. “Receiving a teaching award selected by students is particularly meaningful, because it suggests that you’ve had a really positive impact on at least one student—hopefully, more,” Bracher said. As part of the honor, Bracher delivered the University’s midyear commencement address in December. He talked about how his own college experience was altered after surgery to remove a spinal tumor left him unable to walk. “As you make goals and plans for the future, remember that every successful person faces continued challenges, and there is always room for improvement, no matter how talented or perfect things may seem,” he said.

Margaret Atwood to Receive the 2017 St. Louis Literary Award

The Saint Louis University Library Associates selected Margaret Atwood to receive the 2017 St. Louis Literary Award. For more than 50 years, Atwood has moved seamlessly from genre to genre. She is best known for her fiction, including *The Handmaid’s Tale*, *Cat’s Eye* and *Oranges and Sunshine*. Her most recent novel, *Hag-Seed*, is a retelling of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. The award ceremony will be Tuesday, Sept. 19, at the Sheldon Concert Hall. For more information, visit lib.slu.edu/about/associates.
Dr. Jeffrey Scherrer (Grad PH '02), a professor emerita in occupational science and occupational therapy at SLU, said the plan is for each individual to be enrolled in a six-week intensive training program before leaving jail. Once the individual is released, the support would continue in the form of job placement, life skills and, as needed, mental health resources or interventions for post substance use, social services and more.

“We are pulling faculty and resources across the SLU and St. Louis communities,” Buryan said. So far, 21 academic units and services have been identified to support in some capacity, she said.

The program is also seeking employers who are willing to hire people with a record of incarceration to work in living wage jobs.

**MAJOR GRANTS**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADAPTING CROPS TO CLIMATE CHANGE</td>
<td>$4.6 million</td>
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<td>PTSD AND CARDIOVASCULAR HEALTH</td>
<td>$2.3 million</td>
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<tr>
<td>BEHAVIORAL HEALTH TRAINING FOR FAMILY PHYSICIANS</td>
<td>$1.87 million</td>
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A National Science Foundation grant will help a team of researchers understand how root systems of grapevines affect the vine’s stems, leaves and fruit. The five-year project is led by Dr. Addison Miller, SLU professor and evolutionary biologist specializing in perennial plant evolution.

The five-year Primary Care Training and Enhancement Award from the Health Resources and Services Administration will train family medicine residents and medical family therapy doctoral students in a family medicine behavioral health collaborative curriculum.

**Looking Ahead to Another Successful Summer at SLU**

The Office of Summer Studies plans to build on past programming to draw more than 10,000 participants to campus again this summer for camps, coursework, workshops and more. Summer studies focuses on supporting, developing, implementing and highlighting the many summer opportunities for pre-kindergarten through 12th grade students; encouraging high school and college students to take summer courses; and establishing SLU as a destination for international summer immersion programs.

“We try to build community awareness of summer campus activities,” said Tony Turnsped (PS ’03, Grad Cook ’08), associate dean of enrollment management and hosted more than 120 students and administrators from more than 150 institutions. In addition, more than 150 scholarships were awarded last year.

Summer At SLU also continues to include four-week and 12-week international immersion programs and hosted more than 120 students and administrators from China last year.

Campus will be filled with undergraduate and graduate students, too, with nearly 500 college credit courses offered this summer.

For more information, visit summer.slu.edu.

**SLU Launches 2+SLU Dual-Admission Program**

Saint Louis University and St. Louis Community College have partnered to launch 2+SLU, a dual-admission program that offers students the opportunity to earn a bachelor’s degree in select programs at SLU in two years, after completing an associate degree at St. Louis Community College.

“While SLU has always welcomed students transferring from community colleges, the 2+SLU program will provide students with a more seamless transition and a well-defined path — pre- and post-transfer — to their chosen degree,” said Jay Goff, SLU’s vice president for enrollment and retention management.

As part of the 2+SLU program, students will have access to campus resources such as Pius XII Memorial Library, and guidance from advisers at both St. Louis Community College and SLU to ensure classes taken at the community college meet the student’s individual educational goals and satisfy 2+SLU requirements.

**Re-entry Program Helps Incarcerated Individuals**

Saint Louis University is partnering with the City of St. Louis Division of Corrections in a new, multiprogram project to create services and provide pathways to incarcerated women and men before and after they are released from the St. Louis City Jail and the facility known as the workhouse, a medium-security institution.

The goal is to help incarcerated individuals re-acclimate to the community by providing training, support and services they need to be productive, law-abiding citizens, said Dr. Karen Buryan (Grad PH ’02), a professor emerita in occupational science and occupational therapy at SLU.

The plan is for each individual to be enrolled in a six-week intensive training program before leaving jail. Once the individual is released, the support would continue in the form of job placement, life skills and, as needed, mental health resources or interventions for post substance use, social services and more.

“We are pulling faculty and resources across the SLU and St. Louis communities,” Buryan said. So far, 21 academic units and services have been identified to support in some capacity, she said.

The program is also seeking employers who are willing to hire people with a record of incarceration to work in living wage jobs.

**Art at SLU**

**LEO RAY: Infinite Painting**

Through May 29

SAIN LEU UNIVERSITY MUSEUM OF ART
The Fred Kaiser installation, which uses 300 canvases that depict portraits of people and animals, as well as well-known paintings. Each process an extension of the adjacent canvases.

**Med School Takes Action on Accreditation Issue**

Saint Louis University School of Medicine has launched a plan of action to correct deficiencies identified by the accrediting body for medical education in the United States.

The medical school remains fully accredited by the Liaison Committee on Medical Education (LCME), but has been placed on probation. It has 24 months to address the areas of concern and to have the probation status lifted.

The LCME’s action follows an accreditation site visit in October 2016.

“I apologize for the deficiencies found by the LCME. We must own them and we must fix them. And we will,” said Dr. Kevin Behrns, who joined SLU as dean of the medical school in January.

Behrens immediately put together a plan to correct the problems. He has pledged to work closely with the LCME, conduct a top-to-bottom review of the entire school to solve accreditation deficiencies, and identify opportunities for novel educational approaches.

Work groups that include medical faculty, students and alumni, as well as external experts, will address each of the non-compliant elements cited in detail. Their goal is to ensure the school meets or exceeds the LCME guidelines and is of world-class status.

For more information or updates about remediation efforts, visit slu.edu/lecmereaccreditation.

**Rankings and Honors**

Three top-25 undergraduate business programs, according to U.S. News & World Report: entrepreneurship (No. 10), international business (No. 11) and accounting (No. 23).

No. 4 in the United States for community service, according to Washington Monthly’s “2018 College Guide”

A record 6th consecutive year for SLU on the President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll, the highest federal recognition for a school’s commitment to service-learning and Civic engagement.

No. 13 graduate business entrepreneurship program in the country, according to The Princeton Review and Entrepreneur magazine

No. 96 of the country’s top 330 national universities, as well as the “best value school,” according to the “Best Colleges 2017” issue of U.S. News & World Report

In addition, SLU programs earned high honors in U.S. News & World Report’s 2018 edition of “Best Graduate Schools,” including the No. 1 health law program in the nation for a record 13th year.

Law School Specialties: Health Law

Business Specialties: Supply Chain Management

Business Specialties: Entrepreneurship

Business Specialties: International Business

Business Specialties: Accounting

Law School Specialties: Part-time Law

Law School Specialties: Clinical Training

Top Medical Schools: Primary Care

Top Medical Schools: Research

Top Nursing Programs: Master’s

Top Nursing Programs: Doctor of Nursing Practice

Business School Specialties: Part-time MBA

Top Law Schools
When Saint Louis University moved its burgeoning downtown campus two and a half miles west in 1888, the entire enterprise — classrooms, library, laboratory, chapel, offices and Jesuit residence — fit in a single four-story, red-brick building. Over the next century, the University developed far beyond DuBourg Hall, expanding in every direction and becoming an integral part of the community. SLU grew with the area, and when it needed to be picked up, SLU stepped up, committing to be a catalyst for renewal in Midtown St. Louis. Now, as Saint Louis University prepares for its bicentennial and the next century of progress, the University has unveiled plans for campus and beyond. Take a look at the grand scheme of things. (Story continues on page 12.)

NEW RESIDENCE HALL WILL PROVIDE A GRAND EXPERIENCE

SLU’s second new residence hall in a year will be completed this summer.

Located at the corner of Grand Boulevard and Laclede Avenue, Grand Hall is a seven-story building that will house approximately 530 students in suite-style living. When finished, the $71 million project will be connected to the adjacent Griesedieck Complex, the University’s largest residential facility.

“Think about this area as a neighborhood instead of separate spaces,” said Dr. Kent Porterfield, vice president of student development. “Those facilities will interact interdependently when all is said and done.”

Grand Hall features a 740-seat campus dining hall, as well as classrooms, study lounges, an outdoor plaza and more.

“Grand Hall will integrate spaces for collaboration and dialogue, business incubators, maker spaces and classrooms into the residential experience,” said Melinda Carlson, director of housing, residence life and student involvement. “This hall has the potential to further transform the residential experience at SLU by providing an environment that matches the quality and ambitions of our students.”

Like Spring Hall — which opened last summer just a block west — Grand Hall will be one of the most sustainable buildings on campus. It has been constructed to follow LEED silver standards and uses flooring, carpeting and concrete made partially from recycled and regionally sourced materials, LED lighting and low-VOC products.

To ensure that the new hall meets the needs of students, campus officials worked closely with faculty and with the Student Government Association and the Residence Hall Association.

“Students offered comprehensive living and learning environment that contributes significantly to student success, in and out of the classroom,” Porterfield said. “These projects reflect our ongoing commitment to providing students with an unparalleled residential experience.”
Connecting Campus, Investing in the Area

A Strategic Priority for SLU

SLU’s strategic plan calls for the University to become “a leader in just land use and responsible urban design.” To fulfill this objective, SLU is developing its first campus master plan in 27 years.

“Following the development of the previous campus master plan 27 years ago under the leadership of President Emeritus Father Lawrence Bondi, S.J., our Midtown campus saw exponential growth in size and an increase in civic partnerships,” said University President Dr. Fred P. Pestello. “To meet the ever-changing needs of our community, and ensure we stay true to our eternal and noble mission, we must build upon our history and envision our future.”

While working on the campus master plan, Heimburger said SLU saw a need to better connect its north and south campuses, which are separated by the Grand Bridge and a swath of industrial or vacant properties. From this need, the idea for forming a 353 redevelopment corporation was born.

“When I arrived at SLU, I was approached by many members of the SLU community with the need to develop a plan for the physical future of the University,” Pestello said. “The reasons were compelling to the point that Midtown development became a focal point of the strategic plan.”

Through the Midtown development effort, Heimburger said SLU hopes to spur projects that will help unify the campus and attract services and venues that will benefit students, patients, faculty and staff, as well as local residents.

“Many portions of the redevelopment area are in tremendous need of investment, especially the areas that have been industrial for more than a century,” Heimburger said. “We’re looking forward to working with our neighbors and community partners to plan for the revitalization of the area.”

The redevelopment plan also notes that the University hopes to construct a major educational facility on the southwest corner of Grand Boulevard and Chouteau Avenue — the site of the former Pevely Dairy industrial complex — in the future.

With SLU looking to reduce costs, grow revenues and build a more efficient and effective organization through the Operational Excellence program (for more see page 4), Heimburger said it is important to note that creating and administering a redevelopment corporation is expected to be a budget-neutral operation, meaning that the project will have no impact on SLU’s budget and will not create a deficit.

The University’s redevelopment plan was unanimously recommended by the St. Louis Planning Commission and approved by the Board of Aldermen last fall. In broad strokes, the plan lays out proposed uses within the redevelopment area. These include:

- Medical and educational uses including offices and training facilities for those in the health care and life sciences; classrooms and related instructional, laboratory, research, hospice, nursery and day care spaces; and pharmacy facilities.
- Office facilities for private, public and nonprofit institutions, businesses and agencies; research facilities; retail, dining, entertainment and other services; hotel and conference facilities; recreational and community facilities; and parking.
- New residential housing near the SLU Medical Center, where it’s estimated that 60 to 80 single-family or low-density dwelling units could be constructed on vacant lots in the area.

The University is taking a long-term approach as it moves forward. “We need to plan for both the near and distant future,” said David Heimburger (Cook ‘85), SLU’s vice president and chief financial officer, who also is leading the redevelopment effort. “We have to think about the next 10 years and also about what SLU will be in 50 or 100 years.”

The Redevelopment Area

The boundaries of the redevelopment area stretch from 19th Street, Spring Avenue and Vandeventer Avenue on the west; to Compton Avenue on the east; and from Laclede Avenue and Interstate 64 on the north; to Park Avenue and Interstate 44 on the south.

The area encompasses the future home of a new $550 million hospital and outpatient center that SSM Health is planning to build along south Grand Boulevard, adjacent to the current SSM Health Saint Louis University Hospital (see below). As the University’s health care partner, SSM Health has a seat on the board that governs SLU’s redevelopment corporation.

NEW HOSPITAL WILL ENHANCE MEDICAL CENTER

A new 550,000-square-foot academic medical center in St. Louis moved closer to reality as SSM Health Saint Louis University Hospital and SLUCare Physician Group shared renderings of the facilities in February.

The new hospital and ambulatory care center will include more than 850,000 square feet of space, 218 private patient rooms, an expanded Level 1 trauma center and emergency department, larger cancer care units, expanded patient parking, green space and avenues for any future campus separations.

The new SSM Health Saint Louis University Hospital campus will be located at 11015 Grand Boulevard in the near east side of the city in the area that will be part of the 353 redevelopment corporation. The hospital and SLUCare and Saint Louis University have worked closely together in planning the new facility.” said Dr. Patrick M. Haeny, SLUCare Physician Group CEO. “We are united by the common goal of providing patients with the best possible experience, and I know the new facilities will strengthen medical research and enhance the education of future medical and health care professionals at SLU.”

The new hospital will continue to focus on high-acuity patients, cardiovascular care, oncology, stroke, transplant and trauma.

Groundbreaking is planned for Aug. 31, with a projected completion date of Sept. 2, 2020. 
Community Input
Community engagement is an important part of the process, according to Heimburger. He said that SLU has already been in contact with a number of key property owners in the 353 redevelopment area, including those behind the foundry and armory projects.

“Recently, we were approached by SLU leadership about the possibility of including our City Foundry development in the new SLU 353 redevelopment plan,” said Steve Smith, founding principal and CEO of the Lawrence Group. “We enthusiastically agreed.”

With its proximity to Cortex, as well as the Grand MetroLink Station, the area could provide additional opportunities for technology-related and transit-oriented developments.

Additionally, the University plans to form an advisory board made up of area residents and business owners, along with city residents who may have expertise in social services, transportation and other important issues.

While the redevelopment corporation gives SLU oversight of future development projects in the area, Heimburger noted that the University did not seek eminent domain powers to condemn and acquire property from private owners.

“We have been in St. Louis for nearly 200 years, and we are investing in the future of our city with our neighbors,” Heimburger said. “We want to help make St. Louis a better place to live, learn and work.”

Saint Louis University’s chess team isn’t short on impressive statistics and accolades: three international grandmasters, one international master, a top-four finish at the Pan-American Collegiate Chess Championship, and third place at the 2017 President’s Cup, the Final Four of college chess.

But the most notable number of all may be this one: seven months. That’s how long the five players on SLU’s squad — Dariusz Swiercz, Yaroslav Zherebukh, Francesco Rambaldi, Cemil Can Ali Marandi and Nezima Arzova — have been competing as a team.

“Accidental? Not at all,” Goedeker said. “To me, living for others’ means helping to make communities better and more productive for every citizen.”

The chess team is a great addition to Saint Louis University, attracting exceptional students from around the world,” Sinquefield said. “We all should be very proud of the Saint Louis University chess team.
CHESS IN ST. LOUIS

While collegiate chess may be undergoing a renaissance at SLU, the city of St. Louis has a rich history as a national and global chess hub.

St. Louis hosts a portion of the first annual World Chess Championship.

During the World’s Fair in St. Louis, the city hosts the Seventh Annual Chess Congress and U.S. Open of chess.

St. Louis native Robert Steinitzer competes for the U.S. Chess Championship. Steinitzer dominates the St. Louis chess scene from the 1890s-70s.

The Metropolitan Intercollegiate Chess League, which later becomes the Gateway Chess League, is founded. Eventually the league will include nearly 10 schools.

The Chess Club and Scholastic Center of St. Louis (CCSCSL) opens and quickly becomes known as one of the world’s premier chess hubs.

CCSCSL begins hosting the annual U.S. Championship and U.S. Women’s Championship.

The U.S. Chess Federation names St. Louis “Chess City of the Year.”

The World Chess Hall of Fame opens in the west end neighborhood.

The U.S. Chess Federation designates St. Louis “Chess City of the Year.”

The Chess Club and Scholastic Center of St. Louis (CCSCSL) opens and quickly becomes known as one of the world’s premier chess hubs.

CCSCSL establishes the Simpleshell Cup, St. Louis “Super Grandmaster” tournament.

The U.S. Senator names St. Louis “Chess Capital of the United States.”

A chess table is installed in the Central West End neighborhood.

CHESS Cops program (Cops Helping Enhance Student Skills) is launched by CCSCSL. The program helps police officers serve as chess instructors in the public schools district. SLU’s chess team places third in the President’s Cup.

Ramirez said. And no other collegiate team “is so close to, and in partnership with, the best chess club in the world.”

Top players on the global chess scene are absolutely taking note. Zherebukh jokingly called his path to SLU “inevitable.” A promising chess program combined with the University’s strong academic and beautiful campus? The decision was an easy one, he said.

Playing the Long Game

While it may seem like achieving No. 3 status in less than a year would be solid grounds for taking a well-deserved break, the Billiken chess team shows no signs of slowing down.

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In addition to overseeing the current players’ intense competition and training schedules, Ramirez is focused on growing SLU’s team, which is still small by collegiate standards. One new player, Olexander Ipakov from Turkey, will join the team in June, and there are plans to add two or three more players in the fall.

The team’s headquarters in Morrison Hall, where the players train while on campus, is also growing. An outdoor playing area, complete with a life-size chess board, will be ready for student use later this spring.

A Unique Partnership

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But what makes SLU’s program particularly distinctive is its partnership with the Chess Club and Scholastic Center of St. Louis, widely recognized as the premier chess hub.

“In no other college chess team program that offers players more playing, coaching and training possibilities,” Ramirez said.

In assembling the team, Ramirez isn’t just seeking chess talent; he’s also looking for players who have what it takes to succeed academically in a university setting.

To that end, the team’s undergraduate players are pursuing degrees in biology, computer engineering and finance, while graduate student Yaro Zherebukh, the team’s second board, is working on a master’s degree in applied economics.

MEET THE TEAM

Ramirez became a chess grandmaster at the age of 15 and gained international recognition playing in multiple Olympiads and World Championships. He took second place in the U.S. Chess Championship in 2013 and holds multiple major open victories, including the World Open and U.S. Open.

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Saint Louis University doesn’t have a film school. And it’s not considered a key stop on the road to Hollywood. But for director and screenwriter James Gunn (A&S ’92), SLU is where his cinematic dreams took root.

Gunn, who wrote and directed the 2014 summer blockbuster Guardians of the Galaxy, credits SLU with his success. “The whole birth of my career was at Saint Louis University. It was everything to me,” Gunn said. “I was a kid who was playing in bands and didn’t feel completely appreciated. I took a creative writing class with [English professor] Al Montesi, and I had to write a play in three days or something like that. And I did nothing else but write that play for three days.”

When Gunn got to class, fellow students performed his play. The experience was transformative. “That day was the beginning of my career,” he said. “People couldn’t stop laughing, and they really liked it. It felt amazing. I’d been playing in bands, and people maybe appreciated the way I looked or the way I performed, but this was people appreciating my brain.

“It was what I think I had been waiting for my entire life. I can honestly say that was one of the happiest days of my life.”

In February, as he was working on the more than 2,400 visual effects for Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2, Gunn talked to Universitas about Guardians, his film The Belko Experiment, his creative process and more.
When I’m creating the movie, I really live that’s simply by the grace of God. I have where they’re going. And I’m existing within the world of the Guardians. So I’m weirdos, and they became a family. This Guardians of the Galaxy Vol. 2 for the first film, except for diehard comic book things and aren’t able to capture what is a trillion polygons. It's a horror film set in a typical cabin in the woods. How did you come up with that? I dreamt it, frankly. I dreamt the trailer for The Belko Experiment. I woke up one morning and had the trailer in my head, which is basically the trailer that we released. I'm like, "What happens with these people?" Then I wrote the story to find out what happens. It was that simple. It was just me following through on an initial vision.

You've got two movies coming out in 2017. How did you manage that? Belko was an older script that I'd written before Guardians. And I was going to make it at one time, but I was going through a rough time in my life and I didn't feel like going down to Brazil and making a movie about shooting people each other in the head. It didn't seem like a real joy to make. Little did I know that when I actually did go down to make The Belko Experiment in Colombia, instead of Brazil where it was originally going to be, it was actually the most fun I ever had on a set because it was the greatest group of actors — most of whom were friends of mine that I just gave roles to — that I ever had around. And we just had an amazing time in Colombia. Despite the darkness of the film, it was the most loving, terrorizing group of people. The scale and scope of the movie you direct has grown exponentially. Has that changed you as a filmmaker? If so, how? Yes, honestly, it's changed me for the better. As a younger man I was pretty angry. And I relied on that anger to provide comedy or whatever. I was very aggressive. When you start to make movies in a bigger way, not only for an American audience but a worldwide audience, I needed to let go of some of that to speak to a mass audience. And what I found was that that was me letting go of who I was really, that was me letting go of the things I used to protect myself from who I really was. Writing for everyone allows me to be more vulnerable, it allows me to be more emotional; it allows me to be more truthful about who I am, what I believe in, the depths of the characters. And, I think, rate better cinema that is happening in Guardians Vol. 2.

You're the writer and producer on another 2017 film, The Belko Experiment. It's a horror film set in an office building, rather than some typical cabins in the woods. How did you come up with that idea? I dreamt it, frankly. I dreamt the trailer for The Belko Experiment. I woke up one morning and had the trailer in my head, which is basically the trailer that we released. I'm like, "What happens with these people?" Then I wrote the story to find out what happens. It was that simple. It was just me following through on an initial vision.

What's Next? Whatever project comes next, it will likely be a "spectacle." As a younger man I was pretty angry. And I relied on that anger to provide comedy or whatever. I was very aggressive. When you start to make movies in a bigger way, not only for an American audience but a worldwide audience, I needed to let go of some of that to speak to a mass audience. And what I found was that that was me letting go of who I really was. Writing for everyone allows me to be more vulnerable, it allows me to be more emotional; it allows me to be more truthful about who I am, what I believe in, the depths of the characters. And, I think, rate better cinema that is happening in Guardians Vol. 2.

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Tackling everything from hip-hop to happiness, these cool classes show that learning at SLU is anything but par for the course.

Each semester, Saint Louis University professors teach around 100 courses falling into the category of “special topics.” Ranging across disciplines, these classes advance research in innovative ways by connecting scholarship to pop culture and lived experience. The courses featured here — all taught this academic year — represent a small sample of the personality SLU professors bring to the classroom.
Politicisation

Taught by: Dr. Elizabeth Richard, associate professor of communication

The Details: Each presidential election year, SLU professors find new ways to connect politics to the classroom. In Richard’s case, that means analyzing a range of political speeches from a rhetorical perspective. Richard guides students in applying their skills to use in real-time with blog assignments, research papers and in-depth analyses of presidential speeches.

The Twist: During the lead-up to the 2016 election, students engaged critically in the here-and-now of politics — and not just the candidates to do the same. Partnering with Generation St. Louis (a St. Louis Public Radio program aiming to foster community engagement with young people through public radio programming), Richard’s ideas often made it into a Debate Watch followed by student-centered discussions. “Often we watch the media to tell us what to think and don’t decide what we think ourselves,” Richard said. Having these discussions was a “good way to test out ideas, think and connect” with members of the community.

Required Readings and Projects: Murray Edelman’s Constructing the Political Spectrum — recognized by students who digitally annotate each chapter with relevant examples from recent election cycles; students listen, watch and read political rhetoric, including videos, state the UN address, and acceptance and concession speeches.

What Students Say: “Taking Political Communication during the 2016 presidential election allowed me to conceptualize my own feelings about the outcome of the election and rationalize how much the new presidential will actually be able to accomplish. I have gained insight that has helped me to view the results of the election more critically and realistically.” — Shelby Zena, senior, communication studies, International Studies and Spanish major

Happiness: East and West

Taught by: Dr. Richard Kim, post-doctoral fellow in philosophy

The Details: Inspired by a desire to live fully and help others do the same, Kim teaches Western and non-Western conceptions of happiness and fulfillment. A departure from past Western-centric studies, contemporary philosophers learn from the wisdom of ancient and modern Eastern Thinkers. “In every culture or society, you’ll find brilliant human minds driven by the desire to know the world,” Kim said. So opening the course to Daoist and Confucian ideas of happiness creates a well-rounded, rounded view of understanding, he said.

The Twist: Kim encourages students to practice what they learn. He introduces students to empirically supported happiness activities — simple habits shown to increase a person’s positive emotions and sense of meaning. Incorporating practices such as acts of kindness, gratitude lists or writing letters of forgiveness gives students a broader conception of wisdom and the chance to act actively on being happy.

Required Readings: Senta Ludwina’s The How of Happiness, plus Carlini texts from Dao to Confucianism aligned ancient and Western philosophical.

What Students Say: “One way the course changed how I think about happiness is the way social ties affect it. Without strong, loving relationships, it is hard to make a lot of success, money, pleasure, power or talent will provide joy. So the next time I get in a relationship, I’ll think about what I’m getting out of it as well as what I’m getting into. I’m more focused on being happy in my personal life.” — Maria Molina, senior, theological studies major

Women, Knights, Weapons and Love: Medieval Italian Literature

Taught by: Dr. Simone Bregni, associate professor of languages, literatures and cultures

The Details: In the tradition of Italian scholarship, Bregni introduces students to literature and language starting with the historical and cultural context of the texts. In a study of the Renaissance, that means understanding the periods’ belief in the harmony of all living things. Lawyers travel through time with his students to medieval and Renaissance Italy, where women interacted heavily to lead lives, seduce, seek revenge in God, love was celebrated in many forms, and authors wrote of magical weapons to attempt to ensnare the majesty of art. Works are studied with an eye to history, allowing students to envision fully what they are experiencing.

The Twist: This brings us to video games into his teaching on the Renaissance. Through our games in the game of King series — created to be historically accurate thanks to input from Italian scholars — Bregni and his class “narrated a young commons man’s story and witness firsthand from the mind of the German adventurer wandering. And we can watch the dynamic of power play at the same time,” he said. He also is described in contemporary literature works.

Required Readings: Dario’s Commedia Ludovisi Ariosto’s Orlando (Engaged) (which first lines pronounced for the tale of the course), Machiavel’s The Prince.

What Students Say: “This class prompted me to question my beliefs and way of thinking. The various artwork of the time period uncovered its unconventional — and unconventional — thoughts. Interpreting these works allowed us to examine and question our beliefs; a process that has been truly invigorating throughout college and my personal life.” — Kevin Mueller, senior, French major

Arch City Religion: Religious Life and Practice in St. Louis

Taught by: Dr. Rachel McPhee Lindsay, assistant professor of theological studies

The Details: Shock by the city’s cultural and religious diversity, Lindsay encourages students to discover and help tell the story of religious in St. Louis. Students explore the ways religion shows itself through art, history and even baseball. From microbes to synagogues to street-corner sermons, students visit religious locations throughout the city in transformation learning from a textbook to lived experience.

The Twist: Lindsay’s students become ethnographers and sociologists as they participate in the Arch City religion project (www.archcityreligion.org). Students contribute to the site’s mapping of religious activities in St. Louis, documenting an under-studied piece of the city’s story. Lindsay encourages students “to see religion not just through their own eyes, but how it shapes the infrastructure of the city.” In this endeavor, students begin to “think about religion and theology as relevant beyond the required course load at SLU,” she said.

Required Readings and Projects: Robert Jay Zerenz and Jordan A. A. Zerenz’s The End of White Christian America and other texts guide hands-on experiences, such as recording a religious space in St. Louis to find out what religion sounds like, as well as completing an assignment that is micro-ethnography or a biographical piece contributing to the project’s database.

What Students Say: “I had the opportunity to connect religion to the world around me. With Dr. Lindsay’s helpful guidance, some amazing group members got involved. We were able to take part in a project that binds religion, culture, community and social science in our city forever in an online gallery that will hopefully grow and flourish for years to come.” — Keena Hopp, sophomore, psychology and Russian major

American Decades: Hip-Hop History and Culture

Taught by: Anthea Butler, doctoral student in American studies

The Details: Using a model developed in her graduate program, Butler traces the history of hip-hop as a political movement — achieving its engagement with feminism, class struggle, globalization and potential future forms of activism. Butler includes the current dynamic of the St. Louis area in her teaching and encourages students to ground the content, culture and structure of their favorite artists.

The Twist: Don’t be fooled by the fun, hip subject matter — it’s a lot of work. Though her students are often supposed to feel hip-hop studies as a discipline, Butler said that “hip-hop offers a way into a wide range of topics that are central to understanding American society, culture and politics, including race, class, gender and sexuality.” Butler introduces hip-hop as a historical, political sources and presents tools that are relevant for her students’ lives, recently focusing on the role of hip-hop in the Black Lives Matter movement and the 2020 elections.

Required Readings and Projects: Each week students analyze a combination of essays, news stories and song texts — from Beyond to Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five — and consider texts in both as American studies, African American studies, and women’s and gender studies.

What Students Say: “What makes this class unique is that a lot of people listen to hip-hop, but not many think about the issues that come with hip-hop. This class is something you can take any direction you want to. You’re going to learn something you never really thought about.” — Jackson Jones, freshman, business studies major

The Subject in Graphic Narrative

Taught by: Dr. Maria Clay Cardona, associate professor of languages, literatures and cultures

The Details: Reading, researching, autobiographies in comic book form — and in Spanish — students discuss how text and images tell their narratives to bring themes of loss, trauma, illness and displacement.

The Twist: Drawing on her own work for comic books and taught by research suggesting that young adults are drawn to visual images of learning, Cardona is concerned that students flourish when presented with complex, layered graphic novels. Students lead the conversation and come to conclusions about the text based on their own experiences, sometimes identifying themes she did not see. “Comics can be a helpful tool in the discussion of political and political-related issues such as war, xenophobia and terrorism, as well as other serious issues such as mental health, post-traumatic stress and personal issues,” Cardona said. “Facilitating that discussion is what I have attempted to do in my class.”

Required Readings: A combination of comics — such as buddy Francis Alisz on a World Pool, discussed with the author via Skype — and analytical works, such as Laura Zamora’s What to Expect When the Post-Crisis Novel

What Students Say: “Before this year, my experience of graphic novels was limited to the likes of Calvin and Hobbes and Garfield. This course opened my eyes to the important role that images play in telling a story and how the combination of text and images in these novels allows me, as a reader, to grasp the meaning of not just the characters’ journeys but the authors as well.” — Gill Berman, junior, Spanish major, UTEA

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Students in the Labre Ministry offer food and find friendship with the homeless.

Food for Thought
— By Amy Garland, photos by Douglas Garfield

On a clear Wednesday evening in January, several Saint Louis University students gather to share a meal and catch up. The talk is typical — the weather, classes, relationships — but the setting couldn't be more unexpected. This is no dining hall, no café. Instead, the students huddle around a tent in a corner of a desolate lot a couple blocks from the Mississippi River. If they look north, between an old Catholic church and an abandoned brick warehouse, they could see the landmark Gateway Arch gleaming half a mile away. Dusk settles into night, and the cold begins to bite.

The SLU students belong to St. Benedict Joseph Labre Ministry with the Homeless, a student organization that brings food and fellowship to those experiencing homelessness in St. Louis. Every Wednesday during the fall and spring semesters, Labre members prepare and deliver meals, sharing food and community with the homeless.

“We use food as an excuse for friendship,” said Corey James, Labre president and a senior theology and philosophy major.

James has brought the small group to the place they call “The Warehouse” to spend time with his friend Calvin and Calvin’s partner, Alisha. Tonight, the group learns, the two are celebrating their anniversary. The students serve fettuccine Alfredo and listen as the talk turns to how much the two mean to each other.

Named after the patron saint of the homeless, Labre was started at the University about six years ago by students who came to SLU from Saint Ignatius High School in Cleveland, where Labre was founded in 2002. Since then, the ministry has spread to Jesuit schools across the country.

Labre began at SLU with just a few students, but membership has grown to more than 100 in the past year. At this point, about half of the members attend any given week. Any of them will describe the profound effect Labre has on them.

“When you’re in college, it’s really easy to get caught up in your own little world,” said senior Emily Alcorn, who’s been participating for two years. “Labre opens my eyes every week.”

Junior Henry Gunther agreed.

“It’s navigating the difference between charity and solidarity. It changes how you interact on every level,” he said. “It taught me to approach all people with a compassionate, open-minded perspective.”

Labre friendships form in two ways: with people who are homeless, as they interact with students week after week, and among students, as they cook, pray and reflect together.

Each Wednesday, the group divides and goes on several routes that vary, depending on the population. After a couple hours with their homeless friends, the students return to the University to “debrief,” as James described it.

“Their process is really good. It’s a very self-reflective organization, very much in the Jesuit tradition,” said Dr. Tim Huffman, assistant professor of communication and faculty mentor to the group. “They spend about as much time thinking about what they’re doing as they spend doing it.”

On that Wednesday in January, Huffman was the one providing the reflection to the group before they headed around the city.

“The ability to take the perspective of someone who is different is not that easy,” he said. “Right now, the ability to change the world is growing in your heart.”

* Names were changed to protect the privacy of some individuals mentioned in this piece.
FROM SOMALIA TO SLU

BILLIKEN SOCCER STAR SAADIQ MOHAMMED TACKLES ONE GOAL AT A TIME.

— By Maria Tsikalas
Growing up in Somalia, Mohammed, 21, fell in love with soccer (or “football,” as it’s known to the rest of the world). His dream was to join the Somali national team. As a child, he heard so that when people asked him the same questions, he would have something to say. “It’s like plagiarizing people’s talk,” he said laughing, “but it’s a great way to learn.”

Mohammed was playing for the Banadir Sports Club in 2012 when his dream came true. He was called to join the national Somali team, becoming the youngest player on the squad at age 17. It was a tremendous honor.

In Somalia, a country that has been plagued with violence by terrorist group al-Shabab for years, soccer is a deeply symbolic sport. Due to its global transcendence and role in promoting culture, it was banned by al-Shabab after the group took over much of Mogadishu in 2008. And though al-Shabab was driven out of the capital in 2011, playing soccer is still a risky endeavor. In an impoverished and conflict-ridden country without many educational opportunities, to succeed in soccer means to have survived without—or in spite of—al-Shabab.

It was with this background in mind that filmmaker J.R. Biersmith, a St. Louis native, decided to chronicle the tale of “the young men without the guns” in that country. He traveled to Kenya to meet the Somali national team.

“I was the only person who could speak a little bit of English,” Mohammed recalled. “Biersmith asked about our personalities and what we’d been through in life. After meeting Mohammed and his best friend on the team, Sa’ad Hussein, who had been lashed publicly by al-Shabab 38 times for playing soccer, Biersmith decided to center his documentary on them, titling it Men in the Arena.

“I never wanted to be in that movie,” Mohammed said. “It was 100 percent risky, because I know what al-Shabab is capable of. But you have to risk your life to change your country.”

Biersmith knew that the film would put the two men in even more danger for working with Westerners and speaking out about al-Shabab. He immediately began working on a plan to bring them to the United States. “They were remarkable heroes,” Biersmith said. “They fully understood the magnitude of what they were doing. But more innocently, they just had a dream like every kid does.”

After many hurdles, Mohammed came to the United States in 2014 and played for FC Dallas Academy during the 2014-15 season. It became clear, though, that to play at the university level, he was going to have to take the ACT college-entry test. Biersmith’s sister Jessica (Biersmith) Herschend (Law ’08), who lives in St. Louis, offered to take Mohammed into her home and tutor him. Mohammed also enrolled in Lift for Life Academy charter school for one intensive high school semester, taking 10 classes. He never expected to play soccer at Saint Louis University, though.

“When I came to Saint Louis, I had a lot of challenges,” Mohammed said. “I didn’t know if I was coming to school.” Mohammed said. “The NCAA had to clear me, and the money was tight, so we didn’t know what was going on. I had no clue if I was coming here, but Coach [Mikel] McGinty and my family worked hard to make sure I could come to school, and I got admitted.” After he was cleared by the NCAA, he had one week to get ready for the season.

“He wasn’t really recruited,” said McGinty, head coach of SLU’s men’s soccer team. “I didn’t know anything about him as a player; just listening to the story, I told J.R. and the family that anything I could do to help, I would love to help.”

“I had no idea he would ever play soccer at SLU; I just wanted him to come to SLU,” McGinty said. “I knew that his coming to SLU was the right thing to do for him, and I knew that it was the right thing to do for SLU. In the summer we got news from the NCAA that he was going to be cleared to play, which was very, very late. We were getting to know him all throughout this year, and I’m still getting to know him.”

The situation presented a learning experience, McGinty said, but Mohammed was a great fit with the team.

“He comes into the dressing room with a smile on his face and with kind of a brightness, as a kind of a young, excited kid every day — I think that rubs off on our players in a really good way,” McGinty said. “He certainly has a creativity and a comfort level with the ball that comes from just hours of playing soccer. I think he has a ball control that you don’t see every day; he has a certain flair that you don’t see every day; he’s got an ability to use his body that you don’t see every day; and he’s just got a passion for soccer that you may not see every day.”

Mohammed’s passion is infectious, as evidenced by his huge fan base back home in Somalia, which keeps up with him on social media. He posts video clips of SLU soccer practices and games, and at one point had 45,000 people viewing his posts.

McGinty and Mohammed both credit much of his success at SLU to the friendship of his teammates, who helped him get acclimated by walking him through the logistics of university life — how to study, where to eat, how to balance soccer with the demands of classes.

“Saadiq is someone who helps make you a better person simply by being around him,” said his teammate Joe Saad, a SLU senior. “We would stay up in hotels the nights before games talking about life and comparing how different our paths had been before they crossed in St. Louis. By being around someone one so brave, loving and loyal, it helped put so many things in my life into perspective and helped me push me every single day. Saadiq is incredibly talented and will definitely be integral to the success the program has in the future.”

Mohammed’s future looks bright indeed. In December, he was honored at the Missouri Athletic Club’s Jack Buck Awards alongside St. Louis Cardinals All-Star Baseball Hall-of-Famer Lou Brock, former St. Louis Blues player Brent Jackman and professional sports broadcaster Dan McLaughlin. Mohammed received the 2016 Carl O. Bauer Award, which is presented annually to the top amateur sports figure in the St. Louis area.

“When you work at Saint Louis University, which is the greatest college soccer program in America, you occasionally, occasionally get players like Saadiq who make you feel like you’re a coach because he’s such a gifted player,” McGinty said during the awards ceremony. “He’s such a good soccer player that he does things that as a coach you can’t script, nor predict, nor teach, and all of a sudden you look like a better coach! He is a game-changer.”

“This award is reaching thousands and thousands of miles back to Somalia, where those kids need a hero like Saadiq,” his former mentor Herschend said in her speech at the ceremony. “It goes a really long way for those kids from this war-torn country who need hope, a whole country that needs hope.”

“I don’t know too many people who could’ve gone through the journey he has and could’ve come out the other side as beautifully as he has,” documentarian Biersmith said.

As for Mohammed’s friend and former Somali teammate Hussein, after hiding alone in Kenya for 12 long months, he made it to St. Louis last spring with the constant support and assistance of Biersmith and Mohammed. Because he lacked the schooling Mohammed had and does not know English well, he is not yet able to get into a university, but he is taking classes at St. Louis International Institute and working two jobs in the meantime.

“I DON’T KNOW TOO MANY PEOPLE WHO COULDC’VE GONE THROUGH THE JOURNEY HE HAS AND COULDC’VE COME OUT THE OTHER SIDE AS BEAUTIFULLY AS HE HAS.” — J.R. Biersmith

Mohammed and his family moved to the United States in November 2016; they currently reside in a US Army barracks.

Mohammed's documentary Men in the Arena was screened a few times in the past year, including during the St. Louis International Film Festival last fall. The reception has been awesome, Biersmith said. It was released April 11 on iTunes and Amazon, and the process is underway to make it available worldwide through services such as Netflix or Hulu.

Meanwhile, Mohammed is working hard in his classes. He is determined to get a good education and make the most of every opportunity.

“I really like Saint Louis University,” he said. “It feels like home now, the whole city, because now I know people, now I made friends; it feels no different than home now. I really like the people. Just to have the freedom to go everywhere is amazing, that’s the best thing.”
Quick, what’s the big idea? Forty seconds on the clock ...

That’s the premise of the international “Real!” Elevator Pitch Competition: Sell an idea in about 40 seconds, the length of the ride from the lobby to the top of One Metropolitan Square, the second-tallest building in Missouri. Students come from as far as California and Canada to get the chance.

Last December, Saint Louis University graduate student Dharti Shah (Doisy ’15) and sophomore Richard Beemer were among the budding entrepreneurs. As the competition began, Beemer, Shah and 10 other contestants stepped into elevators. For the next 40 seconds, they had the floor — all 42 of them, in fact.

Beemer outlined his plans to inspire city high school students to graduate by offering a cultural immersion study abroad program. In another elevator, Shah pitched her “All is WELLness” app, which will help people better monitor their health.

The rides continued up and down the building’s 12 elevators until all contestants met with every first-round judge. If a judge liked a proposal, he or she offered one of eight business cards to a student. Students who ended up with the most cards participated in a final round: pitching to two of the wealthiest judges during a ride in a Tesla Model S as it rocketed around a city block.

The judges are real investors and local business leaders, and in 2016, their net wealth exceeded $2 billion. Among the judges were SLU alumni who have become successful entrepreneurs and investors: Rick Forshaw (Cook ’80), Barry Cervantes (Grad Cook ’79), Brian Nottingham (A&S ’01) and Express Scripts’ head of brand, Laura Burkemper (Grad Cook ’94).

By the end of the competition, Shah had earned second place and $1,500 in the not-for-profit category. Beemer, though not a finalist, was pleased; he amassed a number of cards and made new connections.

“This is a great opportunity for these students to gain direct access to outstanding investors and business leaders,” said Tim Hayden (Cook ’94, Grad Cook ’03), director of Saint Louis University’s Center for Entrepreneurship, who noted that this is just one of many networking programs the center offers. “That’s the Center for Entrepreneurship’s function — pulling all of these groups together. We’re a hub for entrepreneurial activity for any SLU student.”
A HUB FOR ANGELS, ACCELERATORS AND ACTIVITY

The Center for Entrepreneurship is the nucleus of the galaxy of creativity, innovation and collaboration that is SLU. "Entrepreneurship flows through every person, every business and every industry," Hayden said. "We want to help our students develop their interests into a viable business. Successful businesses you see today started out as entrepreneurial endeavors.

This approach has made a name for the center internationally during the past 30 years. In fact, SLU's entrepreneurship program has been among the top 25 academic entrepreneurship programs for 25 years straight. In its 2017 rankings, U.S. News & World Report listed SLU's undergraduate program No. 10 in the nation, and the graduate program is No. 13 in the 2018 rankings. The graduate program also made The Princeton Review's list, coming in at No. 18 for top entrepreneurship schools. The center offers five types of hands-on programs to students and the community:

- **Academic programs**, including courses such as “Managing Ideas in Entrepreneurial Firms” and “Social Entrepreneurship,” as well as classes in idea feasibility, business planning, family business, leadership and more.

- **Networking and mentoring programs** that connect entrepreneurs within SLU and beyond via programs such as Billicken Valley, which offers students opportunities to meet investors, small business owners and innovators right here in the St. Louis community.

- **Development programs** to support entrepreneurial ideas in the community, such as the Billicken Angel Network, a group of 41 angel investors who make up the third-most-active group of investors in a nine-state region, and Blue Diamond, an accelerator program that provides training, mentoring, funding and support to students who have an idea or existing business.

- **Competitions** that allow students to present business ideas in various stages of development, which include the "Rooft" Elevator Pitch competition, the Pitch and Catch investor pitch-deck competition at the Gateway Grizzlies ballpark, the Pure Idea Generator challenge at the top of the City Museum, and the Weekly Innovation Challenge on campus, as well as partnering with Syracuse University to offer Student Startup Maches, the only college pitch competition at South By Southwest in Austin, Texas.

- **Programs for high school students**, including the Allsup Summer Academy; the high school versions of the center’s competitions, like the Elevator Challenge at One Metropolitan Square; and TrefoilStart Day in partnership with Independent Youth, where 1,000 high schoolers come to SLU to interact with 17 nationally recognized entrepreneurs.

The programs are well known and have attracted students who began fostering their entrepreneurial careers long before they arrived at SLU. SLU senior Leiah Johnson has been engaging her inner entrepreneur for many years. Before she became a Billicken — before she was even a teenager — Johnson had formed her first company.

At age 12, she and her brother Jake created Flipoutz, a series of trading coins that could be interchanged in a channel bracelet system that became the rage of the preteen set.

Since then, she appeared on Shark Tank, sold her first company and started a second venture. That second business was called Beaux Up, a bowtie company. She made a profit and then sold it, too — but not before gaining the attention and support of Warren Buffet.

Buffet is not the only big-name entrepreneur to engage with SLU students. In fact, each year more than 100 investors, entrepreneurs and others from companies such as Under Armour, Real Madrid, Edward Jones, Express Scripts, Enterprise Rent-A-Car and many other international firms visit the University to speak to students and share their real-world expertise.

These sorts of opportunities set SLU apart, Johnson said, and drew her to the University before she was even looking at colleges.

"I spoke here as a part of the Independent Youth Teen Entrepreneurship Network," she said. "And I just fell in love with SLU."

"Building a strong program within the context of the University and its mission to impact the world has been a part of the very entrepreneurial framework that established the center and makes it uniquely SLU."

"The center not only bridges the gap between the University and the community — it offers the education entrepreneurs need for success," said Dr. Jerome Katz, SLU’s Coleman Professor in Entrepreneurship. "There’s a reason why a senior at SLU was the very first investment the sharks made on ABC’s Shark Tank in a teen business. With all of these programs for our students, it’s not surprising that some of the best high school entrepreneurs apply to SLU."

JUST WHAT THE DOCTOR ORDERED

Entrepreneurship isn’t just for business students anymore, as six SLU medical students demonstrated when they created MEDLaunch, a nonprofit biomedical and entrepreneurial incubator that develops projects aiming to substantively improve the practice of medicine.

The program is the product of collaborative efforts between the School of Medicine, John Cook School of Business, Parks College of Engineering, Aviation and Technology, and the School of Law. MEDLaunch students own their intellectual property. If their device is workable, they can patent it and form their own limited liability company.

Two years ago a group of medical students began the program because they wanted to improve medicine, but how? They took that question directly to those already working in the field.

"We went to doctors and asked, what should we fix? What would they work on if they had the time?" said founder Andy Hayden (A&S ’14), a three-year medical student at SLU.

Last year, teams worked on solutions to problems as varied as accurately measuring blood loss in the operating room, to preventing foot problems and amputation in diabetes patients, and automating the delivery and weaning of oxygen for hospitalized patients.

This year’s teams are looking at new designs for an IV catheter; a platform for information and education in the emergency room; improving medical simulation lab technologies; and several other projects.

"These teams can get to the heart of the matter by coming up with solutions and creating a sustainable business model in the process," said Dr. Richard Buchholz, SLU professor of neurosurgery and a member of MEDLaunch’s board of directors.

"Medicine is ripe for innovation."

SERVING UP INNOVATION IN CULINARY BUSINESS

Also ripe for innovation?

"Medicine is ripe for innovation."

"Medicine is ripe for innovation.

Also ripe for innovation? Culinary business. Available weekdays, year-round as an entrepreneurial facility, the SLU Kitchen program that generates not only great ideas but positive financial outcomes. It’s exciting." UTAS

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Additional reporting by Maggie Rotermund and Nancy Solomon
SURVEY SAYS ...

Saint Louis University asked, and you answered.

Last October, the Office of Alumni and Donor Engagement reached out to alumni to learn more about your time at the University and beyond. It was SLU’s first comprehensive alumni survey since 2010. The online questionnaire, known as the Alumni Attitude Survey, has been used by 260 universities and colleges during the past 15 years. The feedback helps SLU staff members understand what you value about your alma mater and how best to continue to enrich your shared SLU experience.

Here are the results.

WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU ABOUT BEING AN ALUMNUS/A?

94% rate their decision to attend SLU as good to great

93% describe their student experience as good to excellent

87% said that their opinion of SLU is good to excellent

2,913 RESPONDENTS FROM:

48% WOMEN

51% MEN

9 COUNTRIES

ALL CURRENT COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS

ALL 50 STATES

WHAT BILLIKENS SAID BY ERA:

1973 and before
Say they give because “it’s the right thing to do”

1974-1980
Compared to other eras, felt most strongly that their SLU education prepared them to respond to new career opportunities

1981-1993
Are most likely to read alumni magazines

1994-2001
Say “time/other commitments” is the greatest barrier to participating in alumni activities

2001-2008
Tend to read emails from SLU more than other eras

2009 to today
Believe that providing financial support to current students is very important

WHEN YOU GIVE TO SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY:

You like to know how the University is using your gift.

You value supporting SLU students.

You also want to increase the quality of the academic programs.

NATIONAL ALUMNI BOARD
SLU’s newly created National Alumni Board is finding ways to implement some of your ideas from the survey.

HERE ARE JUST A FEW OF THE INITIATIVES THE BOARD IS WORKING ON:

Better communication about:
- What’s happening at the University
- Benefits and perks of being a SLU alum
- Outcomes and recaps of alumni events
- Impact of donations

More professional development and mentoring opportunities for alumni

Better ways for alumni outside of St. Louis to stay connected to SLU

DIDN’T GET THE SURVEY?
Update your contact information with Saint Louis University:
alumni.slu.edu/stayconnected
2016 Alumni Merit Awards

Saint Louis University’s annual Alumni Merit Awards recognize outstanding alumni and acknowledge their success. Below are the 2016 honorees, who were recognized during Homecoming and Family Weekend last September.

COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

John P. Coyne (A&S '78)

Coyne made his career as a writer, with 20 novels and nonfiction books to his credit. He has been a teacher, college administrator, creative writing professor and foreign service officer. Coyne also has been involved in the Peace Corps.

CENTER FOR ADVANCED DENTAL EDUCATION

Dr. Aron E. Dellinger (GDS '07)

Dellinger is an orthodontist and co-inventor of a device called MagnaGlider. He is involved in the Kids First Orthodontic Clinic. A member of many professional organizations, he is president of the Missouri Association of Orthodontists.

FOOT DOCTOR SCHOOL OF BUSINESS

Mark R. Bell (BBA '89)

Bell retired as senior audit partner from PriceWaterhouseCoopers. He has served on the board of directors of the Alliance Theatre and Junior Achievement of Georgia, where he is now director emeritus. He also serves as chairman of the board of the Girl Scouts of America.

PHARMACY COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING

Kuan L. Lin (GRAD A&S '61, '66, '90)

Lin is a senior pharmacist at Walgreens in New York City. He has served as a member of the board of directors of the National Pharmaceutical Council.

POLITICAL SCIENCE

John J. Lennaman (GRAD A&S '65)

Lennaman is a senior vice president and program manager at Bank of America. She has been an active member of the Junior League of Philadelphia. Lennaman earned her private pilot certificate in 2008 with a single-engine land rating and has flown short-distance, bush-plane adventures.

SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Dr. Fred Pestello, (GRAD Med '66)

Pestello is the chairman of the Department of Internal Medicine at Saint Louis University. He is active in community service agencies and is a member of the board of the Greater St. Louis Cancer Association.

SCHOOL OF NURSING

Dr. Susan A. Klepper (GRAD A&S '59)

Klepper retired as a pediatric physical therapist with more than 30 years of experience working with children in school systems, early intervention and home care. Her research focuses on physical activity, fitness and the effects of exercise in children with rheumatic diseases.

COLLEGE FOR PUBLIC HEALTH AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Larry Cheng-Chih Chang (GRAD '89)

Chang is a senior advisor of Taipeh Bethel Health Management Hospital of Taipei Wellness Clinic and Kaiser. A longtime senior executive in Taiwan, he has taken the lead in facilitating scholarly activities for alumni in the area.

SCHOOL OF PROFESSIONAL STUDIES

Dr. Anna G. Perry (Med '70)

Perry is professor emerita of primary care and health systems nursing at Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville. Previously, she was a professor in the SLU School of Nursing, where she developed several specialized programs. Perry also co-authored Fundamentals of Nursing, the most used nursing education.

INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY

Joseph F. Steuerer Jr. (GRAD A&S '64)

Steuerer is the CEO of Jasper Operations Co. He is active in community service agencies and is a member of the board of Memorial Hospital in Jasper, Indiana, serving as the board chairman. He also is a member of the Dubois County Museum, Crisis Connection and Friends of the Arts.

DONNY COLLEGE OF HEALTH SCIENCE

Dr. Susan A. Kipper (GRAD '80)

Kipper retired as a pediatric physical therapist with more than 30 years of experience working with children in school systems, early intervention and home care. Her research focuses on physical activity, fitness and the effects of exercise in children with rheumatic diseases.

SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

Dr. Peter J. Dempsey (GRAD '64)

Dempsey is a radiologist and a professor in the Department of Diagnostic Radiology at the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center in Houston. He is currently the medical director for the Anderson Physicians Network since 2013. Dempsey also has taught and authored more than 70 publications.

SAVE THE DATE

2017 Alumni Merit Recognition Ceremony

THURSDAY, OCT. 20

Saint Louis University will honor distinguished graduates and recognize outstanding alumni and acknowledge their success during the 2017 Alumni Merit Recognition Ceremony on Thursday, Oct. 20. Registration for the ceremony will be available in early summer.
Volunteer with SLU Alumni
The Office of Alumni and Donor Engagement offers a variety of volunteer opportunities to alumni around the country. From assisting regional clubs, to volunteering with reunion planning, to helping with development initiatives, there are so many ways to remain connected, by sharing your time and talent.

For a full list of opportunities, visit our online volunteer interest form.

VOLUNTEER INTEREST FORM:

ALUMNI.SLU.EDU/WCEVENTS

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN LOUISIANA

ALUMNI.SLU.EDU/PUBLISH17

Translate our Mission and Jesuit Values into Action

For a full listing of upcoming events, please visit alumni.slu.edu/events.

WWW.SLU.EDU
Alumni Become Jesuit Volunteers

Twelve SLU alums volunteered on a year of full-time service with the Jesuit Volunteer Corps and its sister organizations, JVC Northwest. As Jesuit volunteers, they live simply and work for social change in a spiritually supportive community. Here are the volunteers and their assignments.

Kelsey Arnold (A&S '16) is a Catholic Family and Child Services volunteer in Yakima, Washington. Erin Cunningham (GRAD COOK) is a Jesuit Volunteer in Palermo, Italy. Ellen Corey (GRAD COOK) is a volunteer at St. Andrew's Catholic School in Portland, Oregon. Jess Foley (A&S '12) is a New Avenues for Youth volunteer in Portland, Oregon. Catherine Lawrence (GRAD A&S) is a West Side Catholic Center volunteer in Chicago, Illinois. Sarah Love (GRAD A&S) is a Neighborhood Service Organization (Detroit) volunteer in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Kara Murray (GRAD A&S) is a volunteer at Zach Goodman Youth Center in Jaxvilles, Alabama. Tim Pazderka (LAW) is a volunteer at Volunteers of America, Portland, Oregon. Catherine Shorter (GRAD A&S) is a Providence Hood River Memorial Hospital volunteer in Hood River, Oregon. Taal Trujillo (GRAD A&S) is a Vietnam Veterans Defense Council volunteer in San Francisco. Sophie Varrus (GRAD A&S) is a Catholic Charities of Yakima (Wenatchee, Oregon) volunteer.

Alumni Spotlight

Mark Peterson

I t was freezing cold as Mark Peterson (A&S ’86) and his brother waited outside Kiel Auditorium to get autographs from members of Chic’s Cora’s band. They met legendary bassist Stanley Clarke, who asked Peterson when he had performed.

“I played drums for seven years but had recently picked up the electric bass,” Peterson recalled. “He told me to write him when I got an acoustic bass.”

Within months, Peterson had one. He wrote Clarke, who sent him through the mail for the next few years.

“What a tremendous gift,” Peterson said. The gift would pay off, but not quite yet. After Peterson completed the pre-med program at Saint Louis University, he began a master’s program in psychology. Music remained a hobby, not a career path.

Then, Peterson developed ulcers.

“In the emergency room, the doctor asked me what I was doing to get ulcers at such a young age,” Peterson said. “I told him I was going to school, playing in a band and working as a waiter. He asked me why I was killing myself, and I thought, that’s a good question.”

At about the same time, Peterson’s close friend was diagnosed with terminal cancer. “One of the last things he said to me was, ‘Just be happy,” Peterson said. “I decided to leave grad school and see whether I could make a living doing what I loved, playing the bass.”

At 22, Peterson began playing in bands on cruise ships. After six months, he moved to New York. He didn’t want to play in jazz clubs and instead found a new career as a booking agent for A-listers such as John Capri, Jackson, Shakira, Mavis Staples, Lyle Lovett, Rick Springfield and Shania Twain. He played bass on Casandra Wilson’s Grammy Award-winning CD, New Moon Daughter. He also played with the late Chuck Berry.

Finally, Peterson quit his day job.

In 2001, John Bazz’s manager asked Peterson to join their tour. He flew to Amsterdam and spent several days getting to know Bazz before auditioning. He toured with her for the next seven years.

Peterson also played for Broadway musicals and on The Tonight Show (the Johnny Carson and Jay Leno versions) and Sesame Street. Working with guitarists/Grammy Award winner Vernon Reid, Peterson arranged, co-wrote and recorded the score for the movie Mr. 3000 and for several documentary films, including the critically acclaimed Free Angela.

This year Peterson is guest conducting Cirque du Soleil’s Michael Jackson: The Immortal World Tour, which starts in Malaysia and ends in Germany.

Peterson credits his parents and his SLU education for contributing to his success.

“My first day in philosophy class, the professor told us to look around the room. He told us that as diverse as we were, we had one thing in common: ‘We were one day closer to death,” Peterson said. “His point was that we need to do everything we can to achieve the life we want. That idea has guided me throughout my life and my career.” — By Marie Dilg
This list of deceased alumni was compiled by SLU’s office of research and development services. If you have a question or would like more information about an “In Memoriam” listing, please send an email message to dev releasenotes@slu.edu.
When Busch Memorial Center was dedicated 50 years ago, the Saint Louis University alumni magazine called the building "the greatest single addition to the campus east of Grand."

The student center project attracted the attention of no less than the president of the United States. Just months after Lyndon Johnson took office, he visited campus for the center's groundbreaking ceremony, fulfilling a promise his predecessor, President John F. Kennedy, made to SLU President Paul C. Reinert, S.J.

A quick lunch and a haircut? Textbooks and cigarettes? Custom bowling balls? Busch Memorial Center offered it all.

A substantial gift from brewery heir and University trustee August A. Busch Jr. went toward the building’s initial $3,250,000 price tag. The 2003 update cost about seven times as much and added more than 50,000 square feet of space. The original eight bowling lanes didn’t survive the 2003 expansion.

The University changed the name to Busch Student Center to recognize students' commitment to the project: In April 2001, students voted to pay an annual fee for the facility's renovation.
This year, Med Reunion has been combined with Homecoming and Family Weekend and with SLU’s bicentennial celebration kickoff. Mark your calendars and join your classmates back on campus to reconnect, meet the new School of Medicine dean and visit with current students.

SLU.EDU/MEDREUNION

SLU also hopes to expand the reunion program. If your class year ends in a 2 or 7 and you would like to celebrate with your fellow Billikens, please visit slu.edu/reunion to learn more.