SLU’S SPRING COMMENCEMENT CEREMONY WAS ESPECIALLY JOYFUL.

Graduates filled the floor of Chaifetz Arena, extending into several rows of overflow seating. Mortarboards were adorned with creative embellishments. Student speaker Zahra Naeem (A&S ’23) eloquently urged her colleagues to “live kindly, love freely and learn adamantly.” And we were brought to collective tears by the powerful address of commencement speaker and Chaifetz School of Business alumnus John O’Leary (’99).

As the graduates joined me in a jubilant shout — they are indeed members of the SLU family FOREVER! — the emotion was as palpable as the confetti and streamers that fell from the rafters. After the ceremony, our newest alumni rejoined their loved ones on the grounds surrounding the arena and lingered in the sunshine of a beautiful spring day. I think I took photos with a line of graduates and families that didn’t slow for a solid hour. It’s possible I have never smiled so much — and every grin was from my heart.

Our end-of-year celebrations condense years of challenge, triumph and transformation into a handful of poignant moments, each dense with meanings and memory. SLU’s 2023 graduates — who navigated some of the most difficult years of any of our lifetimes — earned every exuberant minute of their graduation day.

This issue of Universitas is similarly filled with images and stories that speak to the heart of the SLU experience. Photos that beautifully capture a few of the countless ways that SLU faculty, staff and students live our mission on any given day (page 6). Profiles of students who crossed the globe to make SLU their home (page 15). Stories that illuminate the potential of Jesuit education to create community, expand intellectual horizons, and cultivate wholeness within the confines of a correctional facility (page 18).

As alumni of Saint Louis University, you know well the power and potential of Jesuit education. You carry your own collection of Billiken memories. You might recall the moment you conquered an equation that you were certain was outside of your abilities. Perhaps you can picture the work of art that irrevocably shifted your perspective. Maybe you continue to repeat words from a text or professor or classmate that resonated far beyond the day you moved your tassel to the left side of your mortarboard.

As members of the SLU family (forever), you extend the impact of these moments in each of your lives and communities. You rely on the wisdom you have earned, during your days at SLU and in the years since, to make unique and transformative contributions to the greater good.

In moments of joy and times of difficulty, you remember what it means to be a Billiken. And you commence.

May God’s blessings be with you this summer, and always.

Dr. Fred P. Pestello
President

PHOTO BY SARAH CONROY

A runner at dawn at the Medical Center Stadium on April 11

Features

24 HOURS AT SLU
A photo essay covers one day in the life of Saint Louis University.

GLOBAL REACH
An increase in international graduate students expands SLU’s worldwide impact.

MINDS UNCONFINED
SLU’s Prison Education Program opens minds and changes lives.
WOMEN’S BASKETBALL MAKES HISTORY

Women’s basketball secured the first NCAA Tournament bid in program history with a 91-85 overtime victory over top-seeded Massachusetts in the Atlantic 10 Championship final in March. The game was also the first time the Billikens played in an A-10 Championship title game.

The team members, who ended their first season under Coach Rebecca Tillett at 17-18, started the year by finding their footing together and finished strong with 11 wins in their final 13 games. Working together brought conference honors, including All-Atlantic 10 second-team selections for senior forward/center Brooke Flowers and senior guard Kyla McMakin. Flowers was selected as the A-10’s co-Defensive Player of the Year and as a semifinalist for the Naismith Defensive Player of the Year award. She was joined on the league’s All-Defense team by senior guard Julia Martinez, who also earned Most Outstanding Player honors at the A-10 Championship.

In the NCAA first-round game, Flowers scored a team-high 17 points and grabbed a game-high nine rebounds. McMakin and guard Camree Clegg also scored in double figures in the team’s 95-50 loss to the Tennessee Lady Volunteers.

University Names Two New Deans

Dr. Donna LaVoie
DEAN, COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
LaVoie served as interim dean since 2020, overseeing the Arts and Sciences reorganization, where some programs moved to the new School of Science and Engineering. Before that, she was associate dean in the college for 12 years. A professor of psychology, she has been at SLU since 1995.

Dr. Gregory E. Triplett Jr.
DEAN, SCHOOL OF SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING
The inaugural dean for Science and Engineering, Triplett most recently was senior associate dean for academic affairs at the Virginia Commonwealth University School of Engineering. He joined VCU in 2016 as a professor and associate dean for graduate studies. He began his academic career in 2011 at the University of Missouri in Columbia, where he was an associate professor, lab director and associate director of Mizzou’s honors college.

SLU Partners With Jesuit Organization to Educate Refugees

Saint Louis University is partnering with Jesuit Worldwide Learning (JWL) to offer a bachelor’s degree to international students displaced by conflict, lack of opportunity and poverty. The first cohort of students will start in October and are presently in refugee camps in Kenya and Malawi.

Based in Switzerland, JWL is an international higher education program that serves students in war zones, refugee camps and impoverished countries. Partnering with academic institutions, JWL operates more than 50 learning centers in 20 countries across Asia, Africa and South America. JWL students will graduate with a Bachelor of Arts in general studies through SLU’s School for Professional Studies.

The program offers a bachelor’s degree free of charge to interested refugees in the camps who meet eligibility requirements.

The students will begin their time at SLU with 30 credits already completed through either Creighton University or Xavier Institute of Management in India’s one-year certificate program. Once enrolled, they will be full-time students with access to all forms of SLU support.

Neil Gaiman Receives the 2023 St. Louis Literary Award

Neil Gaiman, the 2023 St. Louis Literary Award honoree, summed up his life’s work: “The job of a writer is to leave the world more interesting.” Gaiman accepted the award from the Saint Louis University Libraries at a sold-out event in April at the Sheldon Concert Hall. The same day, he was named one of Time magazine’s Most Influential People of 2023.

Best known as a novelist, Gaiman writes in a variety of forms. His work includes Coraline, American Gods, The Graveyard Book and The Sandman.

To close out the ceremony, Edward Ibur, executive director of the St. Louis Literary Award, announced that Jamaica Kincaid will come to St. Louis next year to accept the 2024 award.

Kincaid explores themes of colonialism, gender and sexuality, racism, class and family in her most recent novel. A professor in African and American literature at the University of California at Berkeley, Kincaid wrote the novels Annie John, Lucy and See Now Then.
photo by sarah conroy

**ON CAMPUS**

**HONORS & AWARDS**

**HISTORY PROFESSOR WINS NANCY McNEIR RING**

Dr. Mark Edward Ruff received the 2022 Nancy McNeir Ring Award in December and, in keeping with Saint Louis University tradition, delivered the midyear commencement address.

The award — SLU’s highest honor for teaching — was established in 1966 to acknowledge faculty who display special dedication to students. It is named for the University’s first dean of women.

A SLU history professor since 2004, Ruff was a unanimous selection for the award.

**SLU COMMENDS ANOTHER TRUMAN SCHOLAR**

Gabby Chiodo is the most recent — and fifth-ever — SLU student to receive the prestigious Truman Scholarship. (See the photo on page 10.)

Truman Scholars demonstrate leadership potential, a commitment to a career in government or the nonprofit sector, and academic excellence. Chiodo is one of 62 scholars selected this year from a pool of 705 candidates nominated by 275 colleges and universities.

Chiodo is a political science and communication double major with minors in political journalism and women’s and gender studies. She is a SLU Presidential Scholar and a member of the University Honors Program, as well as a managing editor of The University News.

**ALUMNI EARN 2023 FULBRIGHT AWARDS**

Three members of the SLU community were selected for the Fulbright U.S. Student Program, designed to expand perspectives through academic and professional advancement and cross-cultural dialogue.

In partnership with more than 140 countries, the Fulbright U.S. Student Program offers opportunities to graduating college seniors, graduate students and young professionals. Participants pursue graduate study, conduct research or teach English abroad.

Adam Ryan (A&S ’22, CSB ’23) received a Fulbright Combined Award to Austria. He will conduct political science research at the University of Vienna while serving as an English teaching assistant at a secondary school.

Sierra Zima (CSB ’20) received a Binationl Business Program to Mexico award. She will participate in an internship while pursuing an MBA.

Krysta Couzi (PH ’23) received an English Teaching Assistantship to Ghana.

**STUDENT WINS AWARD FOR CANCER RESEARCH**

Kavya Harish is one of 10 recipients of the American Association for Cancer Research (AACR) Award, joining students from other prestigious universities such as Yale, Harvard and Cornell. The award is available to college juniors and includes all-expenses-paid trips to AACR conferences for two years and funding to continue cancer research.

Harish is researching the regulation of the ribosomal machinery in cells and attempting to inhibit protein production. By doing so, she’s shown that previously unrelenting cell growth can be controlled, which can help regulate certain cancers.

**RESEARCHER GETS NIH GRANTS TO HELP PREVENT HIV AND HPV**

Dr. Juliet Iwelunmor, professor of global health and behavioral science and health education at the College for Public Health and Social Justice, received a grant in 2018 to develop and implement a crowdsourcing framework for at-risk youth in Nigeria. Now she is using the framework to identify young people in the United States who could become the next generation of HIV researchers, leaders and innovators in the field.

She was awarded a five-year, $1.76 million grant from the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) to create NIAID STAR (Stimulating Training and Access to HIV Research Experiences). A partnership across four universities — SLU, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Georgia State University and Texas A&M University — STAR focuses on bottom-up strategies for youth engagement in HIV prevention research, involving young people as leaders of HIV prevention interventions.

Iwelunmor also recently received a five-year, $2.83 million grant from the National Cancer Institute to enhance the understanding of HPV prevention in resource-constrained settings. Using the crowdsourcing framework, she aims to increase essential human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination and screening to lower incidents of cervical cancer among girls and women in Nigeria.

**SLU HONORS CLASS OF 2023**

The Saint Louis University spring graduation celebration culminated with the commencement ceremony May 20 at Chaifetz Arena.


As a child, O’Leary was so badly burned in an accident that doctors gave him less than a 1% chance of survival. He detailed his recovery in the 2016 bestseller On Fire: The 7 Choices to Ignite a Radically Inspired Life. His second book, In Awe: Redescover Your Childlike Wonder to Unleash Inspiration, Meaning and Joy, was also a bestseller.

O’Leary joined former St. Louis Alderwoman Marlene Davis and veteran actress Marianne Muellerleile (A&S ’77) in receiving honorary doctoral degrees.

Davis was alderwoman of the City’s 19th Ward for 16 years before retiring in April. She helped facilitate the transformation of SLU’s Midtown neighborhood.

During Muellerleile’s 50-year career, she has appeared in more than 180 television series, including the soap opera Passions, and more than 100 national commercials, including Geico’s “Aunt Infestation” ad. Her movie credits include The Terminator and Memento.

New graduates are encouraged to keep up with SLU events and activities from coast to coast by updating their contact information at alumni.slu.edu/stayconnected.
A LOT CAN HAPPEN IN ONE DAY. THIS APRIL, UNIVERSITAS ATTEMPTED TO CAPTURE IT ALL.

24 HOURS AT SLU

THERE WAS NOTHING PARTICULARLY EXTRAORDINARY about Tuesday, April 11, 2023, at Saint Louis University. It wasn’t commencement day or homecoming or the first day of classes. But that very ordinariness made it perfect.

For years, the Universitas staff has wanted to share with readers all that happens in one day at Saint Louis University — from midnight to midnight in both St. Louis and Madrid.

It was a tall order that required multiple photographers on two continents. And, of course, what they captured just scratches the surface.

Though this photo essay captures only a few fleeting moments from a day in the University’s life, it illustrates the vibrance of campus and the depth of SLU’s impact. Follow the photos from the wee hours to late night and see what a difference a day makes.
5 - 6 A.M.
Back in St. Louis, student workers fold towels at the Simon Recreation Center front desk before the facility opens.

6 - 7 A.M.
The sun rises over early-morning runners at the Medical Center Stadium.

6:30 A.M.
Research assistant Keith Blomenkamp works in Dr. Jeffrey Tuckman’s lab in the Doisy Research Center, investigating pediatric liver disease.

7 A.M.
7:15 - 7:42 A.M.
Students Suzanne Tran (top right), Tran Quach (bottom left) and Carolina Cifuentes Milla (bottom right) prepare breakfast at the student-run Fresh Gatherings Café in the Allied Health Building.

7:30 A.M.
PHOTO BY SARAH CONROY

7 - 8 A.M.
10:53 A.M.
Students cross Grand Boulevard during a busy class-change period.

8 A.M.
8:15 A.M.
Research assistant Keith Blomenkamp works in Dr. Jeffrey Tuckman’s lab in the Doisy Research Center, investigating pediatric liver disease.

8:30 A.M.
10:53 A.M.
Student Susan Rippee finishes a test during her “General Chemistry II” lab period.

9 A.M.
9:15 A.M.
Student Susan Rippee finishes a test during her “General Chemistry II” lab period.

9 - 10 A.M.
PHOTO BY SARAH CONROY

10 - 11 A.M.
PHOTO BY SARAH CONROY

11 A.M.
PHOTO BY SARAH CONROY
11:36 A.M.  
**University President Dr. Fred Pestello (right) and Provost Dr. Michael Luers (left) surprise Gabby Chiodo during her class in Morrissey Hall to share the news that Chiodo had been named a 2023 Truman Scholar. Chiodo, the fifth Truman Scholar in SLU history, was selected for demonstrating outstanding leadership potential, her commitment to a career in government or the nonprofit sector, and academic excellence.**

11:25 A.M.  
Pestello joins a campus tour and talks with prospective students and their families.

11:59 A.M.  
Pestello has lunch with students in Grand Dining Hall.

12:15 P.M.  
**Dr. Barnali Gupta, Edward Jones Dean of the Chaifetz School of Business, greets a student during an “Office Hours with the Dean” event in the Shanahan Atrium of Cook Hall.**

1:02 P.M.  
**Prof. Molly Wilson, associate dean for research and engagement at the School of Law, teaches a contracts class in the Pruellage Courtroom in Scott Hall.**

1:59 P.M.  
**The Billiken softball team practices at the Billiken Sports Center. Clockwise from top left: Head Coach Christy Connoyer (center) talks to the team; Chloe Rhine throws the ball while Kendall Johnson (right) gets ready to field; Abby Mallo bats from a tee; Kaili Hanner winds up to pitch.**

2:34 P.M.  
**Dr. Vithya Murugan, assistant professor of social work, instructs students in her “Intro to Social Work” class in Tegeler Hall.**
4:01 P.M.  
Campus Kitchen student volunteers (from left) Elise Halkias, Nhu Nguyen, Sarah Sargent, Hao Huang and Alicia Avellende-Cruz walk meals across Grand Boulevard to deliver to residents of the nearby Council Towers Senior Living Apartments.

PHOTO BY STEVE DOLAN

5 - 6 P.M.  
Students take advantage of a warm spring day to be outside. Clockwise from top left: Riya Patel (right) and friends on a hammock near DuBourg Hall; Madi Baylor (left), Ella Bolling and Joe Feder (right) at the Cupples House bridge; (from left) Andrew Kowalski, Claire Robinson, DeAndre Westbrook and Andrew Siemer at the Dr. Jonathan C. Smith Amphitheater; and Elizabeth Monzu at a table overlooking Lipic Clock Tower Plaza.

PHOTOS BY SARAH CONROY

5:25 - 6 P.M.  
The cast of Clue the Musical — from left, students Makaina Woods, Marshall Self, Allie Thornton (seated), Jake Allen Olson, Sophie Smith, Aadil Kadam and London Kimble — rehearses in the Main Stage Theatre in Xavier Hall.

PHOTO BY SARAH CONROY

6 - 7 P.M.  
Tan France, host of Netflix shows Next in Fashion and Queer Eye, speaks to students in the Wool Ballrooms in Busch Student Center as part of the Great Issues Committee speaker series.

PHOTO BY SARAH CONROY

6:27 P.M.  
The cast of Clue the Musical — from left, students Makaina Woods, Marshall Self, Allie Thornton (seated), Jake Allen Olson, Sophie Smith, Aadil Kadam and London Kimble — rehearses in the Main Stage Theatre in Xavier Hall.

PHOTO BY SARAH CONROY

8:39 P.M.  
Student Lily Kinnison receives Holy Communion from Michael Rozier, S.J., assistant professor and chair in the Department of Health Management and Policy, during a Mass at the chapel in the new Jesuit Center.

PHOTO BY SARAH CONROY
At a time when enrollment of international graduate students continues to rebound to pre-pandemic levels, Saint Louis University is experiencing a surge. Three years ago, approximately 400 international students were pursuing graduate degrees at SLU in the United States. Today, more than 1,400 international graduate students from more than 20 countries are at SLU. They comprise 11% of SLU’s total enrollment.

The upward trend is the result of the Global Graduate Initiative, a University-wide strategy launched in 2020 to attract international students to graduate programs in business, technology, engineering and health. Through the five-year initiative, the University is partnering with universities, academic advisors and career counselors in countries previously untapped by SLU or where SLU had a low profile.

“We are motivated to elevate SLU’s status as a truly global university and to broaden SLU’s impact on the world,” said Dr. Eric Armbrecht, associate provost and one of the architects of the Global Graduate Initiative. “SLU is achieving this by putting talented alumni all over the planet.”

The University is investing $10 million in scholarships and work experiences to support Global Graduate scholars and is creating 30 new faculty and staff positions to teach, mentor and support their career development. SLU’s Career Services Center is forging new partnerships to create opportunities for international students who can work under a federal visa program.

“Not only are we welcoming students from around the world to St. Louis — we’re opening global learning to all our students,” said Kathleen Davis, vice president of Enrollment and Retention Management. “Creating a diverse, inclusive community is important to our mission. And our Global Grad growth will have a significant impact on the metropolitan community.”

“We are co-investing with our students,” Armbrecht said. “It’s remarkable what these students are doing and how SLU is responding with support.”
The Global Graduate Initiative is supported by the Divisions of Enrollment and Retention Management and Student Development, as well as the Office of the Provost. The Office of International Services plays a key role in supporting international students (graduate and undergraduate) from more than 80 countries. The Global Grad initiative has amplified their efforts.

Rebecca Bahan, director of international services, said the staff is managing an increase in F-1 student visa requests, assisting students with transition advice and serving as a resource for the SLU community’s understanding of immigration compliance. A key component of the University’s mission of educating the whole person is helping international students integrate into SLU’s campus community. The Office of International Services has hired more international student ambassadors to serve as peer mentors and advisors. The ambassadors help introduce Global Graduate scholars to SLU student organizations as well as assimilate to life in St. Louis.

Additionally, annual events like Holi, the Hindu festival of colors and the arrival of spring, and the blossoming of love, have attracted more students than ever before. Seven-hundred students participated in the festival the way we feel it back home — the festival the way we feel it back home — the festival the way we feel it back home — the festival the way we feel it back home — the festival the way we feel it back home — the festival the way we feel it back home — the festival the way we feel it back home — the festival the way we feel it back home — the festival the way we feel it back home — the festival the way we feel it back home — the festival the way we feel it back home — the festival the way we feel it back home — the festival the way we feel it back home — the festival the way we feel it back home — the festival the way we feel it back home — the festival the way we feel it back home — the festival the way we feel it back home — the festival the way we feel it back home — the festival the way we feel it back home — the festival the way we feel it back home — the festival the way we feel it back home — the festival the way we feel it back home — the festival the way we feel it back home — the festival the way we feel it back home — the festival the way we feel it back home — the festival the way we feel it back home — the festival the way we feel it back home — the festival the way we feel it back home — the festival the way we feel it back home — the festival the way we feel it back home — the festival the way we feel it back home — the festival the way we feel it back home — the festival the way we feel it back home — the festival the way we feel it back home — the festival the way we feel it back home — the festival the way we feel it back home — the festival the way we feel it back home — the festival the way we feel it back home — the festival the way we feel it back home — the festival the way we feel it back home.

According to the Council of Graduate Schools, India has surged ahead of China as the top source of new international graduate students in the United States. The scholars SLU is attracting with the Global Graduate Initiative mirror this trend. Of the more than 1,400 Global Graduate scholars, 85% are from India. Here, meet a few who are earning their degrees and helping others feel at home at SLU.

Akelya Arcot Dhanraj, age 26

STUDENT AMBASSADOR COORDINATOR, OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL SERVICES

HOMETOWN: Hyderabad, Telangana, India

Pursuing: Master of Science in Information Systems

ANTICIPATED GRADUATION YEAR: 2024

HEARD ABOUT SLU: I randomly saw pictures of the University on Instagram and found the architecture beautiful. I then researched the University, and I loved every bit of it. Most of the professors have their Ph.D., which made me believe I would be in strong hands. The city of St. Louis seemed like such a beautiful place to live, and I liked the University’s emphasis on keeping international students connected to home. I didn’t want to wait a second more before enrolling.

MAKING THE CONNECTION: The Office of International Services is extremely supportive when it comes to celebrating our traditions. The Holi and Diwali events they hosted, for example, allowed every student to experience the festival the way we feel it back home — the food, the food, the planning, the decorations, the music, the prayers. And it’s not just students from India. Students from all different countries are made to feel at home here.

THE FUTURE: I came to SLU to improve myself in every way possible. SLU is giving me the exposure and experiences to grow independently and equip myself with knowledge, not just academically but as a person. I hope to get an internship after I graduate so I’m even better prepared to enter the market.

Dheeraj Chava, age 22

STUDENT AMBASSADOR COORDINATOR, OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL SERVICES

HOMETOWN: Hyderabad, Telangana, India

Pursuing: Master of Science in Information Systems

ANTICIPATED GRADUATION YEAR: 2024

HEARD ABOUT SLU: I was working on my undergraduate research paper about (COVID-19) pandemic stabilizers when I saw an article by a SLU researcher. I had a lot of universities in mind for graduate school, but I hadn’t heard of SLU, so I decided to visit the University’s website. I was excited about joining a research university to improve my own work. I liked SLU’s curriculum as well. I would not be limited only to my information systems studies either. I could take a course in cybersecurity or anything else that interested me, and that appealed to me very much. The architecture fascinated me, too. I love history, big buildings, big campuses. The culture seemed quite positive.

MAKING THE CONNECTION: Initially, it was difficult for me. I am an only child and was so far from home. Things at SLU were so different. I had no idea what was going on. I had questions but didn’t know how to ask. Then I realized I came here for a purpose. I wanted international exposure, and I started reaching out. I never knew I could be this strong and independent. I learned things get better, if not today, then tomorrow. When the Office of International Services hosted events, like the Diwali and Holi festivals, I found I could talk to people from home. We could share our journeys. SLU literally started feeling like my second home. I now have friends from India, Africa, Iran, here in the United States — such a diverse group of friends.

Neeten Chawla, age 23

TEACHING ASSISTANT, BUSINESS ANALYTICS

STUDENT AMBASSADOR COORDINATOR, OFFICE OF INTERNATIONAL SERVICES

HOMETOWN: Pune, Maharashtra, India

Pursuing: Master of Science in Supply Chain Management

ANTICIPATED GRADUATION YEAR: 2023

HEARD ABOUT SLU: I studied accounting for three years and decided it wasn’t my cup of tea, so I met with a consultant about going in a different direction. I chose supply chain management, but no universities in India offer a master’s in this field; therefore, I needed to study abroad. I was very late in applying to grad schools, but SLU was still an option. It was the only grad school I applied to, and it worked out well for me. The cost also was very reasonable, and I found a job on campus that helps me with my expenses. I didn’t have to rely on my parents as much. SLU has been generous in that regard.

MAKING THE CONNECTION: SLU is very inclusive. Yes, it is difficult initially for students from India, or any other country for that matter, to adjust to new rules, new ways of doing things. Finding foods that you like can be hard. It just takes time. And the Office of International Services does a great job of hosting events to make you feel at home. SLU makes you feel welcome.

THE FUTURE: I currently have a job at SSM Health as a supply chain technician. I am hoping to stay there after graduation, build my career experiences and then return home. I think studying at SLU has given me a big boost toward my goals.

For more information about the Global Grad Initiative, visit slu.edu/globalgrad.

If you are interested in providing work experience for Global Graduate scholars, contact SLU Career Services at career_services@slu.edu.
In many ways, this “Intro to Theology” class could be anywhere on the Saint Louis University campus. At the front of the classroom, the professor leads a discussion on Ignatian spirituality, pausing to write key points on the board. Twenty or so students sit shoulder-to-shoulder at long tables, listening, taking notes, asking questions. On the walls hang inspirational messages, SLU pennants and a Billiken flag.

But this class is decidedly different. This classroom is behind lock and key — nine locked doors and gates, to be exact, from the front of the facility. And these students are incarcerated here, at the Eastern Reception, Diagnostic and Correctional Center in Bonne Terre, Missouri.

They are incarcerated, and they are Billikens. They constitute the most recent cohort of SLU’s Prison Education Program (PEP), which is celebrating its 15th anniversary this year.

Fifteen years ago, Courtney Everett was on the inside, serving a 22-year sentence at the ERDCC in Bonne Terre. He knew the routine and monotony of prison life. He tried to stay out of trouble and take advantage of the limited opportunities in the facility. But mostly, he said, he “tried not to die” there.

To an outsider, the ERDCC might look surprisingly innocuous. It’s made up of nondescript cinderblock buildings with well-kept green spaces in between. Lines of men in gray garb walk without restraint from one place to the next.

But the place possesses a powerful gravity. A mixed-security prison, the ERDCC houses as many as 2,700 people. Razor wire tops every fence. An airlocked hall separates the outside world from the inside. Next to the visitor center sits Missouri’s lethal-injection chamber.

One Sunday evening in 2007, Everett (A&S ’15) was watching television in his cell when a segment on 60 Minutes caught his attention. The weekly news show spotlighted a prisoner education program at Bard College.

The concept of college in prison was unpopular but not unheard of in the early 2000s. For decades, the government had allowed inmates to apply for Pell Grants to pursue degrees, but that support ended in the mid-1990s amid political pressure. By 1997, only eight programs remained in the country, down from 350 in 1982.

Everett didn’t think much about the Bard program in the moment — but he remembered it later when he met Dr. Kenneth Parker, then a professor of theology at SLU.

“I saw the segment and didn’t think twice,” Everett said. “He saw something on TV and made it real.”

In 2008, Parker started holding weekly theological studies classes at the ERDCC. For the initial group of students — and for every group that followed — interest was substantial: 300 people applied for 15 spots.

But the Prison Education Program is a testament to the power of education, and the bonds that can form between prisoners and educators. It is a reminder that, even in the confines of a correctional facility, minds can be unconfined.
Participants could work toward a certificate in theological studies from SLU. In 2001, a dozen students completed the program. Faculty and staff soon realized that another group could benefit: prison staff, most of whom come from communities without much access to higher education.

With the encouragement of the Missouri Department of Corrections, the SLU program expanded and became the first of its kind, offering an on-site, fully accredited Associate of Arts degree program to both incarcerated people and prison employees. The two populations would take classes separately but work toward the same degree.

In 2016, the PEP began offering non-credit classes to prepare students for college in the future. This program currently runs at the ERDCC and the St. Louis County Jail in Clayton, Missouri.

Individuals in the College Prep Program take three to five courses annually in one of four areas: communication and technology, community and society, creative expression, and well-being.

The goal is to develop the collaborative learning, study and research skills needed in a college setting. Students might advance to the PEP’s Associate of Arts degree program or plan to enter college upon release.

As any traditional student knows, there’s more to college than the classroom. The PEP offers more to its students, too. The Inside Out Alliance (IOA) is the program’s student organization, which meets monthly and provides services to others at the Bonne Terre facility.

“Because of the IOA, lots of folks at Bonne Terre got tutoring and got their GEDs,” Wilson, the IOA’s faculty advisor, said. “It is clearly important to our students to help others in their education.”

Another component of a college experience is the enriching, campus-wide events. To translate that to the prison environment, the PEP started the Prison Arts and Education Program, which offers humanities-based workshops and the Inside Out Speaker Series. Dr. Devin Johnston, professor of English, coordinates the program. He draws on the University community as well as his connections in the arts world to bring to the prison everyone from award-winning poets to indie musicians to the Chamber Music Society of St. Louis. “It almost doesn’t matter the subject; we invite people who demonstrate excellence and passion,” he said. “But we also want to provide a public space for intellectual conversation.”

Programming is open to the entire prison community, but the audience tends to be mostly incarcerated people, who started a reading group so they could be prepared to converse with the visitors. And the ERDCC’s media center, which incarcerated people run, records and edits the performances to share on the facility’s closed-circuit television.

“Universities should be resources that radiate outward into their communities,” Johnston said. “That’s ideally what we do here.”

His work with the program is “the richest experience I’ve had in a job I already really enjoy,” he said. It’s a sentiment echoed by other PEP faculty.

Berman has been in SLU’s philosophy department for more than three decades. As the PEP’s academic coordinator, he recruits other faculty to the program. The ones who accept report that teaching in prison is one of their best teaching experiences.

“It certainly was profound for Wilson. “I get choked up thinking about it. When you leave after that last class, you realize — I do not have permission to see these people again,” she said. “For me, walking out on the last day was far more striking than walking in on the first.”

She loved teaching economics to the second Associate of Arts cohort.

“These students are mindful of the potential for their experience, ending in a degree, to have an impact on their material lives, just like our St. Louis students,” Wilson said. “But I think what’s more true for our Bonnie Terre students is the intrinsic value of the experience, of developing a life of the mind. It is enlightening for faculty, and you bring that back to the St. Louis campus.”

Keith said Wilson’s economics class was life-changing.

“It made 20 unique individuals become one cohort,” he said. “And that was the greatest experience, honestly, of my life — being able to connect with a bunch of people I never would have connected with otherwise.”

O’Heir confirmed his sentiments. “Our approach helps students see themselves as part of a community. They go on to participate more in the community inside the prison and to consider what their participation will look like when they’re on the outside,” she said.
All of the work — learning the material and also building self-awareness and a sense of belonging to something bigger than oneself — makes all the difference in the kind of future these students can have.

O’Heir said that more than 95% of all incarcerated people in the United States will return to the outside community. Offering them the chance to receive a high-quality education benefits everyone.

Statistically, incarcerated individuals who participate in post-secondary education are far less likely to return to prison after being released. They’re more likely to find employment and have access to higher-paying jobs. They realize the value of education and encourage family and friends to pursue their own, which can generate generational change.

“Most of these students never get even a first chance at a good education. They see this as an amazing opportunity. And they’re not going to let it fall through their fingers,” Berman said.

Of the 14 PEP alumni who have been released from prison, all are employed, pursuing further education or both. All of them remain out of prison.

When Everett was released in June 2021, he was “scared to death.” He didn’t know how he would make a life beyond prison. Before being hired by SLU, he applied for jobs but found it difficult to get past background checks. He worked for the Salvation Army for six months before the PEP position became available.

As PEP coordinator, one of his duties is to help others during that transition. He advises program alumni about navigating life on the outside, including resources for counseling and further education. Everett himself is enrolled in SLU’s MBA program, and three of his fellow alums are applying to continue at SLU, now that they’re released.

Since the Associate of Arts program started, two cohorts have graduated, in 2015 and 2020-21. Last year, 20 more incarcerated students enrolled in the third cohort, and a new group of Department of Corrections employees will begin this fall.

After the third cohort finishes, the PEP plans to launch a Bachelor of Liberal Arts in 2026. The program also wants to expand reentry support and provide funding for alumni to complete degrees on campus.

In October, the Prison Education Program will celebrate its 15th anniversary with an exhibit at Pius XII Memorial Library and symposiums in St. Louis and Bonnie Terre. The program also will host the inaugural meeting of the Jesuit Prison Education Network to inspire people at other universities to start and sustain similar programs.

The SLU Prison Education Program is free to students. The program welcomes alumni support. To make a gift, call 314-977-2849 or visit giving.slu.edu/prisonprogram.

FROM PRISON TO PH.D.

— by Bridget O’Neill

F ormerly incarcerated individuals often get a bad rap, but one SLU alumnus is changing the narrative. Dr. Stanley Andrisse (Grad A&S ’14) From Prison Cells to PhD wrote about his experiences with incarceration and higher education.

During a discussion hosted by SLU’s Prison Education Program on campus in January, he recalled school suspensions, tepid support in the classroom and his first run-in with the law at 15. That led to multiple felony convictions and serving more than three years in a maximum-security prison on drug trafficking charges.

After prison, Andrisse applied to six biomedical graduate programs. He was rejected from all but one — SLU. Though not a PEP alum, he is a staunch advocate for the transformative power of higher education.

A prosecuting attorney had criminalized Andrisse as a hopeless repeat offender. Now, he is an assistant professor of endocrinology at Oard University College of Medicine and a visiting professor at Georgetown Medical Center. He researches type 2 diabetes and insulin resistance, which claimed the life of his father.

“It’s never too late to do good,” Andrisse said in Creole, recalling the words of his Haitian father.

Andrisse said prior convictions aren’t indicators of one’s potential and ultimate contributions to society. He referenced a 2013 analysis of several studies that found obtaining higher education reduced recidivism — the rate of returning to prison — by 43% and was four to five times less costly than re-incarcerating a person. Yet, he added, less than 4% of people released each year have a college degree.

As executive director and co-founder of the nonprofit From Prison Calls to PhD, Andrisse works to improve access to higher education for incarcerated or formerly incarcerated men and women. The nonprofit is helping to “Ban the Box” on college applications nationwide, expand the Second Chance Pell Grant and removes the questions from the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Through the Bridges to the Baccalaureate program, the nonprofit aims to change the face of the STEM workforce.

1977
Dr. Jim Engelgele (Grad EU) was appointed chairman of the education committee of the Antique Toy Collectors of America, a nonprofit educational corporation dedicated to the history and preservation of toys.

1974
William Glenn (Grad ED) had his book, I Came Here Seeing a Person: One Gay Man’s Spiritual Journey, published by the Catholic publishing house Paulist Press in 2022. A Jesuit for nine years, Glenn spent his career as a psychotherapist and community leader in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Victor White (PC) retired from the Wichita Airport Authority and the airport management position after more than 46 years as a chief executive officer at airports around the United States. He began his career as an intern at St. Louis Lambert International Airport.

1967
Dr. Neil Katz (A&S ’67, Grad A&S ’69) was appointed as first university ombudsman for the Harniss College of Arts and Sciences and the Guy Harvey Research Center at Nova Southeastern University in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida.

1973

1966
Dr. Thomas J. Farrell (A&S ’66, Grad ’68, ’72) published “Humanity, Technology, and American Society Today” at opednews.com. In the piece, he discusses the Man, Technology and Society program at SLU in the mid-1970s as a model for today’s American colleges and universities that wish to institute technology-across-the-curriculum programs for undergraduates.

1962
Dr. Susan (Glesson) Stein (A&S ’62, Grad A&S ’64) had her biography of Robert W. Imbrie, On Distinct Service: The Life of the First U.S. Foreign Service Officer to be Assassinated, produced as an audiobook.

1982
Donna Henderson (Law ’82, Grad ’83) was honored with the 20th Annual Cafritz Award. The Morris and Gwendolyn Cafritz Foundation partners with the George Washington University Center for Excellence in Public Leadership to reward outstanding performance and service by Washington, D.C. government employees. Henderson is an administrative law judge for the D.C. Department of Employment Services.

BILLYKIN NIGHT AT THE BALLPARK

CHEER ON THE ST. LOUIS CARDINALS WITH FELLOW BILLYKINS ON TUESDAY, AUG. 29.

This exclusive $25 ticket price is offered only through the Office of Alumni and Donor Engagement and includes a voucher for a Billikens-themed Cardinals cap. Make plans to be at Busch Stadium!

To register, visit alumni.slu.edu/billikennight23.
1983
Dr. Howard Rosenthal (GRAD ED) received the David L. Underwood Lecture Award, the highest academic award conferred by St. Louis Community College at Florissant Valley.

1985
Thomas J. Magee (LAW), a partner at Hepler Broom, joined the mediator panel of United States Arbitration and Mediation.

1987
Peggy Free (P.C) retired after 35 years with the Boeing Co. Free started her career with McDonnell Douglas on the C-17 Globemaster III and worked the B-1B, C-130.

1989
Steve Allen (A&S '99, GRAD ED '99) received the University of Houston-Victoria Faculty Service Award for the second time and was elected as faculty senate president, also for a second term.

1992
Kim Daman-Scheel (GRAD '92, GRAD ED '96) received the University of Houston-Victoria Faculty Service Award for the second time and was elected as faculty senate president, also for a second term.

1993
Dr. Bernadette (Huelskamp) Henrichs (GRAD '93, GRAD ED '99) received the Helen Lamb Outstanding Educator Award from the American Association of Nurse Anesthesiologists in August 2022. She is the director of the nurse anesthesia program at Goldfarb School of Nursing at Barnes-Jewish College, as well as the director and professor of Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist education and research in the Department of Anesthesiology at Washington University School of Medicine in St. Louis.

1994
Dr. Miguel A. Paniagua (A&S) was named vice president of medical education for the American College of Physicians (ACP) in July 2022. He joined ACP from the National Board of Medical Examiners, where he served as associate vice president of assessment operations and medical education. Paniagua practices consultative hospice and palliative medicine at the Hospital of the University of Pennsylvania and is an adjunct professor of medicine at the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania.

1995
Elisabeth (Scheilhardt) Shocklee (LAW) was appointed managing partner at Evans and Dixon L.L.C., the first woman managing partner in the firm’s 78-year history. Shocklee, who is based in St. Louis, oversees the leadership, growth, profitability and culture throughout the firm’s eight offices. She has been with Evans and Dixon her entire career.

1996
James Ahler (LAW) was named the chief judge of the U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the Northern District of Indiana in January.

1999
David McDonough (LAW) is a partner at Wood, Smith, Henning and Berman. Based in the firm’s Northern California office, McDonough focuses on complex civil litigation, construction defect litigation and general liability litigation, in both state and federal court.

2000
Mariquita Barbieri (A&S '00, LAW '03) joined Thompson Coburn law firm as a partner in July 2022. She lives in St. Louis.

Heath Rosenblat (LAW) is a partner in the business solutions, restructuring and governance practice at Morrison Cohen.

2002
Tabitha (Cuevas) Atwell (LAW) became a principal at Danna McKitrick in January. She focuses her practice on estate and tax planning, probate and trust administration. In August 2022, she was elected to a three-year term on the board of directors for the Society of Financial Service Professionals.

2022
Cutrell lives in Maryland Heights, Missouri, with her husband, Sean, and their boys, Ryan and Matthew.
The Jesuits have “an idea of joining the intersection of contemplation and action, which intrigues him. I considered, at a pretty deep level, the passion for the outdoors. It made sense to stay.”

**2000**
He graduates from SLU and considers graduate studies while working for Trails Wilderness School. “Living in a tent in Grand Teton National Park, taking kids on wilderness trips, made me think that maybe there’s something for me beyond the life of the mind.”

**2004**
The accidental death of a climbing partner coupled with Bantle’s own rollover car accident make him recalibrate. “Maybe I shouldn’t work for a couple bucks an hour without life insurance or health insurance. Maybe I need a plan beyond using my body for work.”

**2011**
Bantle takes a position with Black Diamond Equipment, an elite gear manufacturer. In 2016, he moves to Austria to restructure and relocate the European business. “A chance to work in a publicly traded company, for a founder, in a startup — I got like 20 years of business experience in six years.”

**2017**
 Recruited by The North Face, he happily returns to the U.S. to work for a “global enterprise organization.”

**2020**
He moves to Montreal to become the GM Canada for VF Corp., whose portfolio includes The North Face, Vans, Timberland and more.

**2022**
Bantle settles in Seattle to become CEO of Eddie Bauer, which he hopes to help build as “a broad, highly inclusive and democratic outdoor brand.”

--- By Amy Garland

**Bantle with his father, Dan**

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**Tim Bantle**
**(A&S ’00)**
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER, EDDIE BAUER

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**Bantle (top left) with high school classmates on a mission trip in Honduras**

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**Bantle (left) with his wife, Sara, and sons Ian (left) and Hunter**

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2005
Sarena Dacus (A&S) was named one of Ten Outstanding Young Omahans by the Omaha Jaycees and received the 2023 TOYO Distinguished Service Award from the Omaha Community Foundation.

2007
Alex Frondorf (LAW, GRAD), an attorney in the Cleveland office of Littler, was elevated to shareholder in January. Frondorf devotes his practice to labor and employment matters across industries. He is also an adjunct professor at Cleveland-Marshall College of Law and at Bowling Green State University.

2008
Nicolle Burdlin Knepper (LAW) was promoted to principal and partner at Padberg Appelbaum Knepper, a personal injury law firm in St. Louis. She joined the firm in 2016.

2011
Sarah (Callier) Mangelsdorf (LAW) joined the toxic tort group at the law firm of Goldberg Segalla in St. Louis.

2017
Sanja (Vlahovljak) Ord (A&S, LAW ’14) is a partner at Greensfelder, Hemker and Gale in St. Louis. She is a member of the firm’s health care industry group.

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**Ryan Blum (CSB ’02, LAW ’14) is general counsel at Midas Capital, LLC.**

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**2003**
Dr. Terry M. Keller (GRAD SW) became interim president of Lourdes University in October. He started there as an assistant professor of social work and served in increasing leadership roles, including dean of the College of Social Sciences, vice president of academic affairs and most recently, provost.

**2004**
Rudy Fors (CSB) founded Twin Cedars Bancorp and was approved by the Federal Reserve to acquire and rebrand a bank charter into Twin Cedars Bank.

**2005**

**2006**
Sanja Vlahovljak (A&S, LAW ’14) is a partner at Greensfelder, Hemker and Gale in St. Louis. She is a member of the firm’s health care industry group.

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**How I Got Here**

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Sarah (Callier) Mangelsdorf (LAW) joined the toxic tort group at the law firm of Goldberg Segalla in St. Louis.

Dr. Anita Patel (GRAD PHD) was recognized as a group winner for a 2022 Samuel J. Heyman Service to America Medal. Patel won the COVID-19 Response Award for designing and implementing a plan to distribute hundreds of millions of vaccines nationwide.
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IN MEMORIAM

Mr. Neil Scully
Mr. Marvin Levinson
Ms. Mary Day
Mr. John Basler
Mrs. Barbara (Parrish) Regier
Dr. James Kraeger
Dr. Merle Gibson
Dr. Joseph Safko
Dr. Dorothy Dunn
Dr. Nancy Parlin {A&S '59}
Mrs. Barbara (Resnik) Sawyer {MED '60}
Dr. Joseph Garvin {VSN '59}
Mr. Benjamin Janson {CSB '60}
Mr. Paul Koellner {VSN '60}
Dr. Jack Nieburger {DENT '60}
Dr. Joseph Saloff {MED '60}
Ms. Barbara (Resnik) Sawyer {MED '60}
Dr. Pun Yuen {MED '60}
Dr. Donald Back {MED '60}
Mrs. Dorothy (Hellman) Borganmyer {VSN '60}
Mrs. Judith (Spindler) Curran {A&S '61}
Ms. Mary Day {DCHS '61}
Mr. Harold Deters {MED '61}
Mr. Marvin Levinson {VSN '61}
Mr. Glen Mankowski {VSN '61}
Sr. Francis Ryan {VSN '61}
Mr. Neil Scully {MED '61}
Dr. Donald Back {MED '61}
Ms. Betty (Linker) Benner {A&S '62}
Ms. Phyllis Blyth {CSB '62}
Dr. Richard Brantley {DCHS '62}
Mr. Jerry Dawson {CSB '62}
Sr. Mary Farrell, C.C.V.I. {VSN '62}
Mrs. Mary (White) Ferrick {VSN '62}
Mrs. Catherine (Maas) Frain {VSN '62}
Mr. Gerald Fogate {VSN '62}
Dr. Marie Gibson {VSN '62}
Mr. Knut Heise {CSB '62}
Mrs. Greta (Gray) Holmes {VSN '62}
Dr. James Kraeger {VSN '62}

Mrs. Phyllis Lease {VSN '62}
Mr. Michael O’Flaherty {MED '62}
Mrs. Dorothy (Hannis) Ostermueller {DCHS '62}
Mr. Francis Schiermeier {VSN '62}
Mr. Thomas Stevens {A&S '62}
Mr. Arthur Sullivan {MED '62}
Ms. Zoe Brown {VSN '62}
Mr. John Eckles {CSB '62}
Dr. Robert Hauser {VSN '62}
Mr. Jack Klingenhammer {VSN '62}
Sr. Marian McAvoy, S.L. {ED '62}
Mr. Daniel Olhns {A&S '62}
Mrs. Martha (Wanagat) Ripplie {VSN '62}
Ms. Lakervin (Bartley) Simmons {VSN '62}
Mrs. Joy (Kally) Tector {VSN '62}
Mrs. Urban (Curran) Terry {MED '62}
Dr. Dan Weiling {MED '62}
Mr. John Wielandy {CSB '62}
Sr. Martha Discher, S.C.N. {VSN '62}
Col. Thomas Diex {VSN '62}
Dr. George Fronista {CSB '62}
Mrs. Constance (Cardomy) Irwin {VSN '62}
Dr. Thomas McDonnell {A&S '63}
Dr. Joseph McNally {MED '63}
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Following each alumni name in Italicics is an abbreviation of the college or school from which that alumnus graduated. Here’s a key to the abbreviations:

ABS  COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
CSB  RICHARD J. ADAMS SCHOOL OF BUSINESS includes alumni who graduated under the school’s previous names, the John Cook School of Business, the School of Commerce and Finance, and the School of Business and Administration.
DEN  SCHOOL OF DENTISTRY
DCHS  DOODY COLLEGE OF HEALTH SCIENCES includes alumni who graduated from the School of Allied Health Professions.
ED  SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
GRAD Used in front of other abbreviations to indicate a graduate degree.
IT  INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
LAW  SCHOOL OF LAW
MED SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
PHL  COLLEGE OF PHILOSOPHY AND LETTERS
PC  PARKS COLLEGE OF ENGINEERING AND TECHNOLOGY
PH  COLLEGE FOR PUBLIC HEALTH AND SOCIAL JUSTICE
PS  SCHOOL FOR PROFESSIONAL STUDIES
SM  SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK includes alumni who graduated under the school’s previous name, the School of Social Services.
VEN  TRUST SUGOVA VALENTINE SCHOOL OF NURSING includes alumni who graduated from the School of Nursing.
CELEBRATE ALL THINGS SLU THIS FALL DURING HOMECOMING AND FAMILY WEEKEND.

Come back and see campus, cheer on the Billikens throughout the weekend and mingle with fellow alumni.

Registration for the weekend will be available in August.

MORE INFORMATION: slu.edu/hcfw

September 22-24, 2023