



*The issue of*  
**THE CHANGING  
FACE OF WOMEN  
IN MEDICINE  
AND SCIENCE**

# GRAND ROUNDS



**SAINT LOUIS  
UNIVERSITY.**

Saint Louis University School of Medicine

**FALL 2021**

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## A DEVOTION TO DISCOVERY. A PASSION FOR TRUTH. AN UNWAVERING DEDICATION TO THE FUTURE OF HUMANITY.

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From researchers and physicians to scientists and provosts, women are pioneering the future of medicine in St. Louis and beyond. These individuals have not only embodied inimitable leadership by bridging communities of like-minded women—but they've ceaselessly pursued a quest for knowledge, understanding, and scientific truth.

For far too long, female physicians and scientists have faced unique obstacles—opportunity gaps, a significant

lack of female mentorship and role models, and a dearth of funding. But women at the SLU School of Medicine are eroding these inequities by starting inclusive organizations, mentoring young women in their labs and practices, prompting powerful discussions about women in science, and ultimately establishing an empowering community for the next generation of scientists—and for the greater good of our humanity as a whole.

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## POWERFUL WOMEN. CHANGE. LEGACY.

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IN *GRAND ROUNDS*, WE PAY HOMAGE TO A FEW OF THE POWERFUL WOMEN WHO HAVE CREATED LASTING CHANGE AT THE SCHOOL OF MEDICINE. WE ACKNOWLEDGE THAT THERE ARE MANY MORE WOMEN OMITTED THAN INCLUDED—A TESTAMENT TO THE GROWING LEGACY OF WOMEN IN SCIENCE AND MEDICINE AT SLU.



SAINT LOUIS  
UNIVERSITY.  
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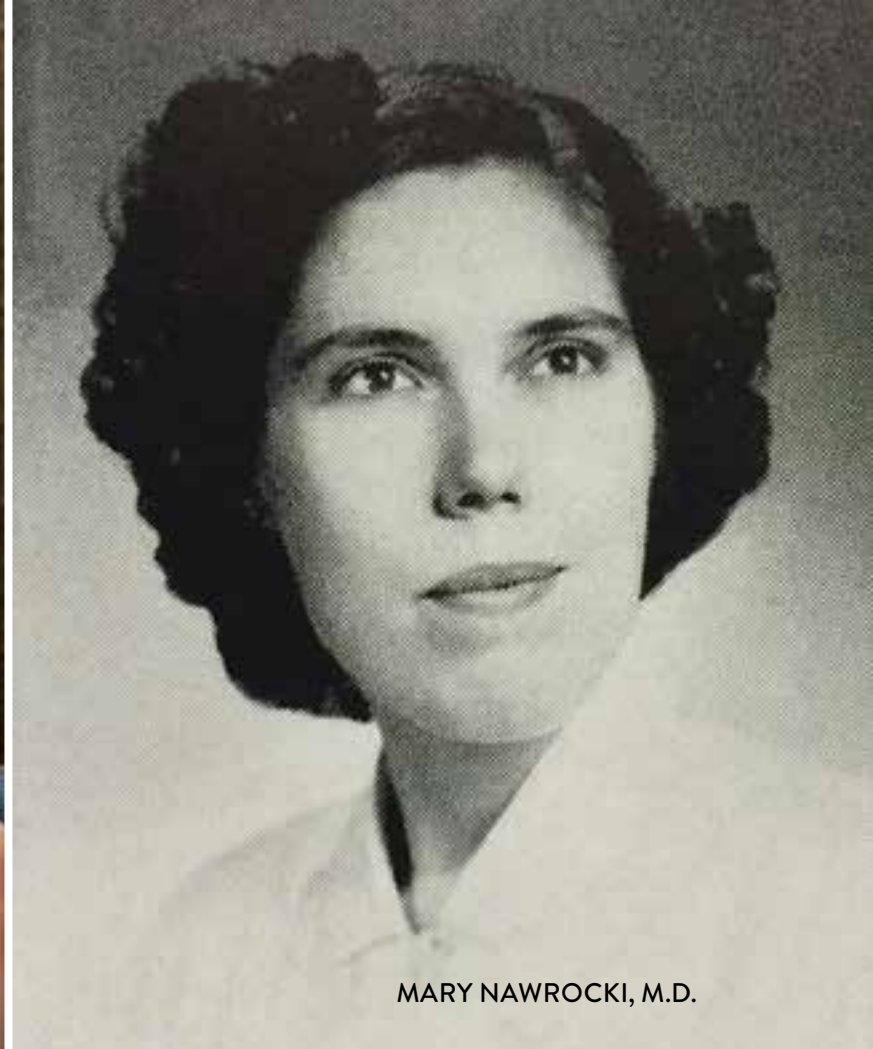
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PATRICIA MONTELEONE, M.D.



# MAKING HISTORY

## MEET THE PIONEERS WHO PAVED THE WAY FOR THE NEXT GENERATION OF WOMEN IN MEDICINE AND SCIENCE AT SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY

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CONTRIBUTIONS BY FEMALE RESEARCHERS, PHYSICIANS, AND SCIENTISTS AT THE SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE HAVE CHANGED THE FUTURE OF MEDICINE, AND OPENED NEW DOORS FOR WOMEN. AT SLU, WOMEN HAVE LED THE CHARGE IN A MULTITUDE OF WAYS—PROVIDING POWERFUL LEADERSHIP, BREAKING DOWN DECADES-OLD BARRIERS, MENTORING FUTURE SCIENTISTS, AND RE-ENVISIONING THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN SCIENCE AND MEDICINE.

THEIR STORIES BEGIN WITH A COMMON THREAD. A PASSION FOR HELPING OTHERS. CURIOSITY ABOUT THE WORLD AROUND THEM. A DEVOTION TO SCIENCE AND DISCOVERY. AND THE KNOWLEDGE THERE WAS WORK TO BE DONE, NO TIME TO WASTE, AND THEY WERE THE PEOPLE TO DO IT.

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**CHRISTINE JACOBS,  
M.D., F.A.A.F.P.**

Improving equity and access to health care while training the next generation of physicians has been a lifelong passion for Christine Jacobs, M.D., F.A.A.F.P., interim vice

president of medical affairs and interim dean of the Saint Louis University School of Medicine. Since joining SLU in 2008, Dr. Jacobs has been instrumental in developing new programs, training new physicians, and leading the medical community in St. Louis and beyond.

Originally from California, Dr. Jacobs spent formative time in her early career in Appalachia, rural Illinois, and Africa, providing medical services for rural and underserved communities. “I’ve always had a commitment to improving access to health care,” she says. But melding that interest with her passion for teaching, she and her husband moved to Chicago, where she spent over two decades in academic family medicine.

Dr. Jacobs eventually moved to St. Louis for her husband’s position at Washington University in St. Louis. “I was very attached to Chicago,” Dr. Jacobs says. “My patients were attached, my residents were attached. It was really a hard move.” But once Dr. Jacobs made the leap to St. Louis, she began to see she could make a tremendous difference. “One thing I love about SLU and St. Louis is the fact that you can accomplish a lot here,” she says. “Our community, our challenges, and our problems are right out in front of us. Because we’re a smaller place, you can actually do something about it. That’s been very appealing to me.”

Propelled by this ability to enact meaningful change, Dr. Jacobs’ contributions to SLU are immense. In 2011, she served as the founding program director of the SLU Family Medicine Residency and was awarded two HRSA grants. Her first program, the Longitudinal Underserved Community Curriculum, was designed to train family medicine residents to care for different populations in the greater St. Louis

community—while simultaneously studying core challenges, such as addiction, child abuse, senior safety, and more.

“When you’re a doctor and you walk in the room with a patient, there’s a lot of performance pressure,” Dr. Jacobs says. “You need to be thinking, you need to get the diagnosis, you need to get the treatment. If we give residents time to experience and study these issues outside of the exam room, they can open up their minds and learn about them in different ways.”

Dr. Jacobs’ second initiative was the Family Medicine Behavioral Health Collaborative Curriculum, which offered training to family doctors in tandem with medical family therapists. “I’ve always been interested in the intersection between behavioral health and physical health—this program trains the two types of providers side by side,” she says.

Dr. Jacobs became chair of the Department of Family and Community Medicine in 2017, where she established a new academic track for medical students at SLU—the Urban Community Health track. “For four years, students are paired up with someone in underserved medicine,” Dr. Jacobs explains. “The goal is to give them that extra passion about working with an urban population.”

St. Louis, in particular, has its own unique set of challenges when it comes to the intersection of equity and health care. “COVID has shone a light on issues that have been percolating in our community for so long,” Dr. Jacobs says. “For example, in St. Louis, the fear of health care in the Black community exists because we’ve done such a bad job in the past. COVID has resulted in disproportionate death rates in the Black community and now disproportionately low immunization because of a quite justified lack of trust.”

As interim dean, Dr. Jacobs sees her role as advancing SLU’s excellence in patient care, education and research through collaboration across the School of Medicine, Saint Louis University, and beyond. When she reflects on her work at SLU, she’s proud of what she’s achieved thus far. “SLU is a place where you can have big ideas. We’re very committed to the community and we excel in that. To me, pursuing academic medicine at SLU is the pursuit of truth and scientific inquiry—while at the same time caring for our community. It’s a wonderful place to be.”





### MARY NAWROCKI, M.D.

Mary Nawrocki, M.D., now 97, has paved the way for future generations of women doctors in St. Louis and beyond. In 1948, she was the first woman to enter the Saint Louis University School of Medicine—and

would later become the first woman inducted into the Alpha Omega Alpha Medical Honor Society. Since those milestones, Dr. Nawrocki pursued a decades-long career specializing in rehabilitation medicine in her adopted state of Pennsylvania, serving as a role model and icon for other female physicians and scientists.

“As an undergraduate at SLU, I was into the sciences and in those days, my classes were held in the medical school building,” Dr. Nawrocki remembers. “So I spent most afternoons there and I felt at home.” Beyond breaking barriers for women, Dr. Nawrocki witnessed history in real time for Black students on February 11, 1944. “I happened to be in the congregation on the day when Fr. Claude Heithaus made his famous homily, insisting that Black students be admitted to the university,” she remembers. “That was a big deal. That was a highlight.” His words led to the first integration of a university in a former slave-holding state in the same year.

After finishing her undergraduate degree in 1945, Mary Nawrocki worked in Anheuser-Busch’s yeast plant laboratory for a year. “At that time, one of my professors came back to the biochemistry department from the service,” she says. “I thought, ‘Well, I’ll go to graduate school and work in his lab’. But one day, another colleague who worked in the lab said to me, ‘I have a secret. [The School of Medicine is] going to start admitting women. Why don’t you apply?’”

Dr. Nawrocki jumped at the opportunity and was accepted—along with Catherine Carrol, a graduate assistant in bacteriology who would graduate one year later. One of Dr. Nawrocki’s favorite memories was during her gross anatomy lab. “Catherine and I were assigned to one of the cadavers,” she remembers. “And the people in charge gave

us the biggest, heaviest cadaver—but it was a wonderful specimen because it had wonderful muscle development. They thought they were playing a joke by giving us something heavy—but we did better.”

After her historic accomplishment of graduating from the SLU School of Medicine in 1952 as the first woman, Dr. Nawrocki accepted an internship at Philadelphia General Hospital, one of the oldest hospitals in the country at the time. 1952 was also the first time graduates were matched by computer with their internships. “Rehabilitation medicine was a very new specialty in those days,” she says. “It had its impetus in World War II.”

Dr. Nawrocki worked at Philadelphia General Hospital for three more years—until she married in July of 1957 and moved to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She would go on to have five children within six years, prompting her to take some time off from her career. “The oldest was born in 1958 and the youngest was born in 1964.”

One day, Dr. Nawrocki received a phone call from the medical director of the Harmorville Rehabilitation Center who asked if she’d be interested in substituting for doctors on vacation. She said yes—and that temporary position eventually turned into a full-time role. “Gradually, I worked there more and more,” she says. “I spent 27 years of my career at Harmorville Research Center.”

As she looks back on the evolution of medicine, Dr. Nawrocki is amazed at the many advancements. “It’s almost as if I went to school in the middle ages. I can’t even begin to tell you how much has changed in the way of medications and procedures and so forth,” she says. “People ask me if any of my children went into medicine and I say, ‘Thank goodness, no.’ By the time I was finishing med school, tuition had gone up to \$900 dollars a year.”

For women in medicine, Dr. Nawrocki notes an increasing number of female doctors and researchers—but she still remembers that being the lone female in her class was met with mutual respect from her colleagues, many of whom were veterans of World War II attending on the GI Bill. “The boys were very respectful and very supportive,” she says. “I always thought of all the boys in the classes as the brothers I never had.” As for her journey—she feels lucky. “I happened to always be in the right place at the right time.”



### **SUSAN HEANEY, M.D.**

Growing up on a reservation in rural Nebraska, Susan Heaney, M.D., never imagined a career in academic medicine. In fact, her pathway to medicine started with apprehension. “I thought by going to

medical school, I couldn’t get married or have children,” she says. “My mother cried when I told her I was getting married because she thought it meant I wouldn’t be a doctor.”

But after graduating from medical school at Creighton University—and having three children of her own—Dr. Heaney not only moved up the ranks in general pediatrics, but also played a vital role in the St. Louis medical community. Beginning with a public health scholarship which required a three-year commitment to “serving the underserved,” Dr. Heaney has taken on a plethora of roles: chair of the Faculty Affairs Committee, vice president of medical affairs at Cardinal Glennon Children’s Hospital, and her current role as director of the Division of General Academic Pediatrics and professor at the SLU School of Medicine.

Between Dr. Heaney’s breadth of experience in medicine and her involvement with Women in Medicine and Science, she’s observed meaningful progress around equity in the workplace. “When I started my residency, pediatrics, as it is now, was a lot of women,” she says. “But we now have more women who are surgeons and in leadership. There are many more opportunities open to women,” she says.

Dr. Heaney worries many of the positive steps forward for women, however, have been reversed due to the impact of COVID-19. “The burden of providing childcare and education at home has fallen more on women,” Dr. Heaney says. “There’s this pause in the academic careers [of women] in terms of the things they’re trying to do.”

To effectively aid women with this balance, developing a strong support system is essential. Dr. Heaney credits SLU for

providing faculty members with the assistance and mentorship necessary to pursue their interests. “Several chairs and deans have supported what I wanted to do and how I wanted to improve,” she says. “It’s not just women mentoring women, it’s men supporting women, and vice versa.”

Since joining SLU, Dr. Heaney has found more than a wonderful group of fellow pediatricians, researchers, and scientists; she’s also discovered a deep connection to the university’s Jesuit values and SLU’s commitment to giving back. “It’s my motivation,” she says. “I’m not motivated by making a lot of money. By serving and by helping people, it makes you a better person and it makes the community a better community.”

### **PATRICIA L. MONTELEONE, M.D.**

From the day she decided to go to college, Patricia L. Monteleone, M.D., has been a pioneer, and as a medical student in the 1950s, she was one of very few women in medicine. When appointed dean of the SLU School of Medicine in 1994, she was one of the first women deans in the nation. Now

at 86 years old, Dr. Monteleone reflects on a powerful career guided by an unwavering love for science and service.

Growing up in East St. Louis, Illinois, Dr. Monteleone recalls discovering a newspaper article about the intersections of science and medicine. Her interest in becoming a doctor was piqued—but as a student at an all-girls Catholic high school, the path to college wasn’t easy. “Women weren’t encouraged to go to college,” she says. “It wasn’t anybody’s fault. That’s the way the world was. Most women got married between 19 and 23, and they weren’t encouraged by their parents or teachers to go to college. So, they didn’t pursue it, and it was their choice.”





Dr. Monteleone's family, however, took a different path. "My parents encouraged me very much to go to college and become anything I wanted to be," she says. "My dad said, 'You can go anywhere you want, but I want you to go to a Catholic college.'" And Dr. Monteleone's parents weren't the only ones—her principal at the time called her into the office and asked if she'd considered applying to college. "The principal was hoping I would major in English and come back to teach at the academy," she remembers. "I said, 'Well, I am more interested in becoming a physician.'"

Dr. Monteleone began her undergraduate program at SLU in 1953, a unique time to be a college student. "When the servicemen came back from the war, they had the GI Bill of Rights and many went to college," she says. "Lots of men suddenly entered colleges, and SLU didn't have enough classrooms." Due to the lack of space, many of Dr. Monteleone's classes were held in Quonset huts placed on SLU's campus.

After finishing undergrad, Dr. Monteleone stayed at SLU for her medical degree: "It was unusual for a woman medical student to be walking around the medical school. My classmates were wonderful. They were very encouraging and welcoming to me." Even though Dr. Monteleone was undoubtedly groundbreaking, she never thought of herself differently from her male counterparts. "I just thought of myself as a medical student, a pediatrician, or a dean," she says. "I didn't put an adjective in front."

As a pediatrician with a specialty in medical genetics, she spent her career in academic medicine. First as a clinician, teacher, and researcher for 25 years, then later as a medical administrator. In 1986 she was appointed Vice President for Medical Affairs at Cardinal Glennon Children's Hospital. "I quickly realized that I needed further education in the business and finance of health care administration to understand the multitude of changes that were rapidly occurring in medicine. So, I matriculated in the M.B.A. and M.H.A. graduate programs at SLU, primarily attending classes in the evenings for four and a half years. I received both degrees in 1993," she says. Concurrent to her evening classes, Dr. Monteleone was also asked to lead the SLU Department of Pediatrics as interim chair from 1990 to 1993.

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**“ I JUST THOUGHT OF MYSELF AS A MEDICAL STUDENT, A PEDIATRICIAN, OR A DEAN. I DIDN'T PUT AN ADJECTIVE IN FRONT. ”**

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**—PATRICIA L. MONTELEONE, M.D.**

New challenges arose when she was appointed associate dean for Graduate Medical Education and Veterans Affairs in 1993, followed by her appointment in 1994 as the dean of Saint Louis University School of Medicine. She served as dean for 14 years, retiring in 2008.

A renewed curriculum for medical students was completed during her tenure, followed by two successful seven-year LCME accreditations. Extramural research funding to the School of Medicine tripled, culminating in the construction of a new \$82 million, state-of-the-art research building. Additionally, the 14 clinical department practices of the SLU faculty were organized into one practice entity, *SLUCare*. The funding for 10 new endowed chairs in the School of Medicine was obtained from benefactors of the University and the chairs were bestowed on distinguished faculty nationally recruited. "One of my greatest thrills as dean was to watch a medical student or young faculty member evolve into a knowledgeable, caring clinician, superb researcher, or great teacher," she says. "The importance of a knowledgeable and effective administrative staff in a School of Medicine cannot be understated. We were so fortunate to have a hardworking team and the support and leadership of Reverend Lawrence Biondi, then-president of Saint Louis University, during my tenure as dean. Many goals we accomplished could not have been done without the leadership of the University President."

Dr. Monteleone's impact at SLU is tangible. From her work studying pediatrics and cytogenetics to her adept leadership as the dean, Dr. Monteleone was instrumental in advancing the SLU School of Medicine—and the future of medicine for students, basic scientists, and physicians alike. Reflecting on her accomplishments, Dr. Monteleone's career was truly a labor of love: "I loved it. I loved biology. I loved medicine. I loved SLU. I loved it all."

# STRIVING FOR A MORE EQUITABLE FUTURE

IN RECENT YEARS, ADVANCING EQUITY AND JUSTICE IN THE SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE HAS BEEN A GROWING PRIORITY. TWO WOMEN IN PARTICULAR ARE LEADING THE CHARGE—KATIE HEIDEN-ROOTES, PH.D., AND RITIKA JAIN, A SECOND-YEAR MEDICAL STUDENT AT SLU. BY ENACTING STRUCTURAL CHANGE AND CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPORTANT DIALOGUE, NEW SPACES ARE EMERGING FOR WOMEN AND UNDERREPRESENTED INDIVIDUALS TO FIND SUPPORT THROUGH MENTORSHIP AND CAMARADERIE.

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*Katie Heiden-Rootes, Ph.D.*

## REIMAGINING EQUITY AND JUSTICE AT SLU

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Katie Heiden-Rootes, Ph.D., serves the Saint Louis University School of Medicine community through three vital roles: associate professor in the Medical Family Therapy Program, director of clinical services at the Center for Counseling and Family Therapy, and faculty fellow for equity issues in the Office of the Provost.

As a Licensed Marital & Family Therapist (LMFT), Dr. Heiden-Rootes brings a unique perspective to issues of equity and justice, both in and out of the academic realm. Since starting at SLU in 2015 as assistant professor, Dr. Heiden-Rootes has advocated for diversity, equity, and inclusion to take a larger stage at SLU. Along with Dr. Denise Hooks-Anderson, M.D., she started the first departmental Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee in the School of Medicine. “Given SLU’s mission, it seemed like so much of SLU was focused on serving the community—but they weren’t taking care of themselves in the same regard,” she says.

In January 2021, Dr. Heiden-Rootes was announced as the faculty fellow for equity issues in the Office of Provost, a role that allows her to encourage the university to “look in the mirror” and prioritize long-term changes. “This is my next point of intervention,” she shares. “I’m not interested in just healing—although

healing is also needed—but I’m interested in prevention work and structural changes where we can end the inequity, not just fix the back end of it.”

As Dr. Heiden-Rootes progresses in her role, she’s increasingly aware of aligning the university’s actions with their values. “There’s often a disconnect in academic settings between the thing you want to do and what makes the university look good and get high rankings,” she says. “The pursuit of truth is one of the really uncomfortable parts about DEI work. We have to face what’s actually happening as opposed to what we wish was happening.”

This search for truth and dedication to service is also present in Dr. Heiden-Rootes’ own therapy practice and her role as director of the Center of Counseling and Family Therapy in St. Louis. “We serve a lot of local folks in St. Louis City, Midtown, and St. Louis County. We serve about 50 percent people of color, mostly low income. Many of them don’t have health insurance,” she says. As director, Dr. Heiden-Rootes manages policies and oversees the entire operation—but the majority of the day-to-day work is performed by graduate students. The Center of Counseling and Family Therapy also includes The Aging and Memory Clinic, run by Max Zubatsky, and the Family Clinic for Queer and Trans Youth, run by Dr. Heiden-Rootes.



As Dr. Heiden-Rootes's career revolves around deepening SLU's equity and justice initiatives, she considers SLU's mission—and its impact on the greater St. Louis community. "When I think about equity, I think about health. If I have a healthy village or community, I will thrive. I will be well. Service to humanity includes us," she says. "We are the humanity. Our faculty from underrepresented and marginalized communities are our humanity. We are not saviors, we are people. We get so focused on being the givers, we forget that we need to receive and be part of the change."

## STUDENTS SEEKING CHANGE

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For Ritika Jain, a second-year medical student, women's and equity organizations are a key part of her experience at SLU thus far. A natural leader, Jain is involved with the Student National Medical Association, the American Medical Women's Association, and the SLU School of Medicine Orientation Committee. After completing her undergraduate degree with majors in molecular and cellular biology and psychology at the University of Illinois, Jain went directly to medical school. "I really resonated with SLU's mission and their emphasis on mental health," she says.

As a member of the Student National Medical Association (SNMA), an association for underrepresented minorities in medicine, Jain leads community service outreach projects. "I look to community organizations to see where we, as students, can help and give back," she says. Initiatives include gardening and maintenance at local shelters, donating items, and hosting health advocacy events. "We discuss the benefits of health screenings, why taking care of your health is important, and perform free blood pressure screenings for members of the community," Jain explains. "We're also working on a project called Fun Fitness Fridays, where we go to local elementary schools and teach students about health, wellness, fitness, and mental health, all while engaging in an opportunity for mentorship."

When Jain isn't giving back to her St. Louis community, she can be found collaborating with three other female medical students as part of the American Medical Women's Association (AMWA). "The goal of our organization is to create mentorship and a safe space for any women-identifying individuals in our school," Jain says. "I think one of the biggest things that comes out of it is mentorship and shared experiences with other women in medicine." Through partnership with the Women in Medicine Society (WIMS), the two organizations work in tandem to offer mentor groups, panels, and important dialogues about women in medicine.

"We recently had a panel with female physicians who spoke about their path to medicine and how the role of women has changed and become more prevalent in recent years," Jain recalls. "We also talked about challenges and struggles—because as much as we like to think that women are equal to their male counterparts in medicine, that's still not exactly true. Women face many obstacles that many men don't encounter on their journey in medicine."

As Jain prepares to start clinicals in March of 2022, she's gearing up for her own new challenge. And although she's keeping her options open in terms of what kind of medicine she hopes to practice in the coming years, she's focused on making SLU a better place for incoming students—particularly women and underrepresented minorities. As a member of the Orientation Committee, she's excited to welcome the incoming class at SLU School of Medicine with open arms. "I really like connecting with the classes that come after me," she says. "I enjoy guiding younger students through the processes that I went through. I remember being in those shoes and being overwhelmed, nervous, and confused. I'm so grateful for the people that have helped me thus far, and this truly emphasized the importance of collaboration in the career of medicine."



*Ritika Jain, a second-year medical student*





# CHASING TRUTH FOR A STRONGER FUTURE

AT SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY, SCIENTISTS OF ALL DISCIPLINES INVESTIGATE THE MOST COMPLEX RESEARCH QUESTIONS IN THE PURSUIT OF TRUTH. MEET THE WOMEN UNITED UNDER A SHARED QUEST FOR DEEPER UNDERSTANDING—AND LEARN MORE ABOUT THEIR GROUND-BREAKING RESEARCH, INSIGHTS, AND CHALLENGES.

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BARBARA WHITMAN, PH.D.

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# MAKING CONNECTIONS THROUGH INNOVATIVE IDEAS

Dr. Barbara Whitman's 40-year-long career can be described in a few phrases: Find your passion, act on it, and use your voice. As professor of pediatrics and assistant dean of graduate medical education, Dr. Whitman started her career in family therapy and psychiatric epidemiology. But when she met a woman with a child who had Prader-Willi syndrome, the trajectory of her career changed forever.

From that moment, Dr. Whitman devoted much of her research to studying Prader-Willi, an extremely rare syndrome which causes the affected individual to never feel full. "They literally can eat themselves to death in the sense they can weigh 500–600 pounds if not properly cared for and with limited access to food," Dr. Whitman says. The syndrome is immensely difficult on families as well: "It's making sure the fridges are locked, there's no food out, there's no upsetting the child who literally wants to eat all the time. It changes the dynamics of a family."

Alongside her own research, Dr. Whitman serves as an assistant dean and is responsible for organizing faculty development programs. Soon, she hopes to initiate programming around gaming as a tool for medical teaching. "The gaming industry is flourishing," Dr. Whitman shares. "It highlighted the gap between our faculty and our trainees and their ability to communicate with and embrace the digital world." As she witnessed students armed with a sophisticated digital knowledge, Dr. Whitman felt inspired to investigate a new initiative—reverse mentorship—a program that pairs senior leaders

with younger scientists. Although the program is still in its early phases, Dr. Whitman is excited about the possibility of teamwork and collaboration between faculty and students in the coming years.

Dr. Whitman also keeps her doors open for any student in need of answers or support as they navigate the complexities of a career in science. "Medicine is a narrow world," she says. "If you partner with another medical person, you're remaining in a very narrow world. You need to broaden your outside life more. You need to have hobbies. You need to have an outlet for your creativity, which you won't often have in your medical job."

As she reflects on her 40 years in medicine, Dr. Whitman brings a broad perspective on how the industry has changed—particularly for women. "I do think things are better. They've markedly improved in terms of understanding that the intellectual and clinical contributions of women are no different from men," she says. "I have been privileged to work here at SLU. The university and the medical school have allowed me to have an absolutely wonderful career that I would wish for everybody here."



ADRIANA M. MONTAÑO, PH.D.

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# HONORING HER ANCESTORS THROUGH HER RESEARCH



Adriana Montaña, Ph.D., and interim senior associate dean for research in the School of Medicine, has spent the entirety of her career studying orphan diseases—a group of disorders that impact fewer than 200,000 individuals. But for Dr. Montaña, it’s more than just research—her work on Morquio A

syndrome, a rare inherited birth defect that impacts a child’s appearance, organ function, and physical abilities, is personal due to its prevalence in her home country of Colombia. “It’s the largest hub of patients,” Dr. Montaña explains. “Our ancestors and the indigenous people also had the disease. We can see portrayals of it in ceramics and stone carvings.”

After learning about Morquio A syndrome as an undergraduate at the University of Los Andes in Bogotá, Dr. Montaña pursued her Ph.D. in Japan. “At that time, the only place in the world doing research on Morquio A was that specific lab,” she says. “I did a Ph.D. in Medical Sciences with a focus on biochemistry and molecular biology. I learned about clinical features, metabolites, and mutations related to this disease.”

Now 25 years later, Dr. Montaña has been an integral part of the SLU research efforts investigating mucopolysaccharidoses (MPS), a group of genetic lysosomal storage diseases that includes Morquio A syndrome. “We focus on the basic science—trying to understand what this disease is and trying to find biomarkers,” she says. “We do clinical studies to

understand what happens in patients.”

In the early stages of her career as a young scientist, Dr. Montaña found herself without a mentor—and as an established researcher, she hopes to provide solace and support to the women and students in her lab. “I’m trying not to let history repeat itself,” she says. “I think mentorship at any level is very important. We all need mentors in our lives.” Dr. Montaña has also been a part of the Women in Medicine and Science Association at SLU. “I think that program has provided the chance to interact with more women,” she says. “We all go through similar things—we have families and careers, and dreams and difficulties. It’s nice to know that you’re not alone in the journey.”

As a researcher studying a rare disease, Dr. Montaña has carved a unique path for her career—and as she looks back on over two decades of research, she offers prudent advice to those interested in pursuing a similar role. “Just move forward,” she says. “Don’t let the obstacles stop you. You must learn from the difficulties. As women, we often underestimate ourselves—and people think that we are ‘less than.’ Appreciate yourself, value yourself, and value your knowledge.”

To learn more about Morquio A syndrome and other genetic lysosomal storage diseases, visit [mpssociety.org](http://mpssociety.org).

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**“/” I THINK MENTORSHIP AT ANY LEVEL IS VERY IMPORTANT. WE ALL NEED MENTORS IN OUR LIVES.**

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—ADRIANA M. MONTAÑO, PH.D.

## INSPIRED BY THE STARS

As a college senior, Elise Alspach, Ph.D., an assistant professor in the Department of Molecular Microbiology and Immunology, got her first tattoo: the Little Dipper. “When I was young looking up at the stars, I remember that first sense of awe at the universe,” Dr. Alspach says. “I got the tattoo to remind me of that feeling—when you’re looking at something you don’t understand and want to know more about it.”

Since that self-proclaimed act of “childhood rebellion,” Dr. Alspach’s career has been driven by a search for answers; one that was only further accelerated by the death of her mother from lung cancer. “I remember being a young college student who didn’t know much about cancer,” Dr. Alspach says. “When I went to grad school, I wanted to be able to understand more. I wanted to be able to contribute to furthering our knowledge of cancer as a disease and contribute to making better therapies.”

Propelled by this quest for knowledge, Dr. Alspach obtained her B.S. in Cell and Molecular Biology from Bradley University and her Ph.D. in Biology and Biomedical Sciences from Washington University in St. Louis. She joined SLU in May 2020 where her research focuses on cancer immunotherapies. “We’re interested in looking at how the immune system interacts with tumors and can be harnessed as a therapeutic for cancer,” says Dr. Alspach. One therapy in particular is immune checkpoint therapy—a treatment that “sets off an alarm clock in a tumor,” making the immune system aware of the presence of the tumor and start to fight it. While immunotherapies can be life-changing for many patients, there is still work to be done in expanding the success rate: “Only about 20–40 percent of cancer patients have

really good responses to immunotherapies,” Dr. Alspach says. “I’m looking for ways to improve those therapies.”

Dr. Alspach and her team are also researching the distinction in immune response against tumors in males and females, a topic that is largely unexplored. “My lab is interested in looking at the differences in antitumor immune responses, and how that influences eventual tumor development and evolution. We’re doing a lot of modeling of that in mice, and then hopefully moving into patient samples,” she says.

As principal investigator in her lab, Dr. Alspach looks back at her journey and remembers one significant mentor: Dr. Sheila Stewart. “When I was a graduate student, Dr. Stewart’s goal was to help us develop our voices,” says Dr. Alspach. “She was passionate about making her female students into leaders.” Today, Dr. Alspach hopes to provide her female trainees with opportunities for mentorship—while simultaneously contributing to cancer research with the hope of making a difference for future generations. “In a very personal sense, I am motivated to try and do something to make sure that the experiences I had with my mom don’t happen to as many people in the future,” she says. “I see myself giving back to humanity through my work. All I want to do is help people have better lives.”





## RESPONDING TO GLOBAL CRISIS

Amelia Pinto, Ph.D., a viral immunologist and assistant professor in microbiology and immunology, has spent nearly two decades studying emerging infectious diseases—so when the COVID-19 pandemic struck, she jumped in without question, knowing that her work is often dictated by global crises. “When you study emerging infectious disease, you have to be comfortable with being flexible as far as what you’re going to study,” she shares.

After joining SLU in 2018, Dr. Pinto began research on Zika virus in addition to a quick project on SARS. “We set up a lot of systems in the lab in our work with SARS then,” she recalls. “Honestly, I was not thinking even remotely about going back to SARS up until the COVID-19 pandemic. But with my background in emerging infectious diseases, I knew how to adapt quickly, how to publish quickly, and where the impactful work was in what I do.”

For Dr. Pinto, her work is centered on the immune system response to infectious disease with the goal of improving vaccine efficacy. In addition to her work with SARS-CoV-2, she is also involved in researching

two viruses relevant to the health of the greater Missouri community: the Powassan virus and the Heartland virus.

“Missouri is an odd epicenter of tick-borne viruses,” Dr. Pinto says. “Global warming is bringing the tick populations in much,

much larger numbers—and in greater contact with people. We’re seeing pathogens that would have been called an unknown illness now being spread everywhere.” Although the infection rate of these two viruses is still low, Dr. Pinto’s lab is devoted to learning what type of vaccine would be effective in the future. “The grand vision would be a screening of animal populations in an area, identifying the virus in that area, and then preventatively vaccinating an area of people where the virus was identified,” she says.

Despite the unpredictable twists and turns of studying emergent diseases, what surprises Dr. Pinto the most isn’t the ever-changing nature of her field—it’s her unexpected love of teaching. “The way Ph.D. researchers are trained, you’re very selfish to your project because that’s how you keep going—you focus on your work and you work alone,” she says. “But it’s a very myopic vision of how you’re going to be successful. The biggest surprise of my career has been how much I love teaching and my students.”

Dr. Pinto also hopes to provide meaningful mentorship to her students—especially female scientists who may feel alone. “My graduate advisor was female and I think that made a huge difference,” she says. “You’re not always alone or blazing a trail—there are other people who’ve had these same issues who have been successful, and managed to navigate a way through and still hold on to the beliefs they have.” Dr. Pinto also imparts empowering advice to all of her students: “There’s this fear that you must be perfect in order to make it—but you have to be brave, take risks, and ask good questions. It’s okay to fail.”



## EARLY TO THE INTERSECTION OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Maureen Donlin, Ph.D., is no stranger to charting her own path through unfamiliar territory. With early training in biochemistry and enzyme kinetics, Dr. Donlin discovered a passion for data-driven computational work in the mid-1990s—and subsequently carved her own career at Saint Louis University based on her intersecting interests.

When Dr. Donlin and her husband first moved to St. Louis in 1994, Dr. Donlin accepted a job in curriculum development at Washington University in St. Louis—and was first introduced to the emerging world of technology and computers. “I had done nothing in the computational realm at all,” she recalls. “But when I got there, they said, ‘Oh, let’s introduce the use of computers and do some online tutorials.’”

Dr. Donlin jumped in without hesitation. “I taught myself and I took some coursework—like HTML programming, database programming, and learning how to do things on the web,” she says. After her role with Washington University in St. Louis, Dr. Donlin took a position at SLU in the School of Public Health that focused heavily on the connection between programming and healthcare, a new angle that resonated with her background. “I ended up learning how to do database programming and creating database-driven websites,” she says.

Within three years, Dr. William Sly, the chair of Biochemistry at SLU, approached Dr. Donlin about a potential bioinformatics job at SLU—and ever since 2001, she’s been a vital part of the Biochemistry and Molecular Biology department, running a small research lab where she studies the fungal pathogen, *Cryptococcus neoformans*. An environmental pathogen, scientists started seeing it clinically in the 1970s after they began

treating cancer patients with immunosuppressive drugs. “It would grow in the lungs,” says Dr. Donlin, “But it can disseminate to the brain and that’s the problem because it is very difficult to treat.” Her lab’s research is focused on finding new compounds and chemicals that have the potential to create new therapies since current options are only 15–30 percent effective.

In addition to her own research, Dr. Donlin directs the SLU Master’s Program in Bioinformatics and Computational Biology, where she helps oversee recruitment, internships, and equity in the department and beyond. “Even at the graduate level, there’s an underrepresentation of women in computational fields,” she says. “I hope we can recruit more women into that. We’re actually doing pretty well—I think we’re close to 50-50 in our graduating class.”

As Dr. Donlin spends time supporting young women in bioinformatics and computational biology, she’s mindful of a challenge that many women in science face systemically: “Balancing your professional goals with the expectation of women being the primary caregiver—whether it’s to a child or a parent or someone else,” she says. “Most of us were raised to think more about caring for others first before taking care of our needs. But SLU offered me the freedom to really find my own path. I’ve been encouraged and supported in so many ways.”









# A LASTING LEGACY

FOR MARGARET “MOLLY” ROZIER CHEN, M.D., AND HEIDI SALLEE, M.D., A LIFE IN SERVICE CAME NATURALLY. AS THE GRANDDAUGHTERS OF TWO OF THE FOUNDING MEMBERS OF CARDINAL GLENNON CHILDREN’S HOSPITAL, DR. ROZIER CHEN AND DR. SALLEE UNDERSTOOD INNATELY WHAT A CAREER IN MEDICINE MEANT—AND BOTH DECIDED TO FOLLOW IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF THEIR GRANDFATHERS—DEDICATING THEIR LIVES TO SERVING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN THEIR ST. LOUIS COMMUNITY.

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PICTURED LEFT TO RIGHT: “MOLLY” ROZIER CHEN, M.D. AND HEIDI SALLEE, M.D.

## A FAMILY AFFAIR

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Margaret “Molly” Rozier Chen, M.D.’s grandfather, Austin Sharp, M.D., graduated from Saint Louis University School of Medicine in 1950 and joined the original staff at Cardinal Glennon in 1956. “He had great contributions to the foundation and mission of Cardinal Glennon, and he dedicated his life to the health of children and families,” Dr. Rozier Chen says. “But I didn’t know him as a pediatrician growing up. I just knew him as my grandfather.”

When Dr. Rozier Chen was in college, her grandfather passed away—and his death left a profound impact on her, shifting her entire career trajectory. “I met and read letters from all of his former patients and families he took care of,” she says. “It was really special. A whole new side of him was revealed to me, and it was through his death that I began to learn about his life of service. I knew then that I wanted to take care of people, to treat my patients as my own family, the way that he did.”

From that moment onward, Dr. Rozier Chen felt called to pursue a career in medicine and was accepted to the Saint Louis University School of Medicine. I was excited to be walking the same halls that he walked over 50 years before, and often walked by his class photo that was on display outside of the admissions office. I often imagined him giving me a little wink, letting me know that he was proud,” she remembers. Later, when she became a member of the faculty, her grandfather’s presence was still tangible. “On my first day as a faculty member at Cardinal Glennon, I walked into the physician’s lounge and there was his picture again, this time as a tribute to the original staff of the hospital. I saw it as another opportunity for him to be watching over me!”

Dr. Rozier Chen’s connections to the local medical community extend beyond her grandfather—her mother has been a NICU nurse at Cardinal Glennon for nearly 40 years. “She’s the piece between my grandfather and me at Cardinal Glennon,” Dr. Rozier Chen says. “My parents have both been really supportive to me throughout my

life, especially when I was choosing my career path.” As she considered her options in college, Dr. Rozier Chen recalls many people telling her it would be challenging to balance family with a career in medicine—but her parents encouraged her, believing that both were possible.

Dr. Rozier Chen’s reality is now the one she dreamed about, and she’s proud of the example she embodies for her daughter. “I want my daughter to see me engaged in a career that I love, the same way that I was able to watch my mother and grandfather in their careers,” she says. “I want her to find meaning and passion in whatever path she chooses, and I hope that I can be that example for her.”

## CARRYING ON HER GRANDFATHER’S LEGACY

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For Heidi Sallee, M.D., an associate professor in the Department of Pediatrics, becoming a pediatrician offered her new insight into her family’s roots. After growing up in California, Dr. Sallee didn’t personally know her grandfather—Peter G. Danis, M.D., the founder of Cardinal Glennon Children’s Hospital—but becoming a physician allowed her an opportunity to connect with his legacy. “I think in some ways, I know him better as a physician because of hearing my family talk about his role in founding the hospital,” she says. She’s also encountered former patients of her grandfather who have mentioned the impact he had on their families. “Those stories you hear from families when he provided reassurance and caring, I love that side of medicine.”

Since her grandfather’s career, the field of pediatrics has changed dramatically—particularly for women—and Dr. Sallee looks forward to continuing to advocate for a more equitable, compassionate world for female scientists and doctors. She believes that pediatricians can play a unique role in advancing equity. “So many women are entering pediatrics,” she says. “It’s probably about 75 percent. I think pediatrics has been a leader in terms of how to manage family leave. We can be leaders because we’re half a step ahead of other fields of medicine.”

As she contemplates her last few decades in the medical world, Dr. Sallee feels a deep sense of purpose. “To me, this career has definitely always felt like a vocation—that I was being called to do this work. When I finished residency, I worked for five years in East St. Louis at a community health center, and I loved it. When you answer God’s call, you can discern it.”

The SLU School of Medicine has played an enormous role in the lives of both Dr. Sallee and Dr. Rozier Chen—and their families have carved a path forward for the future of pediatrics. “SLU has instilled in both of us a lot of values, including the pursuit of truth for the greater glory of God,” Dr. Sallee shares. “Not only are we walking in our grandfathers’ footsteps, but we’re walking in the footsteps of everybody who came before us.”

## ALUMNI IMPACT

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# CORINNE TAN, M.D.

SLU SCHOOL OF MEDICINE '09

Assistant Professor of Surgery, Cardinal Glennon Children’s Hospital

IN HER ROLE CARING FOR PATIENTS WITH CONGENITAL HEART DEFECTS, CORINNE TAN, M.D., PAYS TRIBUTE TO HER MENTOR, ANDREW FIORE, M.D., HAVING RETIRED THIS SUMMER FROM CARDINAL GLENNON.

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“I returned in November 2020 as pediatric cardiac surgery faculty to work with Drs. Fiore and Huddleston,” says Dr. Tan. “Dr. Fiore was a big influence as to how I ended up going into this field and has been a mentor of mine for many years, since my days as a SLU med student.”

“The best mentorship a female physician may receive may not necessarily be from a fellow female. Dr. Fiore was the first clinical faculty I was exposed to as a first-year medical student and I subsequently rotated on the pediatric cardiac surgery clerkship as a third-year medical student. I’ve been fascinated by the field of congenital heart surgery and Dr. Fiore has continued to counsel and guide me through the 11 years of post-graduate training and now for the last seven months as I began my first attending job. It’s so neat to have come full circle, and be back at Cardinal Glennon where it all started and get to work with and learn from Dr. Fiore before

he retired. Dr. Fiore has dedicated his life to the field and to his patients, yet he understands the importance of family and giving them his best.”



*Corinne Tan, M.D. and  
Andrew Fiore, M.D.*





# ALUMNI IMPACT

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**GRAND ROUNDS TALKS TO THREE WOMEN ALUMNI WHO  
ARE MAKING GREAT STRIDES IN EACH OF THEIR FIELDS**

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# ANNE CHRISTOPHER, M.D.

SLU SCHOOL OF MEDICINE, '94

CEO of St. Louis Pain Consultants, and CEO and Medical Director of MidAmerica Spine Center

## HOW HAS THE SLU MISSION INFORMED YOUR WORK?

I've often thought the Jesuit mission has not just informed my relationship with the patients I treat but also the ways in which I lead my organization. The Jesuit idea of leading and serving for others is a big part of what I took away from my training at SLU.

## WHAT HAS BEEN THE MOST SURPRISING THING ABOUT YOUR CAREER JOURNEY?

In order to advocate for our patients, I have had to learn a great deal about the business of administering healthcare.

## HOW HAS SLU PREPARED YOU TO MEET THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES YOU'VE DISCOVERED THROUGHOUT YOUR CAREER?

There is no doubt that practicing medicine in these times is hard. I've discovered that keeping the passion I have caring for patients front and center despite challenges and obstacles comes from a place of love. First and foremost it's the love for humanity and the patients that seek care and counsel that inspires me to face challenges day in and day out.

## WHAT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES ARE ON THE HORIZON FOR THE FUTURE OF FEMALE PHYSICIANS AND SCIENTISTS?

Women have made huge contributions to science and medicine since the first woman walked across the stage to collect her diploma, but what I have seen increase in the

last decade is that women are finding their voices and are engaging more than ever in leadership roles to advance their fields and bring along other talented women.

## HOW HAVE YOU MENTORED WOMEN THROUGHOUT YOUR CAREER?

I've been lucky enough to teach medical students and residents, but as the mother of four children, my most gratifying mentorship has come in helping young physician mothers balance a busy career with a healthy, happy family.

## WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO WOMEN IN MEDICINE AND SCIENCE TODAY?

I would encourage them to find ways to give back to their field as much as to their individual patients. I would also encourage them to reach out to the women who have gone before them for support and guidance. You don't always have to reinvent the wheel.

## ANYTHING ELSE YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE?

Healthcare is a challenging field no matter what role one plays in it. That is especially true now with the stress COVID-19 has added. Over the last 18 months, I have become increasingly grateful for the education and experience I gained at SLU. Great leaders and great clinicians aren't born. They are made and SLU is the kind of institution that makes sure its graduates have the core skills to become both.



# MAHEEN MALIK, M.D.

FORMER RESIDENT, '91

*Medical director of the award-winning Comprehensive Stroke Center at Mercy Hospital South*

## WHAT IS YOUR BEST MEMORY OF THE SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE?

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The mentors and teachers during my four years of residency. They were very influential in my training and I was lucky to have them.

## WHAT HAS BEEN THE MOST SURPRISING THING ABOUT YOUR CAREER JOURNEY?

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How much I have enjoyed it and continue to do so. I thought it would be a satisfying profession because I was focused on patient care, but it's the cognitive stimulation and camaraderie that has also been very fulfilling.

## HOW HAS SLU PREPARED YOU TO MEET THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES YOU'VE DISCOVERED THROUGHOUT YOUR CAREER?

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The residency is very demanding but the hard work and hours we put in do prepare us and nothing seems difficult after that.

## WHAT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES ARE ON THE HORIZON FOR THE FUTURE OF FEMALE PHYSICIANS AND SCIENTISTS?

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The challenges continue to be: work-life balance, since women continue to be primary caregivers and homemakers, and the struggle to achieve leadership roles and break the glass ceiling in academia and medicine. Opportunities are there because things are changing, and there is perhaps some—early and fragmented—

understanding of the difference women physicians make. Because the field is growing and there are not enough physicians and scientists to do everything, this will open up opportunities by default.

## HOW HAVE YOU MENTORED WOMEN THROUGHOUT YOUR CAREER? HOW HAVE WOMEN BECOME MENTORS TO YOU?

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My main mentor was my mother—a physician herself. I have continued to encourage young women physicians in my work and social life, to hang in there through the first few years which can be very difficult—especially with young children.

## WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE TO WOMEN IN MEDICINE AND SCIENCE TODAY?

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The empathy women physicians provide is exceptional. I encourage women to enter this field and aim high.

## ANYTHING ELSE YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE?

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It has been a very gratifying career and I would do it again without any hesitation. I look forward to many more fulfilling years. The changes happening in medicine are exciting and I expect the future to be bright and perhaps unexpected.





# ANNIE MOOSER, M.D.

FORMER RESIDENT, '20

*Dr. Mooser was one of five Surgical Residency Program Graduates in the first all-female class. Dr. Faidah Badru, Dr. Jennifer Keller, Dr. Jennifer Lobb, Dr. Laura Peck, and Dr. Annie Mooser graduated from the Department of Surgery General Surgery Residency program in 2020.*

## WHERE ARE YOU NOW?

Currently, I'm in the Kingdom of Bahrain. I flew off CVN-76 [USS Ronald Reagan] yesterday after a one-year tour.

## WHAT HAS BEEN THE MOST SURPRISING/INSPIRING THING ABOUT YOUR CAREER JOURNEY SO FAR?

No surprises. The crew of the Reagan and their Air Wing are my new inspiration.

The young men and women on board the USS Ronald Reagan are grinding every day to maintain our maritime efforts as the Navy's only forward-deployed carrier. The resiliency, personal attributes, and backgrounds of the Navy's young enlisted made me want to be the best physician possible for those sailors. The challenges for enlisted sailors at sea during the pandemic and Afghanistan drawdown are immense mentally, logistically, and physically. I am so impressed by their abilities to push on in service of their command and country, and I will take their example as my inspiration in patient care.

## WHAT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES ARE ON THE HORIZON FOR THE FUTURE OF FEMALE PHYSICIANS?

We face the same challenges as our male colleagues: focusing on quality surgical care in the face of an ongoing pandemic and fulfilling our administrative obligations

when most of us probably just want to focus on only the clinical and procedural elements of care. There is no need to emphasize separate challenges based on gender. We are all in an environment where the daily mentality and emphasis should always be on the patient, not how we feel we are perceived or exist within the hospital as females.

## WHEN YOU THINK OF SLU WHAT IS THE ONE WORD OR PHRASE THAT COMES TO MIND?

Si se puede.

## ANYTHING ELSE YOU WOULD LIKE TO SHARE?

Good luck to all SLU students and residents taking on care for a very interesting patient population. Stay strong and keep helping the people of St. Louis, an incredibly violent and economically disadvantaged city that needs doctors who will always do their best for patients and their families. Stay longer to talk to family members, complete care no matter how difficult the circumstances, don't pass off what is yours to own, and keep reading and studying to know what you're doing.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHTS

ON FAITH, DISCOVERY,  
PASSION & CLARITY IN

MEDICINE & SCIENCE



REBECCA CUNNINGHAM, PH.D., M3

## SPOTLIGHT ON FAITH IN MEDICINE AND SCIENCE

“One of the ways I tie faith in my daily life is practicing discernment and trying to understand where God is leading me at this moment,” said Rebecca Cunningham, Ph.D., and current M3 student. “I follow the phrase, *cura personalis* closely, it’s important in the formation of myself as a medical student and as a medical professional treating patients.”

After completing a Ph.D. in Developmental, Regenerative, and Stem Cell Biology at Washington University in St. Louis, Cunningham realized she wanted to work directly with patients. She hopes to one day merge these two careers of serving others in a clinic, taking clinical experiences, and applying them to research informing the treatment of patients.

“A physician at College Church inspired me to pursue medicine; she laid it out as a beautiful and unique career, to heal the human body and take care of someone in a singular way,” said Cunningham. “She is the type of physician that I aspire to be, she is there to care for the whole person and to serve others.” Cunningham said she was drawn to the Saint Louis University School of Medicine Jesuit traditions and Ignatian spirituality.

One way Cunningham implemented *cura personalis* while developing as a medical student was to partner with Ascension Healthcare and their Mandorla programming. Mandorla aims to inspire “spiritually centered leadership and living,” and its mission is to “help people explore internal spiritual resources to serve a larger purpose.”

“It can be hard to develop an identity outside of being a medical student; so, forming your academic and spiritual wellbeing as a student is so important,” said Cunningham.

Mandorla helped create a 30-day meditation program of simple reflection and relaxation for students preparing for their first board exam. “By taking care of my own mental and spiritual wellbeing, I can provide the best care for my patients and my education,” continued Cunningham.

Cunningham said sometimes it’s hard for her to envision her career going forward because she is trying to blend these two distinct careers. But one of the prevalent things she’s learned over the past several years is not to make decisions in a time of desolation. “This is one of the things that comes to me in my spirituality, figuring out times when I am in desolation, especially in medical school, a person can reach some low points, and not reach out for help,” said Cunningham, “but recognizing these times and reaching out to mentors is so important. There is so much to navigate and discuss throughout training. No matter how self-reflective you are, it is good to have an objective person tell you how they see you growing or what areas need improvement.”

Cunningham noted the opportunities she has experienced are because of her support network, in particular her husband. “It is important to acknowledge those people who support you because careers in research and medicine can be consuming,” said Cunningham. “It has been a gift to have a family/life balance and to have a partner or family who is understanding of the sacrifices that have to be made.”





MONICA GOODLAND, M.D./PH.D. STUDENT

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## SPOTLIGHT ON DISCOVERY IN MEDICINE AND SCIENCE

The career of a physician-scientist is unique; few careers compare that allows one to experience the passion of solving a patient's medical issues while pursuing research that may ultimately translate into a clinical cure for the patient's disease.

"I was unprepared for how this process has been as much about scholastic achievement as personal evolution," said Monica Goodland, M.D./Ph.D. student, "but I've found that every challenge helps me understand medicine as my calling rather than my career."

Goodland embraces the Saint Louis University School of Medicine founding principle of *cura personalis*, and this institutional foundation helps her discover ways to meet daily challenges and opportunities. "SLU challenges us to care for the whole person. Instead of hyper-focusing on test results or treatment plans, we consider our patients' beliefs, values, and circumstances in all that we do, which forges a deeper understanding and connection not only with the patient but with medicine as well," said Goodland, "I believe that successful leaders adopt this same type of holistic approach and apply it toward their own lives and careers."

Having discovered every journey is unique and deserves tailored attention, Goodland's advice for those exploring a future in medicine is "whichever path you embark on, embrace the process, and learn from it. You will be challenged, and there will be obstacles, but there is no single way to win, and finally, you will need and deserve support. You are never wrong to ask for that."

Goodland finds inspiration for her journey in women such as Naomi Osaka and Simone Biles, "and every other woman who has prioritized her mental health over productivity/achievement." Goodland notes these women are talented and driven individuals who have experienced success yet have become intimate and familiar with their boundaries and needs. "In a world that anticipates women giving their all until they have nothing left, they dared to keep something for themselves," said Goodland. "I think we can all take a page from their books, especially in fields so plagued by attrition and burnout."

As a founder and executive committee member of SLU Voice for Change, whose mission is to provide a platform for effective dialogue and action available to all students, trainees, faculty, and staff, with particular attention to those belonging in historically excluded groups and anyone isolated within their respective department, Goodland notes, "the future holds an incredible amount of opportunity. As more historically marginalized people enter biomedical sciences, firmly held beliefs and norms are being questioned. The challenge is to maintain this pressure on the system. The opportunity lies in how we confront the past, acknowledge the present, and ultimately rebuild for the future. From day-to-day work procedures up to how and who we perceive to be scientists/physicians--there is the growing opportunity to achieve equitable and just population health by including (and honoring) the key stakeholders—researchers, care providers, and patients—at the table."



ALEJANDRA MALLORGA HERNANDEZ, M4

## SPOTLIGHT ON PASSION IN MEDICINE AND SCIENCE

To pursue a passion is to use your skills to contribute to a cause beyond yourself. For Alejandra Mallorga Hernandez, an M4 student, community outreach to the underserved is a passion she will forever pursue.

As a medical student and previous co-president in the Latino Medical Student Association (LMSA) SLU chapter, Mallorga Hernandez works with underserved Latino communities to find health care gaps. She holds a master's in public health and enjoys using numbers and data to find community health care opportunities and learn more about the people she serves. "As a first-year medical student, I was part of the LMSA e-Board that started a health care screening clinic at St. Cecilia Catholic Church. There is a large immigrant population who attends their service, and many of them only speak Spanish," said Mallorga Hernandez. "This complicates finding and accessing health care resources in various instances."

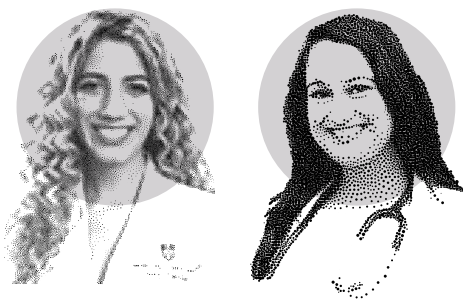
The clinic started as a means of providing blood pressure and glucose screenings but quickly became a reliable source for the local Latino community to connect with valuable resources. That was until COVID halted their efforts, "I am a huge advocate for sustainable initiatives, so having to put an abrupt halt to our clinics due to COVID was absolutely heartbreaking," Mallorga Hernandez mentioned. Although it posed a challenge, since then, LMSA has been able to resume monthly clinics, and while doing so, they have become familiar with the hesitations the Latino community had regarding COVID vaccination.

"There are many myths circulating online from untrustworthy sources, which confuse our patients. As we advance with the health screening clinics, we are working

on creating safe spaces to address any doubts regarding vaccine safety," Mallorga Hernandez stated. Along with St. Cecilia and LMSA leadership, she is currently working with the SLU SOM Office of Student Affairs and the Office of Diversity to organize informational workshops in Spanish and a fully bilingual COVID vaccine clinic at St. Cecilia.

For Mallorga Hernandez, working with underserved communities is crucial in her medical journey and a highlight in her medical student career. She is bilingual and will continue using Spanish to help her community bridge health care gaps. Moreover, she encourages more Latino students to choose a career in medicine. "We are seeing more diverse classes of medical students come in," said Mallorga Hernandez, "but Latinos in medicine are still vastly underrepresented; we make up less than 6% of the physician workforce. My advice for any underrepresented groups in medicine is to join us—we need you. It's been shown again and again that a diverse physician workforce leads to improved patient outcomes."

Mallorga Hernandez cannot count the number of people who have helped her on her path in medicine, and at SLU SOM she has found amazing mentors willing to provide support and guidance. The most important lessons have been those instilled by her father, a neurologist in Peru. "It is because of him I discovered my passion for medicine. After many decades, it is refreshing to observe how he maintains the same excitement for the intricacies of the human brain and the same love for his patients. It's exciting to envision myself just as passionate about medicine and bridging health care disparities in the years to come."



NATALIE YAKOBIAN, M2, AND AYESHA MOHAN, M2

## SPOTLIGHT ON CLARITY IN MEDICINE AND SCIENCE

As a medical student, it is easy to get overwhelmed, lost in the world of studying, and forget to focus on the future as a physician. M1 students participate in a Careers in Medicine event where mentors walk students through a career guidance website that helps with placement in recommended fields to assist with career path direction.

“The class was meant to help clarify, but it made me think about things I had never thought about and fields that had not been on my radar,” said M2 student Ayesha Mohan. She said the class unlocked a need for a deeper dive into her journey to become a physician.

“SLU offers so many resources that we wanted to figure out a road map, per se, through medical school and a pathway to a medical career,” said Natalie Yakobian, a fellow M2 student. Yakobian and Mohan teamed up and developed Physician Pathways, a podcast series featuring one-on-one interactive faculty interviews giving students the ability to learn firsthand through candid conversations and live answered questions about clinical careers.

“It’s important to start networking and reaching out to make connections. Communicating with physicians is a necessary skill; Physician Pathways was designed to make these connections and encourage interactive conversation with faculty in specialties we might not typically have interest in or access to,” said Yakobian.

This platform also brings to light the cultural complexities students will face as doctors that cannot always be taught in the classroom. “For example, we had an LGBT specialist

speak about the challenges in health care and how we can best address the needs of this community, we’ve had specialists talk about substance use abuse and how we should approach that in the clinic,” said Yakobian. “Our podcast guests remind us that no matter our path, our patients are people. We are studying not just to become scientists or doctors, but we are studying to treat people, not just problems.”

Through Physician Pathway interviews, students learn more than just clinical work. “We are learning about balancing a family, prioritizing work and personal life, and talking to prominent physicians who achieve the work/life balance we all desire and, for me, seeing them happy and successful is inspiring,” said Mohan.

Yakobian added, “one of the doctors we’ve interviewed in Physician Pathways, Dr. Jamie Sutherell, mentioned, ‘when you are on your journey through medicine it is really important to be open to different pathways. It is easy to get sucked into what we think we should be doing and close ourselves off to the opportunities around us,’ and he is right; we put together this initiative so students open their mind to different opportunities, so they won’t be afraid to ask questions or get help, so they seek mentorship, and learn to be comfortable talking to and learning from successful physicians.”



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