



Slippery Rock University Magazine

THE rock »

Spring 2024

School of Rock



NEW DIGITAL MAGAZINE COMING SOON

A new digital version of The ROCK Magazine is coming in Fall 2024. We will stop sending you the printed magazine, starting with the Spring 2025 issue, unless you notify us about your preferences.

DO YOU PREFER PRINT OR EMAIL?

To ensure that you continue receiving The ROCK Magazine in the mail, or to request that you only receive the digital version via email starting in Spring 2025, please complete a short online form by visiting sru.edu/rockmag, or by scanning [this QR code](#) with your smartphone.

GOING GREEN, STAYING CONNECTED

The decision to start a new digital magazine is based on feedback from our recent reader survey and SRU's commitment to sustainable practices to prevent excess printing and postage. Thank you for helping us better serve you as you stay connected with your ROCK community.



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THE ROCK

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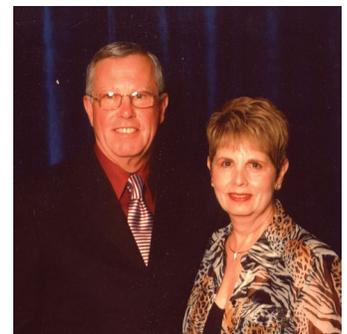
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WHAT ARE ... COLLEGES?

SRU was part of a clue on the TV game show "Jeopardy!," Feb. 1. For the \$400 clue in the category of "Commonalities," contestants had to figure out what Slippery Rock, Case Western Reserve and Austin Peay had in common. Contestant Juveria Zaheer, a psychiatrist from Canada, answered correctly.

STRATEGIC PLAN: THE FIRST CHOICE

SRU President Karen Riley recently introduced the University's new strategic plan. Titled "Slippery Rock University, The First Choice," the strategic plan builds on the University's tradition of excellence while setting the expectations and charting a course for SRU to thrive in the coming years.

The strategic planning process, which began in spring 2021, involved many contributions from across the campus community. The four themes, or "pillars," of the plan include SRU's commitment to:

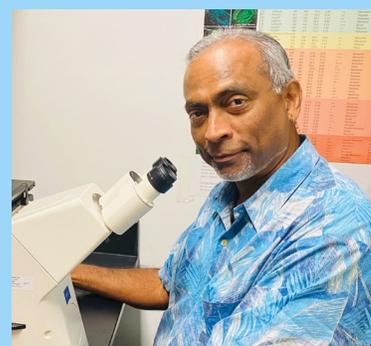
1. a robust, supportive, and inclusive culture;
2. academic discovery and growth;
3. community impact and collaboration;
4. and financial sustainability and resource stewardship.

Learn more about the strategic plan online at sru.edu/about/strategic-planning or by scanning this QR code with your mobile device.



EXECUTIVE SEARCHES

Following extensive national searches, SRU has filled two key executive-level positions last fall. Holly McCoy was named chief human resources officer, and Michael Zieg was named provost and vice president for academic affairs. Both had served in their roles as interims since June 2022 and April 2022, respectively, and each has worked at SRU for more than 20 years.



Athula Wikramanayake, '83, Bachelor of Science, biology

HOME: Miami, Florida

PROFESSION: I have been a professor of biology for almost 25 years. I am currently a professor of biology at the University of Miami, Florida, and I have been the department chair for almost 10 years.

HOBBIES: Gardening for wildlife. I also grow orchids and keep ornamental fish.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: My greatest accomplishment was probably getting my Ph.D. and discovering some pretty cool things in my research. I was also recently appointed as the co-director for the Embryology: Concepts and Techniques in Modern Developmental Biology course at the Marine Biological Laboratory at Woods Hole, Massachusetts. This course has been taught continuously for 130 years and is considered one of the most prestigious training courses in my field.

WHY I GIVE: I like helping people. But giving is also a way for me to show my appreciation for those people who have helped me in my career path. My brother, Eric (also an SRU biology alum), and I recently provided seed funding to establish a scholarship fund in honor of the late Frank Hoffman, an SRU biology professor. Dr. Hoffman was not only an inspirational teacher but he was also a kind and generous man. Eric and I have very fond memories of the times that we spent with Dr. Hoffman and his wonderful family at their home. I was happy to note that within a few months of establishing the fund we are over halfway to our goal of reaching \$25,000.



Katie Hedderman, '14, Bachelor of Science, professional studies

HOME: Pittsburgh

PROFESSION: I'm the owner of HomePL8 Training and I'm also a major gifts officer at the Pittsburgh Zoo.

HOBBIES: Coaching, hiking, pickleball and anything outside when the sun is shining. I also enjoy finding dog friendly places like breweries, coffee shops, restaurants, trails to hike, new towns to visit on a long weekend with my wife, Lauren, '13, and our dog, Dusty.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS: My greatest accomplishment is my softball business, HomePL8 Training, which is a training facility that hires only former female collegiate softball players. I run this business while working full time and it has been one of the hardest and rewarding things I have ever done. I put my heart and soul into coaching, and seeing the athletes thrive in an environment where they are supported off the field as much as on the field is what I am proud of most. I won a \$25,000 grant from the Pittsburgh Penguins and 84 Lumber in 2023 as a woman-owned business who makes an impact in the community.

WHY I GIVE: I believe if we all would strive to leave people, places and things better than we found them, the world would be a better place. I give back to SRU, and specifically Rock softball, to allow the student-athletes to do just that, have a program better than I had when I was there. I hope the student-athletes have more opportunities for growth on and off the field through scholarships. They are our future and I believe in investing in that.



SUPERB EXPERIENCE

Fifteen SRU students worked at Super Bowl LVIII in Las Vegas after the NFL selected the SRU sport management program to work at the league's marquee event that turned out to be the most watched event in U.S. television history. SRU students staffed the Bart Starr Awards Breakfast, engaged with fans at the NFL Fan Experience, and provided hospitality at Allegiant Stadium on game day.



HERO AMONG US



From left, SRU President Karen Riley and CHFC President Eric Zahren present Sgt. David Duffey the Carnegie Medal



Sgt. David Duffey, an SRU graduate student majoring in criminal justice, was awarded the Carnegie Medal by the Carnegie Hero Fund Commission at a ceremony on campus in March. The Carnegie Medal, North America's highest honor for civilian heroism, is awarded to only about a dozen individuals each quarter. Since Andrew Carnegie established the award in 1904, more than 10,000 people received the medal.

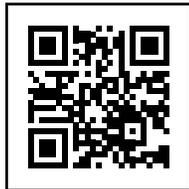
Duffey earned the recognition for his act of bravery on Oct. 16, 2022, when he witnessed an accident on the Pennsylvania Turnpike and pulled a truck driver from the burning cabin of his truck seconds before it exploded. Read more about his heroic deed on the SRU website by scanning this QR code.





HIGH BAR TO CLEAR

Former SRU pole vaulter Roxanne Dunn, '20 (top left), was presented with the 2024 NCAA Inspiration Award during the NCAA Convention in Phoenix. The Inspiration Award is presented to a coach or administrator currently associated with intercollegiate athletics or to a current or former varsity letter winner at an NCAA school. It honors those who used perseverance, dedication and determination to overcome a life-altering situation and become role models, giving hope and inspiration to others. Roxanne, featured in the Fall 2022 issue of The ROCK Magazine, was paralyzed after a car accident in March 2021, months after graduating from SRU. Read her story on the Rock Athletics website by scanning this QR code.



TOP PROF



Sajad Hamidi (bottom left), an SRU associate professor of physics and engineering, was named 2023 Professor of the Year Award by the American

Society of Civil Engineers, Pittsburgh Section. Hamidi is one of nearly 1,700 members of the national organization's Pittsburgh Section, representing the civil engineering profession in western Pennsylvania.

Each year, the section hosts an Engineers Week Awards Banquet and an awards committee votes to recognize a civil engineering professor in recognition of "continual excellent teaching," as well as "contribution to professional guidance and development of students," and the "advancement in their field through publication of meritorious papers, research or practice," among other criteria.



IN MEMORIAM: SAMANTHA SWIFT

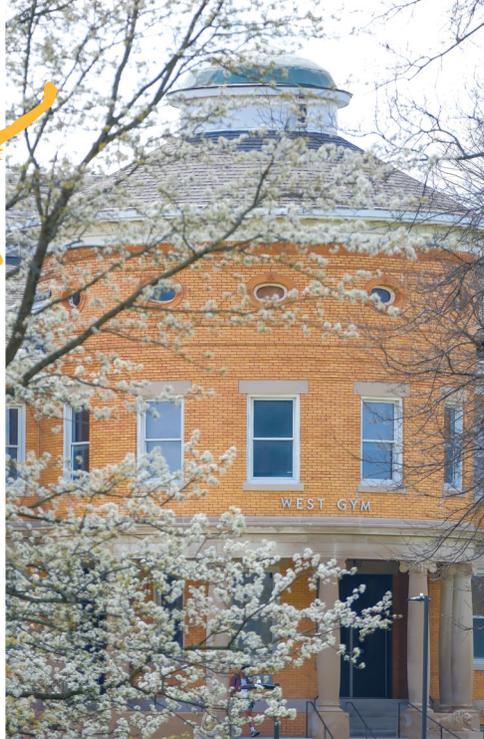
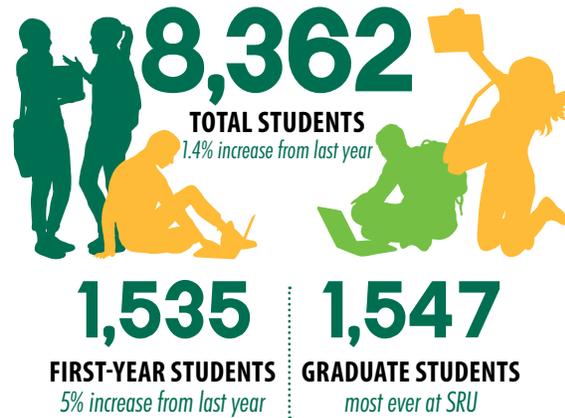
Samantha Swift, SRU's interim vice president for advancement, passed away Dec. 31, 2023. A native of Butler, Swift worked at SRU since 2011, including nine years as director of development and two years as executive director of development and advancement services before being named interim VP of advancement in September 2022. The University has since renamed its annual fundraising golf outing for women's athletics The Samantha Swift Memorial Golf Outing. This year's outing is June 7 at the Slippery Rock Golf Club. Learn more at srufoundation.org/wago.

GARDEN SPOT

SRU dedicated a space near the entrance of the Storm Harbor Equestrian Center in memory of the center's late benefactor, Carolyn Carruth Rizza. The Carolyn Carruth Rizza Memorial Garden, completed last fall, pays tribute to Rizza, who passed away Dec. 27, 2022. The 60-by-60-foot garden includes a green space with benches, a stone walkway, a pondless water feature, caste lighting, perennial flowers and other plants and trees. Funding for the project was provided by a donation from Carolyn's husband, Paul Rizza, and her brother, Brady Carruth.



SRU success by the numbers



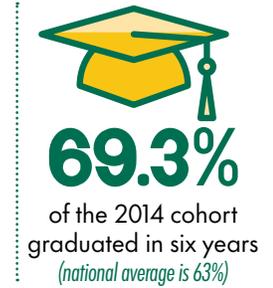
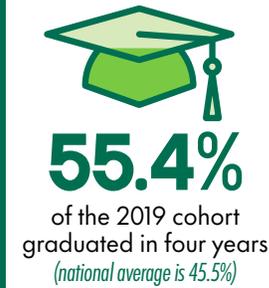
of first-year students in fall 2022 retained in 2023
(highest rate in the State System)



of first-semester students in fall 2023 returned for a second semester



of first-semester students in fall 2022 returned for a fourth semester

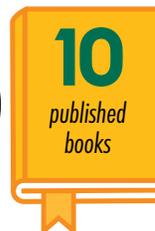
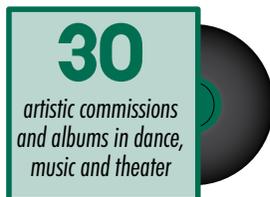


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SRU HAS GONE SIX YEARS WITHOUT ANY TUITION INCREASES



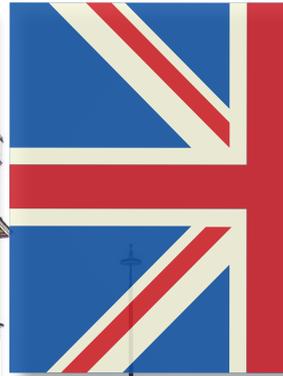
FACULTY SCHOLARLY ACTIVITY IN 2022-23



FUNDING SRU IN 2022-23

- \$3.1 million in private donations
- \$1.7 million in grants and sponsored research

LONDON





CALLING

Slippery Rock University
Marching Pride
Slippery Rock, Pennsylvania
Est. 1889



group of Slippy Rock University students rung in the new year when the clock struck 12. The time was noon, Jan. 1, 2024, and the clock was none other than Big Ben. SRU's marching band, the Marching Pride, performed in London's New Year's Day Parade along a two-mile route in streets of England's capital in front of more than 500,000 spectators and tens of millions of television viewers, including those watching on PBS in the United States.

The Marching Pride was one of 28 bands from overseas and nearly 100 acts overall selected to perform in one of world's largest New Year's Day parades.

"This was a once-in-a-lifetime experience for our students, not only to travel overseas with their closest friends, but to showcase their talents for the world," said Jonathan Helmick, associate professor of music and director of the Marching Pride. "Receiving this invitation really shows that SRU and our Music Department have an international reputation."

The last time the Marching Pride performed on the international stage was at the 2019 St. Patrick's Day Festival in Dublin, Ireland, but none of the current students were part of that trip.

The parade started at Piccadilly and passed Regents Street St James's, Pall Mall, Trafalgar Square and Whitehall before reaching Parliament Square near the Palace of Westminster and its iconic clock tower, Big Ben.

The Marching Pride, which had been training for the parade for months, performed the SRU fight song, the theme from "Rocky," and, for their finale performance, "Make Me Smile," a tune made famous by the rock band Chicago.

While in London, the more than 140 band members and staff visited many of the popular tourist destinations, including Westminster Abbey, St. Paul's Cathedral, the Tower of London, Buckingham Palace, Windsor Castle and more.





BREAKING BARRIERS

Students with disabilities are offered more than equitable access to a college education at SRU. They are finding a place to thrive.

As a public institution, Slippery Rock University serves the needs of a diverse population of learners, including students with disabilities. Nearly 700 students, approximately 8% of SRU's campus population, are registered as having a disability, whether it is a developmental disability, such as autism; a physical disability, like a visual impairment; or a mental disability, including post-traumatic stress disorders.

SRU's Office of Disabilities Services helps students overcome barriers by providing workspaces, assistive technologies, extended test-taking time, one-on-one coaching and many other resources that allow for equitable access to education.

Led by its assistant dean of students, Natalie Burick, the office also oversees the Rock Life program, a four-year, non-degree bearing program for students with intellectual or developmental disabilities. The Rock Life program gives these students the opportunity to get college experience and bridges the gap between high school and whatever their next goal may be, whether that's gainful employment or having the confidence to live independently.

Here are two examples of students with disabilities who have found success at SRU thanks to the support of these programs, resources and, most of all, the people who make them possible.

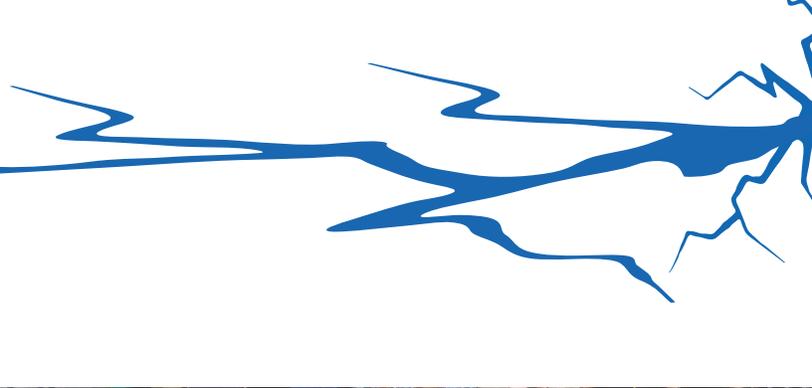


Alek Richardson

Although there were 20 participants in the Rock Life program last fall, Alek Richardson was the lone student who completed the requirements in December, meaning he had to walk across the stage at SRU fall commencement ceremony without fellow classmates. His mother, Jean Richardson, sat in the bleachers praying he wouldn't be overcome with nervousness.

"Beyond my wildest imagination, as Alek began his solo walk across the stage, the student body rose to its feet and cheers erupted across the field house," Jean Richardson said. "Soon all who had gathered in the bleachers rose including the faculty and staff on the platform. My heart nearly pounded out of my chest, witnessing the wonder of my son being seen and honored for unique gifts that he alone brought to the SRU community over these past years."

Born in Ukraine nearly 30 years ago, Alek was placed in the arms of his adoptive mother and told by a social worker, "If you do not take him, he will die here." Alek had permanent brain damage resulting from malnutrition, a pre-mature birth and significant



Scan the QR code to read a letter from Alek's mother.



medical trauma, but Jean kept hearing a voice telling her, "Don't give up on me yet."

"Throughout his life, that small voice has become my mantra with Alek," Jean said. "Alek arrived on the SRU campus with lots of courage and he left with even more."

Jean wrote a letter to the SRU community, thanking everyone for not giving up on Alek. It was published online (scanning QR code above). In the letter, she described how Alek benefitted from the Rock Life program.

"Alek learned some of the most important lessons that anyone could learn; Alek learned to ask for help when he was overwhelmed, to forge his own way of becoming more independent, and form true friendships that will last him his lifetime," Jean wrote. "Alek leaves the campus of Slippery Rock University a different person from when he arrived. Like other graduates, he is excited for new opportunities away from his parents, looking forward to moving into an apartment, hopeful about applying for a job and delighted to be forming new relationships while cherishing ones he created at SRU."

Julia Murray, a junior psychology major from Pittsburgh, faces challenges that go well beyond the typical college student. She's deaf and blind. But that hasn't stopped her from embracing all that's different about what she's experiencing and the opportunities to succeed.

"I love it here," Murray said of SRU. "I really enjoy all the different experiences I've gotten here, the different people that I've met, as well as the many different opportunities on campus with clubs and organizations. I've been able to discover new activities that I've never done previously."

"Different" is a label that's been applied to Murray her entire life. As an infant, she was diagnosed with cone-rod dystrophy and bilateral sensorineural hearing loss. She has limited peripheral and central vision – her eye acuity is 20/400 in both eyes. Thanks to cochlear implant surgery when she was 2 years old, she is able to hear now.

When she was 9 years old, Murray attended a sports camp for blind athletes at SRU, now known as ENVISION Blind Sports, so when it came time to choose a college, she knew the campus was a place where she'd have the support she needs.

More than 20 SRU students are blind or visually impaired and SRU's ODS has a staff member dedicated to blind services. The office assists visually impaired students with everything from navigating campus to retrieving information that professors write on classroom whiteboards. They can even create braille on site.

Murray is active with campus organizations, including the University Program Board, a student-run organization that brings a variety of entertainment and educational programs to campus.

Her career goal is to work with people who are blind or visually impaired, teaching them occupational or life skills.

"I've learned a lot about myself and other people," Murray said. "I'm more aware of how important it is to advocate for myself. Back in high school, I would be fearful to advocate for my needs toward my peers because I was always worried about how they would respond and if they'd accept me. Here in college, I've put myself out there and I do what I need to make sure that I'm getting what I need."

Being an advocate goes beyond advocating for her own needs – it includes spreading awareness to others who might interact with people with disabilities, which is a testament to the diverse campus that SRU strives to foster.

"I'm always a representation of the (disabled) community," Murray said. "If a person (who I've interacted with) comes across someone else who is visually impaired, I would hope that they would be more open to others because they've met me."

Murray's message to the world is all about appreciating people for their differences.

"Every person with a disability is different, just like people without disabilities are different," Murray said. "Even within a certain disability, there is such a spectrum. No person with a visual impairment has the same condition. No person with deafblindness has the same hearing and vision. It's all very different."

LEADING THE BUCCO BRIGADE

SRU alumna delivers the **'WOW!'** as the Pittsburgh Pirates manager of ballpark entertainment

There are moments during a Major League Baseball game that make the fans cheer, boo or simply say "Wow!" These moments are most often authored by players who are paid millions of dollars to hit home runs, make diving catches and throw strikeouts, but sometimes those moments are driven by people who aren't playing the game.

For Pittsburgh Pirates games at PNC Park, the person creating those moments is Celine Halt.

"I want fans to walk out of the ballpark saying, 'Wow!,'" said Halt, a 2020 Slippery Rock University graduate with a degree in resort, recreation and hospitality management. "We do everything that's fun about the ballpark that's not part of the baseball game."

Halt is the manager of ballpark entertainment for the Pittsburgh Pirates. She organizes pregame and between-inning programming, such as the ceremonial first pitch, the T-shirt cannon and video content that appears on the scoreboard. She supervises more than 60 seasonal employees who provide in-game entertainment, including members of the Bucco Brigade and the people who play the famous characters who participate in the Mrs. T's Great Pittsburgh Pierogi Race.

That's right, Sauerkraut Saul's boss is an SRU graduate.

"I love what I do," said Halt, who began working with the Bucco Brigade in 2017 when she was an SRU student. "Working for the Pirates was a dream of mine even before I was in college. It's great to be able to lead the group that I was once part of and working to improve and enhance all of our guest experiences. I love interacting with our fans and creating 'wow' moments for them."

A native of Murrysville, Halt grew up as a fan of Pittsburgh sports and experienced many of those "wow" moments herself.

"This is my hometown team, so there's nothing cooler than saying you work for one of those big sports teams that you grew up watching their games and going to their games," Halt said. "I remember going to my first game when

I was probably in third grade and telling my dad that I wanted to be one of the people shooting T shirts or getting the foul balls, but I never knew how that job could come about until I was at Slippery Rock and I had those right connections and being in the right place at the right time."

After graduating from Franklin Regional High School, Halt only applied to one college – SRU. The University offered the major she wanted, proximity to home and opportunities through the University Program Board, a student-run organization that brings a variety of entertainment and educational programs to campus.

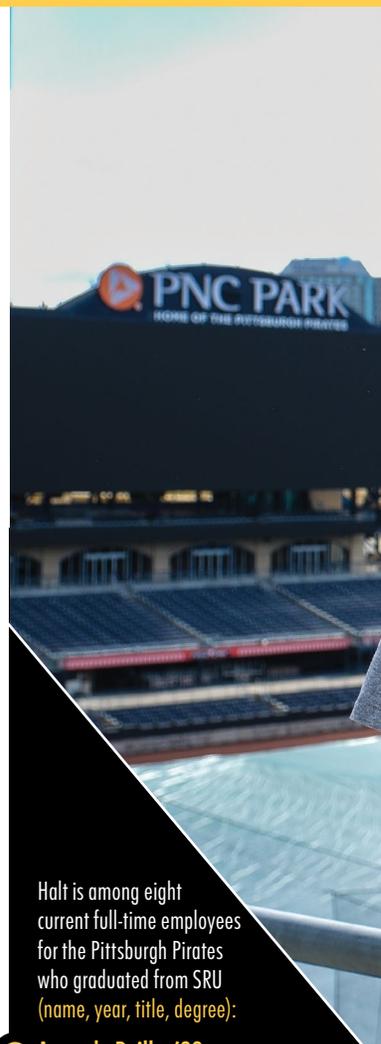
"SRU gave me all of the tools that I needed to go into the real world and break into the field that I wanted, which was entertainment, recreation and hospitality," Halt said. "I gained so many experiences that opened doors for me that led me to my current career path, as well as ones that I could have never even dreamed were possible. And being at Slippery Rock, I felt like a name, and not a number. I was involved in so many different things on our campus and being able to be in so many different places."

Among her many activities, Halt was a member of Alpha Xi Delta at SRU. During the 2017 baseball season, a fellow Greek life member who worked on the Bucco Brigade asked the sororities if anyone was interested in applying.

"My thumbs never typed so fast asking for an application to be part of this," Halt said. "I went through the interview process and started my first game a month later and I was on the team for almost three seasons."

Halt took an internship with Carnival Cruise Line in 2019 as part of the Fun Squad Entertainment Staff. She lived on a cruise ship for four months and planned events for guests, such as trivia, karaoke and parties.

Poised to complete her degree at SRU in the spring of 2020 and continue her career with the cruise-line industry, Halt encountered a snag in her plan.



Halt is among eight current full-time employees for the Pittsburgh Pirates who graduated from SRU (name, year, title, degree):

- 1 Amanda Reilly, '23, Coordinator, Internal Events (strategic communication and media)
- 2 Catherine Dumm, '22, Project Manager (communication)
- 3 Celine Halt, '20, Manager, Ballpark Entertainment (resort, recreation and hospitality management)
- 4 Jodi Hummert, '99, Director of Security Operations (sport management)
- 5 Chris Hunter, '94, VP of PNC Park Operations (sport management)
- 6 Jeff Podobnik, '89, VP of Florida and Dominican Republic Operations (sport management)
- 7 Joe Biletdeaux, '87, Director, Alumni Affairs, Promotions and Licensing (sport management)
- 8 Jim Trdinich, '86, Director, Player Relations and Team Historian (communication)



"I was one of the COVID graduates," Halt said. "The whole hospitality industry was put on hold."

She worked off and on as a substitute teacher and took a contract job as a recreation director at an aquatics and sports facility in Massachusetts for eight months, before deciding to reapply to the Bucco Brigade in 2022.

During her interview, one of her previous supervisors told her there was a full-time opening with the Pirates.

"I went from applying to be on the Bucco Brigade to applying to lead the Bucco Brigade," Halt said. "I got the job on April 4, 2022, which was a week before Opening Day. I had a very quick turnaround."

Halt has worked full-time with the Pirates ever since. She was promoted from coordinator of fan engagement to coordinator of gameday presentation during her first season and, prior to the 2024 season, to manager of ballpark entertainment.

As she's taken on more responsibilities, Halt has become more involved with areas across the organization including things like scoreboard operations. That involved a trip to spring training in Bradenton, Florida, to gather video content that will be used throughout the season.

During the season and on game days, Halt is involved with writing the script for the game. That includes cueing the national anthem singer, scheduling what the game hosts do during inning breaks and other types of promotions and "fan activations" (think T-shirt cannon or singing "Take Me Out to the Ball Game"). She works at field level and wears a headset that allows her to communicate with the director and producers in scoreboard room of the press box.

Halt works at least 12-hour days for each of the team's 81 home games. When the team is on the road, she is preparing for the next homestand, and during the offseason she is revamping systems and processes for the next season. This includes holding the stopwatch for all Pierogi Racer applicants (40 seconds is the minimum).

Looking back, Halt doesn't think twice about choosing SRU. "All the projects, leadership opportunities and things I learned in my classes, they all helped me get to where I am now," Halt said. "I made a lot of connections and SRU prepared me well. If I had to do it all over again, I'd pick Slippery Rock every time."

Top, left to right, SRU alumna Celine Halt, '20, who, as manager of ballpark entertainment for the Pittsburgh Pirates, supervises the Racing Pierogis and Bucco Brigade (photo credit: Alysa Rubin, Pittsburgh Pirates).

WALK IN THE PARK

SRU ALUMNUS CURATING
COMMUNITY AS SUPERVISOR OF NEW
NORTH CAROLINA GATHERING SPACE



Adam Bell became part of a community on a 660-acre rural campus at Slippery Rock University. Now, as a professional, Bell is responsible for building a community around a 7-acre urban park in the heart of one of the fastest-growing cities in the country.

Bell is the supervisor of programming for Downtown Cary Park in Cary, North Carolina. A 2010 SRU graduate with a degree in communication-public relations, Bell is not designing blueprints or even swinging a hammer to build the new \$68-million public gathering space. He's responsible for what people will do there now that the park is finished. This includes organizing concerts, movies, arts and food festivals, yoga classes and wedding receptions.

"My job is amazing," said Bell, who describes himself as a "community curator" on LinkedIn. "I have the opportunity to impact people's lives daily. Downtown Cary Park is a free park that's open seven days a week, so to be able to invite our citizens to this park and offer them cultural-enriching programming is extremely important to me and I'm happy to be able to serve the community."

Although Downtown Cary Park was completed in November 2023, the project itself was 20 years in the making, long before Bell embarked on his career or even enrolled at SRU. But as Bell's career progressed, he developed the skills to become the right person in the right place to guide programming at what can be considered the model for how a contemporary city park should function.

"Downtown Cary Park is a park like no other," Bell said. "Yes, there is park in the name, but this is really a modern, world-class venue."

The park is intended to bring people together and offer a variety of things to do, regardless of age or physical ability. It has a botanical garden, waterfalls, walking bridges, an amphitheater, a grab-and-go food market, a pavilion and plaza, picnic areas, multiple dog parks, and a splash pad and playgrounds that include two play structures in the shape of cardinals.

"People are hungry for the arts and outdoor recreation," Bell said. "Being able to offer these types of programs and experiences to our residents really gives me energy."



Scan the QR code to watch a video interview with Adam Bell at the park.



Bell didn't always have this type of energy. A native of Butler, Bell enrolled at SRU as a biology major with the intention of going to medical school to become a cardiologist.

One day Bell was doodling during a class when a fellow student involved with the University Program Board noticed and tapped Bell on the shoulder and said, "Hey, you're creative; why don't you join our organization." UPB is a student-run organization that brings a variety of entertainment and educational programs to campus. Bell also joined a fraternity, Phi Beta Sigma. His involvement at SRU directly led to him becoming an event planner.

"That set me on the path to where I am now, because I was really enjoying organizing events," Bell said. "(Being at SRU) really shaped and molded me. I was able to take advantage of the clubs and organizations, and because of that, I've been able to make a career out of it."

After graduating from SRU, Bell earned his master's degree in counseling psychology and college student personnel administration at James Madison University. While there, he worked as a graduate assistant, including a year coordinating camps and conferences at JMU. In 2012, Bell took a job at Elon University in North Carolina as the assistant director of student activities, where he advised the Student Union Board and

booked programming and major events for students.

He was hired by the Town of Cary in 2015 as festivals and events supervisor. A year after the Downtown Cary Park broke ground in 2021, his role became exclusively focused on event management for the park.

"I took this job because I wanted to continue creating experiences for people," Bell said. "Our main goal is to provide a place of community and a place of belonging."

Downtown Cary Park opened Nov. 19 with a ribbon-cutting ceremony and a full slate of activities of what residents can expect in the coming years, including a fountain light show, live music and dance performances, food trucks and trivia contests. The park is open daily from 7 a.m. to 11 p.m.

Bell said his favorite feature of the park is the skywalk, a 13-foot-high boardwalk that meanders through the park within the tree canopy.

"I love the skywalk because it offers panoramic views of the park with a lot of shade," Bell said. "As an event planner, I need to make sure I'm taking the time to decompress and so that's where I go."

It also gives him a wider view of the space where he can plan more events and reflect on the community he is curating.



SCHOOL OF ROCK

The term “rock star” gets thrown around often these days to describe high achievers, such as rock-star professors or rock-star alumni. But every now and then, you come across someone deserving of the title. For John Anthony, a Slippery Rock University music instructor who also graduated from the University, the turn of phrase is quite literal: he’s the lead guitarist for The Vindys, an emerging rock band based in northeast Ohio that is catching a lot of attention for their music, as well as in the film and sports industries.

Anthony, a 2010 SRU graduate with a degree in music education, teaches guitar classes and leads a new guitar

SRU ALUMNUS JOHN ANTHONY TEACHES GUITAR TO COLLEGE AND HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WHEN HE’S NOT PLAYING LEAD FOR THE THE VINDYS

ensemble at SRU. As an adjunct professor, Anthony is moonlighting from his full-time job as a music teacher for Austintown Local Schools in Ohio. But his other side gig includes touring with The Vindys, who have opened for artists from Pat Benatar to Hunter Hayes.

Last year, The Vindys’ music video for their song “Bugs,” directed by Peter-John Campbell, was selected for the Tribeca Film Festival in New York City, where it premiered with eight

other music videos from musicians including The Black Keys and Lizzo. Only 76 films were accepted out of the thousands of films across a variety of categories that are submitted to Tribeca each year. The festival was started in 2002 to spur

the economic and cultural revitalization of lower Manhattan following the 9/11 attacks. One of its founders is film legend Robert De Niro.

“This was the first time that we got some really big national coverage,” said Anthony, who was a founding member of The Vindys when band was formed in 2014. “We’ve had some momentum and push with really cool opportunities.”

The premiere at Tribeca was a red-carpet affair at the Village East by Angelika theater in Manhattan with photographers and audience members greeting The Vindys as they arrived for the viewing.



From left, Anthony at the Tribeca Films Festival premiere, and with band, The Vindys, featuring Jackie Popovec and Rick Deak (photos courtesy of Cusano Photography, middle, and Getty Images, right).



Anthony performing as an SRU student in 2010.

"SRU is one of the best schools in the tri-state area for music education," Anthony said. "The faculty are great. I love the campus. I thought it was wonderful."

"It is rare to encounter young students who are as focused on one thing as much as John," said David Glover, associate professor of music, who mentored Anthony in high school and college. "He was passionate about music and the guitar from a very early age and has developed that passion into a highly successful career as a guitarist and music educator."

Anthony mentioned Glover, Stephen Hawk and Jason Kush among the faculty who influenced him the most.

"Those three, they really set me up to be a successful music educator," Anthony said. "There's always bumps and bruises when you're a first-time teacher or a 35-year teacher, but SRU provided such a wonderful foundation for everything I needed to do in the classroom today."

"John has music in his bones, whether that's performing or teaching," Kush said. "He's always been driven since he was a student. What sets him apart is that he is academically minded but also a rock musician to the core. But he doesn't live that stereotypical rock-star lifestyle. He likes teaching and he's humble, down-to-earth and relatable."

"We're still in disbelief; it was such a blast," Anthony said. "A lot of people were talking about our film and to be in New York and associated with something nationally known was a thrill."

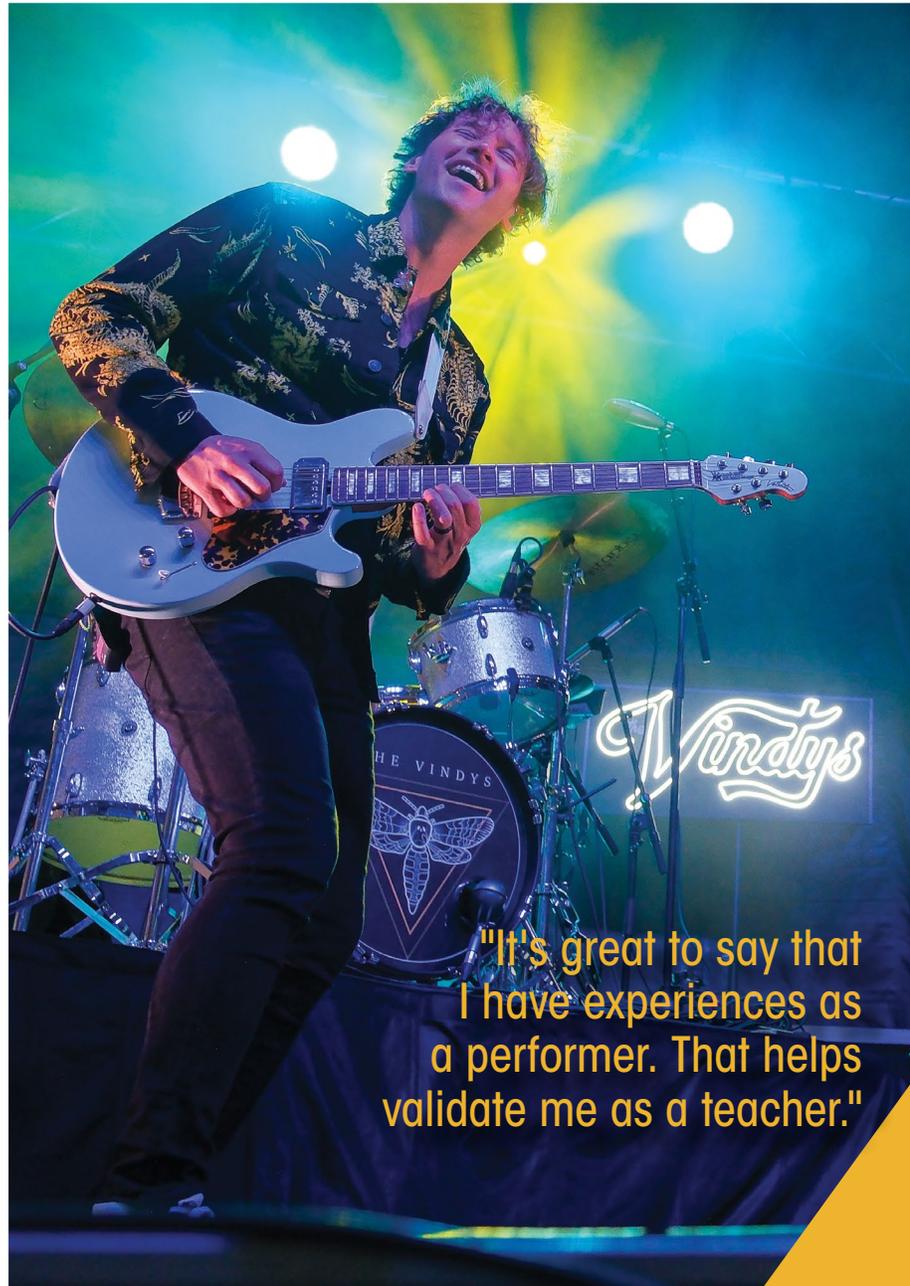
In 2019, The Vindys' "Are You Ready" music video was shown during inning breaks as part of the Pittsburgh Pirates baseball telecasts as part of their Friday Nights Rocks segments. The song was also featured in the opening highlight montages for Pittsburgh Penguins hockey telecasts on AT&T SportsNet. In 2023, the song reached a national audience when ESPN used it in the opening of its NCAA Softball Championship coverage.

Meanwhile, The Vindys have been on the road playing shows in New York, Los Angeles and San Francisco. They've appeared at several music festivals, including Wonderstruck in Cleveland and the Three Rivers Arts Festival in Pittsburgh, and last fall they opened for Ann Wilson from Heart at Stage AE in Pittsburgh. In 2024, they opened for ZZ Top at the Stranahan Theater in Toledo.

Despite the busy schedule, Anthony is able to play all the chords with The Vindys and his two jobs as a music instructor.

"One of my greatest assets is that I can fit my life together," said Anthony, who lives in Boardman, Ohio, with his wife, Alexa. "It's very challenging, but it's wonderful. It just takes a lot of preparation and looking ahead to make sure everything lines up where it needs to be."

Eighteen years ago, Anthony realized that SRU was where he needed to be. After attending the Summer Arts and Jazz Academy at SRU when he was a student at Mohawk High School in nearby New Castle, Anthony chose to enroll at SRU. It also helped that he was asked to join the SRU Jazz Ensemble for their summer tour of Europe before his freshman year.



"It's great to say that I have experiences as a performer. That helps validate me as a teacher."

Below left to right, John Anthony teaches guitar at SRU and rock band classes at Austintown Fitch High School in Ohio when he's not performing with The Vindys (right).



After graduating from SRU in 2010, Anthony earned his master's degree in music (jazz studies) from Youngstown State University, where he led a 13-piece Frank Zappa Ensemble. He then taught music for 10 years at McDonald Local Schools before moving to Austintown in 2022.

As a freelance musician playing in the Youngstown area, Anthony met Jackie Popovec. The two decided to start their own band, The Vindys, a name inspired by the shorthand for the Youngstown newspaper, The Vindicator. Popovec is the lead vocalist and the other current regular member is rhythm guitarist Rick Deak.

"It started as a cover band in Youngstown and then Jackie started bringing originals that we were workshopping," Anthony said. "We had enough to come out with our first EP in November 2014 and some of the songs got picked up on our local radio station in Akron, Ohio, The Summit. From there, it just exploded, and we were getting a lot more opportunities. We're starting to branch out from a cover band to basically only doing original material band in 2017."

In 2021, the Canton Repository referred to Anthony as a "guitar virtuosity" and described Popovec's vocals as evoking "Amy Winehouse on the more retro songs while going full-tilt rock 'n' roll on the harder, moodier numbers."

That virtuosity has carried over to

Anthony's teaching. He has contributed cross-curricular lessons focused on The Grateful Dead to the national curriculum TeachRock.org and served as a consultant for the curriculum geared toward elementary students. He has also presented lectures and contributed an article to TRIAD, a publication of the Ohio Music Education Association, titled "Using Popular Music in the Classroom: A User's Guide On How Not To Look Awkward Teaching It."

In addition to helping start the Guitar Ensemble at SRU, which has five members, Anthony gives one-on-one guitar lessons to SRU students, and in the spring, he taught a section of Lab Band, which has 20 students, many of whom are taking music as minor or the class as an elective. In the fall, he instructed a methods course where he taught students how to teach certain instruments like the ukulele or bass guitar.

"I teach them how to play the guitar and how to teach someone how to play it," said Anthony. "I use what I experienced in the classroom and use it to benefit future music educators."

Despite his rock star status, Anthony doesn't go out of his way to mention that to his students. He said most of his students at SRU are jazz-oriented but they are open to more rock or blues based music, especially if it expands their knowledge and musicianship.

"They appreciate that I am doing 'the thing' and experiencing it firsthand,"

Anthony said. "But when I'm in work mode, I try to professionally separate other parts of my life unless it's something I can use as a teaching moment."

Anthony's high school students are more attuned to rock music. He started a rock band at Austintown Fitch, the same way a school would have its own marching band or choir. Membership doubled in the year since Anthony started the band where now more than 45 students are taking rock band at Fitch.

"It really says a lot to the importance of modern programs coinciding with the traditional programs," Anthony said. "It resonates with so many students who go through music programs and who might not have had that connection to a choir or orchestra, but they might be a phenomenal guitar player. The students are excited because it's another outlet, and the beautiful thing is some students are joining choir who would have never dreamed of doing one of those ensembles because they realize that they must learn how to sing."

Anthony teaches three periods of rock band at Fitch in addition to History of Rock 'n' Roll and individual guitar lessons, just like he does with SRU students.

"It's definitely challenging at times, but it is absolutely rewarding," Anthony said. "As someone who teaches all day, and especially teaching in a very specific, niche kind of thing, it's great to say that I have experiences as a performer. That helps validate me as a teacher."

Photo credit: Leonard Okpor



MODEL SCOUT

SRU alumna has worked decades finding and developing talent for the fashion industry, but she's still a teacher at heart

"You should be a model" is one of the ultimate compliments you can give to recognize someone's beauty. Whether or not that person decides to pursue a career in modeling and develop the skills and knowledge to become successful, well, that can depend on having the right connections. That's where Karen Lee Grybowski comes in.

As a scout, consultant and fashion show producer, Grybowski has advanced and promoted the careers of models for decades. She's worked with some of the world's top modeling agencies and traveled to more than 50 countries to discover talent. And she's a graduate of Slippery Rock University.

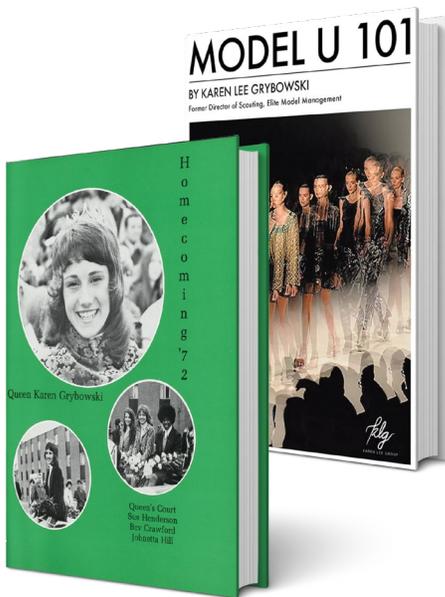
Grybowski was like many students in the 1970s who came to SRU, a former teachers college, to major in education, but her career aspirations changed not long after graduating.

"My mom used to ask, 'You went to school for teaching; what are you doing?'" said Grybowski,

who earned bachelor's (1973) and master's degrees (1978) in physical education at SRU. "(My parents) loved what I do, but still they were like many people who don't quite understand it. I tell them, I do teach. I coach young people and develop new talent."

Grybowski might not stand in front of a classroom full of students, but she's spent nearly 40 years helping aspiring models enter the profession, which is much more than posing in front of a camera. She wrote a book, "Model U 101," sharing her insights, all that have been shaped by her training in physical education.

"The book covers makeup, hair, skin care, healthy eating and exercise," said Grybowski, a certified yoga teacher. "I like giving tips to young people and I also get into a model's style and brand, which is so important, as well grace and etiquette and all the things that are really involved in becoming not only a good model, but a good businessperson as well."



“

I chose Slippery Rock, and I'm so happy that I did. It was a wonderful school and wonderful environment.

Grybowski's business acumen has helped her develop her own brand. She founded a consulting, coaching and scouting company for models, named the Karen Lee Group, and she's well known and connected as a modeling scout. She was even a guest judge on the popular television show "America's Next Top Model" with fashion-model icon Tyra Banks.

But like the modeling practice itself, Grybowski's career involves many things that happen behind the scenes to reach the success that might only catch a glimpse from the public eye.

A native of New Castle, not far from the SRU campus, Grybowski was steered in the direction of education after seeing her cousin succeed as a teacher.

"I thought teaching sounded great and Slippery Rock was right there and it had a good reputation," Grybowski said. "So I chose Slippery Rock, and I'm so happy that I did. It was a wonderful school and wonderful environment."

Grybowski was active in her sorority, Alpha Xi Delta, she joined in the marching band as part of the 'Rocklette' dance line and was crowned Homecoming queen in 1972.

"I had an excellent education," Grybowski said. "The professors were amazing. I had a lovely group of friends and the professors, the coaches, the friendships that I have made have helped me, along with my parents and family. Slippery Rock was a great place to become a young adult and I know it still is."

Grybowski's younger sister, Luann, followed her to SRU and wound up becoming a successful high school girls basketball coach and educator, winning more than a combined 700 games at four high schools in western Pennsylvania.

After graduating from SRU, Grybowski entered the teaching profession at her alma mater, New Castle High School. Two teachers there went on maternity leave and Grybowski and a fellow SRU

alumna Michele Fendya (Krull) "team taught" classes until the permanent teachers returned. Grybowski enjoyed it and continued teaching at schools in the Pittsburgh area after teaching briefly in Tennessee.

While back in western Pennsylvania, Grybowski finished her master's degree at SRU in 1978 and started working at the luxury department store Saks Fifth Avenue in downtown Pittsburgh. People there started telling her, "You should be a model," and she did for a local agency.

"I joke about it now and say that I became the Giselle Bündchen of Pittsburgh or the Cindy Crawford of Pittsburgh," Grybowski said.

The Steel City was not the best place to transition to a modeling career, so in 1980, Grybowski packed her bags and moved to New York City where she found some work as a model and supplemented that income by becoming a fitness trainer at the New York Health and Racquet Club.

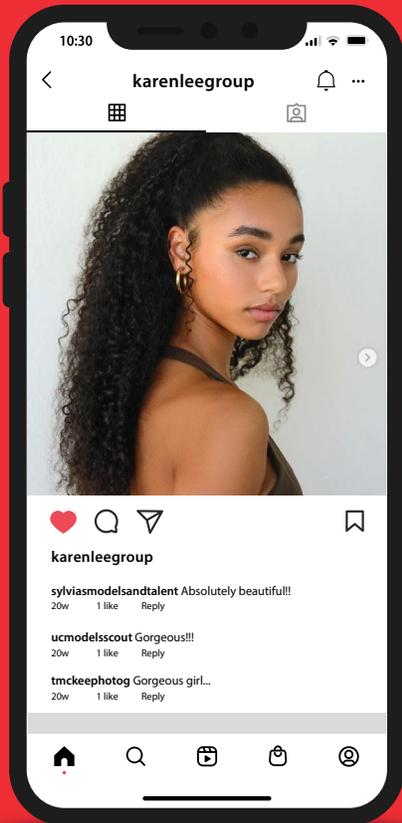
"I kept both of those things going, fashion and fitness," Grybowski said. "Then I met this woman, Kay Mitchell, who hired me for her camp and then to work at her agency."

Kay Mitchell, president of the Legends modeling agency, recognized Grybowski's experience as a teacher and model and encouraged her to get into the business side of the modeling industry as a scout.

"Back then you couldn't really start a modeling career in your late 20s, but I was fortunate to do some modeling and ending up falling into the business side of the modeling industry. It has been a wonderful career for me."

Grybowski worked for some of the leading agencies, including Pauline's and Wilhelmina, and in 1991 she landed a job as the director of scouting for Elite Model Management. During her 18 years at Elite, Grybowski helped launch the careers of hundreds of models. She was a major collaborator in the production

From top, Karen Grybowski with Nigel Barker as a guest judge on the TV show America's Next Top Model (credit Tyra Banks/ANTM); with the models Ava Moselle and Maddux Callaway; with Elite Model Management founder John Casablanca and his assistant Lorraine Caggiano; a page from SRU's yearbook with Grybowski as Homecoming queen in 1972; and the cover of Grybowski's 2022 book, "Model U 101."



“
I was able to
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people
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that maybe
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of the Elite Model Look, a yearly worldwide model search that brought to the industry such top models as Gisele Bündchen, Ana Beatriz Barros, Isabeli Fontana, Alessandra Ambrosio and many others who went on to have successful careers.

“It’s a very creative business,” Grybowski said. “I like the fashion and the artistry from the designers and working with photographers and editors. I was fortunate to travel the world. I would have never done that had I stayed a school teacher. The travel has helped me become a better person and to see that people really are beautiful from all corners of the world. I was able to give young people opportunities that maybe they would have never had, people from Africa, Asia, Europe and South America.”

On one of her first trips to Africa, Grybowski was a judge for a first-ever continent-wide model competition. The contest’s winner was a Nigerian woman named Oluchi Onweagba who was discovered by a different

scout. Onweagba signed a contract with Elite, moved to New York City and started a successful modeling career in which she appeared on the cover of Italian Vogue and in the Sports Illustrated swimsuit edition, as well as many advertising campaigns for brands such as Victoria’s Secret.

“I don’t think she had ever walked in high heels before (that competition),” Grybowski said. “A lot of the press questioned why we chose a tall skinny girl – they liked curvy girls – but I thought she had high-fashion potential and she’s had a nice career.”

Grybowski went to great lengths to discover and develop talent with interviews in far-flung countries, but admits sometimes models can be discovered even on the street.

“Some people always wanted to be models, but some of them don’t even think about it,” Grybowski said. “As a model scout, you sometimes see someone at the local bakery that has the potential and you



Left from top, Grybowski promotes her models on Instagram, including Mia Skye Jones and Addison Soens, while also working backstage at fashion shows (bottom right with Oluchi Onweagba). Right, Grybowski with model Mary Sickler backstage at the Andy Yu fashion show (credit Nick Starichenko).

stop them and say, 'Hey, are you a model? Have you ever thought about it?' Many of them are jarred by the question but once they look up my credentials, they feel I am safe."

After Elite went through a management change, following the departure of founder John Casablancas, Grybowski was out of a job. She compared such moves as those in sports when general managers or coaches want to bring in their own scouts.

"Instead of going to another agency, I thought, 'You know what, I'm going to start my own,' but I'm not going to just do scouting. I decided to do coaching, teaching and consulting, and produce fashion shows," said Grybowski, who founded the Karen Lee Group in 2010. "Now I have my hands in a few things. And funnily enough, I started giving camps and workshops for young people and that's really how I started in the business."

In modeling industry parlance, Grybowski is now known as a "mother agent manager," who finds and develops a model then places them with an agency and

earns a commission between 5-10% from the agency. She typically has 20 models as clients, some of whom live upstairs in her Manhattan townhouse, some who are still in high school and some who are already placed with agencies and continue to work with her.

"A model's development can be a long process," Grybowski said. "I can stay mother agent as long as the girl is modeling because they always need coaching, feedback and someone to bounce ideas off of."

Now that Grybowski's career has come full circle and even with her sharing her tips and secrets as a published author, there's still more she wants to do.

"I don't want to be this big-time scout anymore but if I see someone or someone wants my help, I enjoy guiding them," Grybowski said. "I prefer coaching, teaching, speaking and producing shows. I'm grateful for all that has been given to me, and for as long as I am gifted to be on this beautiful earth, I am hoping to continue to learn, to grow and to teach anyone who may be interested."



Song Without End

Late SRU professor remembered with Stacey Steele Memorial Music Education Scholarship

When you discover music that you enjoy, you want to keep listening. But at some point, the song ends. The same goes for rewarding work. But as music professors at Slippery Rock University, Terry and Stacey Steele's work continues to strike a chord even after retirement. Their song hasn't ended.

"We talked about it so many times about how blessed we were to have found a career that not only makes us feel good, but lets our work continue through our students," said Terry, who worked at SRU for 32 years. "When we decided we wanted to be educators, we didn't realize the long-term effect to help young people become adults and move them toward reaching their potential and having wonderful lives and wonderful careers. We were part of their journey. Stacey felt exactly the same way."

Stacey, who worked at SRU from 1988-2015, passed away Oct. 20, 2023, at the age of 75. Her husband shared these thoughts at a memorial service at Swope Music Hall, where the couple spent so much of their time. More than 40 former students, along with the SRU flute choir, played flutes at the service as a tribute to Stacey.

"It was very emotional; it wasn't a traditional funeral by any means," Terry said. "The flute players performed several pieces, and then throughout the service, people talked about her and how much she meant to them and how she mentored them. It was two hours long. It was just beautiful."

Kathy Melago, '97, a professor of music, and Cassandra Eisenreich, '07, an associate professor of music, were alumna faculty members who helped organize the memorial service.

"I can't even possibly put into words how impactful Stacey was to so many people," Melago said. "That type of relationship for a teacher to have with her students, that doesn't exist anymore."

"My relationship with Stacey and Terry Steele literally changed the trajectory of my life," said Tonia Kaufman, '95. "Stacey was like our mother away from home. She cared so much about us, more than what she taught us in class; she made sure we were taking care of ourselves. She was amazing."

"She was just a very loving, giving person and she had everybody's best interest in mind," Terry said. "She loved taking care of her students and she was very supportive, outgoing and she loved people. And she was a fabulous musician."

Stacey won the SRU President's Award for Excellence in Teaching in 2007, served as chair of the Pedagogy Committee of the National Flute Association and was the principal flute player for the Butler Symphony.

A native of Kansas, Stacey met Terry when the two were music education students at Wichita State University. Terry graduated a year ahead of Stacey and began teaching before Terry attended graduate school at the University

of North Texas. They moved to Slippery Rock in 1975 when Terry was hired at SRU.

During the 13 years prior to Stacey joining the SRU faculty, she was a Lamaze teacher (her second son, Andy, was born using the method) and she operated a private music studio, teaching flute to high school students.

"That's largely why the flute program was getting so big (at SRU)," Terry said. "A lot of those students were coming to Slippery Rock from the tri-county area and they thought, 'Well, I'm getting good enough; I could probably be a music major. That helped create a job for her (at SRU)."

After earning her master's degree from North Texas in 1984, Stacey started as a quarter-time faculty member in 1988. The flute program continued to grow, and three years later, she became a full-time faculty member.

"I had such pent-up energy, waiting for a focus, that I couldn't have been happier," Stacey said in 2011. "It has been, and continues to be, a dream job for me."

Terry retired in 2007 and Stacey followed in 2014, although she returned to teach for a semester in 2015. Terry started to notice Stacey forgetting things as she prepared for classes despite her reputation for being organized.

"She had the presence of mind to step away from her career which she loves so much because she was feeling a little bit out of control," Terry said. "Her dementia had gotten worse, and we found out it was Alzheimer's disease. For the last 10 years it was pretty rough."

After Stacey passed away, a group of alumni contacted Melago about starting a Stacey G. Steele Memorial Music Education Scholarship fund at SRU.

Kaufman was among the first alumni to donate to the scholarship.

"It's important to memorialize her and provide opportunities so people know what is possible," said Kaufman, a teacher at Plymouth Whitmarsh High School near Philadelphia. "Education is important because it can make these deeply rooted connections that flourish. What I learned from Stacey will live on for many generations, because I'm teaching it to my students and I have students who I taught who are now band directors and music teachers. It's about making sure that that continues, and that's why I donated to the scholarship."

The scholarship, which is now fully endowed, will be awarded annually to a student pursuing a degree in music education, maintaining a 3.25 minimum GPA and demonstrating active involvement in the Pennsylvania Collegiate Music Educators Association. To donate to the scholarship, visit srufoundation.org/give.

"This is meaningful because it remembers her," Terry said. "We have been retired for long enough that we don't know any of the students here. We still know many of the faculty, but this scholarship gives more longevity to her career. All the students who had her for class remember her but the ones who are here now don't know who she is. This scholarship keeps her memory alive."

And Stacey's impact, the sweet melody of affecting student's lives, continues to play on.



"Stacey was like our mother away from home. She cared so much about us, more than what she taught us in class; she made sure we were taking care of ourselves. She was amazing."

Tonia Kaufman, '95



From top, Terry Steele outside Swope Music Hall where he and his wife, Stacey, spent their careers as SRU music professors; middle, Stacey and Terry Steele playing a flute duet; bottom, Terry speaking at Stacey's memorial service where a chair for Stacey was left empty among a choir of alumni flute players.



SOLID Foundation

FOR **RockTEACH**

**RECORD DONATION HELPING
SRU BUILD A MORE DIVERSE
TEACHER WORKFORCE**

Teachers are in high demand. State and national data show that the talent pool of educators is not only thinning, it lacks diversity. Almost half of students in U.S. public schools are Black, Indigenous or people of color, known as BIPOC, but only 20% of teachers are BIPOC. That's a concern because a diverse teacher workforce has shown to improve both educational and social-emotional outcomes for all students.

Slippery Rock University is helping address these needs through RockTEACH. Founded in 2018, this program, facilitated by SRU education faculty and students, is designed to promote teacher education as a career path for BIPOC students at high schools that partner with SRU.

"The heart of the RockTEACH Program is relationship-building," said Linda Zane, professor of elementary education and early childhood, who is one of the RockTEACH program directors. "Our success thus far has been evident in the deep relationships that aid in the recruitment and persistence of teacher education students."

RockTEACH has many components, including the recruitment of BIPOC high school students to the field of teaching and support for pre-service teachers at SRU. Programming includes an "Education Major for a Day" event where high school students experience campus life and meet with RockTEACH student ambassadors, as well as a Summer Institute where SRU faculty and ambassadors visit communities and meet with teachers, administrators and students from partner schools to offer professional development and explore new ideas and, of course, build relationships.

"Through partnerships with urban schools, relationships are developed with BIPOC students in order to introduce them to the field of teaching," Zane said. "We provide opportunities for them to engage in activities around the field of education and college life in general."

"I have always loved helping people, and becoming a teacher would be a good way to achieve my goal," said AJ Williams, an SRU freshman secondary education major from Homestead. "I heard about RockTEACH through my school district, and I absolutely love the program. My favorite part about it is working with the kids."

Before his senior year at Taylor Allderdice High School in Pittsburgh, Williams attended a Summer Institute at SRU where he got to teach activities and lessons with school-age children enrolled in Sharon City and Farrell Area School Districts' summer programs.

If graduates of partner high schools choose to enroll at SRU, like Williams did, they are offered even more community and support through extracurricular activities, academic mentorship, exposure to teaching and professional development.

"Then, once they graduate from SRU, the diverse teacher pipeline comes full circle as alumni engage in mentorship to successfully meet the needs of future BIPOC teacher-leaders," Zane added.

Because the goals of RockTEACH are ambitious and multifaceted, the program requires adequate funding to sustain and support the crucial efforts to serve students and, by extension, the greater good of society.





That's where people like Dave and Judy Phillips come in.

Judy Phillips graduated with a degree in education from SRU in 1966, and although she only taught for seven years, she and her husband, Dave, have always recognized the importance of teacher education, especially for those from BIPOC communities.

"Minority teachers are underrepresented in the education system," Dave Phillips said. "We think it's necessary to help recruit and support aspiring minority teachers who might not have the means to pursue their education and become a teacher. If a child is in a class and sees a teacher who looks like them, they are more likely to aspire to be like that teacher."

Dave and Judy Phillips recently donated \$25,000 to support ongoing needs of the RockTEACH program and \$75,000 to endow a scholarship fund for SRU student ambassadors in the RockTEACH program. But even more significant is their \$2 million bequest to the College of Education to support the RockTEACH program and its students.

The \$2 million estate gift is the largest planned bequest in SRU history.

Dave Phillips spoke on behalf of his wife, Judy, because she is battling dementia and since 2021 has lived in a personal care facility near their home in Sugar Land, Texas. The couple, who met as teenagers while growing up in Sharpsburg, Pennsylvania, has lived in Texas for 50 years. Dave spent the majority of his 42-year career as an insurance agent in Texas, after briefly working in Michigan and Ohio, where Judy was a teacher.

Judy also worked in the insurance industry for 10 years, but she stayed true to her training as a teacher and the connections she made at SRU. She loved helping children and was a substitute

"The heart of the RockTEACH Program is relationship-building. Our success thus far has been evident in the deep relationships that aid in the recruitment and persistence of teacher education students."

teacher for a few years in Texas. When Dave and Judy celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary, six of her friends from SRU, some of whom were her suitemates in North Hall, came to Texas for the occasion.

"The biggest thing she got from SRU was an understanding of what kids need," Dave said. "She loved teaching. The friends that she met there were lifelong. And the education she received at Slippery Rock was life changing."

Now, they want to change the lives of others.

"Supporting our future teachers is so important because when you go on to educate people, you're doing something that will benefit others for the rest of their lives," Dave Phillips said. "We recognize that there is an underserved part of education, and our money will go a long way to helping others."

The scholarship, named the Judith Ferraro Phillips '66 Excellence for Aspiring Teachers Scholarship, will award approximately \$4,000 annually to SRU education majors who are part of the RockTEACH program with a preference for students who are

underrepresented minorities. The \$2 million estate gift will be used for additional scholarships for RockTEACH students and funding to sustain the program.

When told the size of his family's gift reached unprecedented levels for SRU, Dave responded with a charge for more people to support education.

"We've felt strongly about this for years," Dave said. "I wish it wasn't the largest and I hope that it won't be the case for long."

To learn more about bequests or donating to the University, contact University Advancement at **724.738.2004** or email **advancement@sru.edu**.



Top, RockTEACH participants engage with children from Sharon City and Farrell Area School Districts as part of a Summer Institute at SRU; bottom, David and Judy Phillips are the benefactors of a new scholarship and \$2 million estate gifts that supports RockTEACH.

EDITORIAL INFORMATION

To submit "Class Notes," email us at alumni@sru.edu or go to www.rockalumni.com.

We do not publish engagements or pregnancies, but we do publish marriages and births.

Please note that due to space restrictions, submissions may be edited. However, remember that we are proud of all our alumni and all they do. GO ROCK!



SLIPPERY ROCK UNIVERSITY ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

2023-2024 BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Matt Vannoy, '09
Holly Vogt, '97
Richard Wood, '75
Sam Zyrill, '78

1960s

David Belka, '63, was awarded the Kiwanis Outstanding Leadership Award by the Kiwanis Club of Oxford, Ohio, in September. This award recognizes active admirable leadership as a club officer, board director or committee member for club projects, events, activities and other programming.

Janet (Waddell) Hurley, '63, and Dennis Hurley, '62, retired after 60 years in education and celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary with a trip to Vienna, Austria.

Tom Priester, '62, was inducted into the Slippery Rock Soccer Ring of Honor in September, and was awarded the USA Track & Field Running Official of the Year in December.

1970s

Dawna (Richards) Bates, '70, '76M, received the 2024 Alumni of Distinction award from The Greater Latrobe Partners in Education Foundation. The award acknowledge excellence among alumni of the Greater Latrobe School District for professional achievements, service to the community and/or service to the district.

Ron Hess, '72, president of The Window Depot, hosted the organization's first car show where a very unlikely meeting took place. **Dave Zott, '72**, owner of a 1969 Chevy Chevelle, was entered in the muscle car category and was wearing an SRU sweatshirt, as was Ron. The two men discovered that not only did they both attend SRU, but they were in the 1972 winter graduation class. Dave won the President's Selection award in the car show. ❶

Fran Kissel-Powell, '73, was featured for the sixth year in the annual Instructors' Showcase at the Burbank, California, Creative Arts Center. Kissel-Powell retired from teaching elementary school after 34 years in Glendale, California, and now creates and teaches pottery. Kissel-Powell took her first pottery class when she was a student at SRU. ❷

Rich Matrunick, '75 (left in photo), was inducted into Derry Area High School's Inaugural Hall of Fame Class. Matrunick was the school's first-ever state champion, winning the 880-yard run in track and field and continued his athletic career at SRU in both track and field and football. Matrunick earned many accolades on the track, including a trip to the NCAA Championship. Matrunick coached track at Derry for 32 years. ❸

Bernice (Whitehill) Pippin, '71, '73M, has published a book, titled "God With Us: Remembering September 11, 2001." The book is a short series of adult and children's sermons offered after the 9/11 attacks, plus a reflection on current times.

1980s

Len Krichko, '80, was named to the executive board of the American Basketball Hall of Fame in Detroit, Michigan. Krichko also accepted an invitation to serve on the National High School Football Hall of Fame executive board in Canton, Ohio.

Kim Wilson, '89, was inducted into the National Fastpitch Coaches Association Hall of Fame. Wilson, who is in her 28th year as the head softball coach Rowan University, has led Rowan to eight New Jersey Athletic Conference titles and 19 NCAA tournament appearances, including a third-place national finish. During the 2023 season, Rowan went 42-10 and captured the NJAC regular-season title with a 17-1 record while Wilson earned the conference's Coach of the Year award for the ninth time and the third year in a row.

1990s

Scott Albert, '98, performed at the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York as part of a "Saluting America's Band Directors" project. Albert teaches in the Shaler Area School District in Pittsburgh, and was among 400 educators selected to perform. Albert met alumna, **Olivia Bazanos, '21**, who was also performing. ❹

Tiffany L. Ayres, '93, established Keys to Bees, Inc. in 2023. Keys to Bees promotes honeybee health through an array of educational programs and community outreach and also offers unique management programming (HoneyBee Concept) to promote organizational stability utilizing the methodologies of the honeybee. Ayres earned a master's degree in beekeeping from Cornell University.

Tracy (Delu) Glass, '94, was awarded the 2024 Pennsylvania Music Educators Citation of Excellence in Teaching Award for District 5. The Citation of Excellence is presented by PMEA, the professional organization for music education in Pennsylvania, and recognizes individuals who have made lasting contributions in their area of music education. ❺

2000s

Brady Crytzer, '08, '10M, has written seven books, with his most recent book, "The Whiskey Rebellion," being named one of "Ten Books to Read" by the Wall Street Journal and featured in The Washington Post. Crytzer also stars in cable television series "Into the Wild Frontier" on INSP and NBC Peacock, and is regularly featured on Sirius XM radio. Crytzer is a professor at

Robert Morris University and won the 2023 Judge Robert K. Woltz History Award.

Allyssa Jones, '04, was among 500 teachers selected for their wish to be granted via Palo Verde Fiesta Bowl Charities Wishes for Teachers Draft Day. Jones' wish was to purchase new books for their classroom. In its annual tradition to honor, support and celebrate Arizona's educators, Fiesta Bowl Charities granted 500 teachers \$2,500 each. Jones is a kindergarten teacher at Lowell Elementary School in Mesa, Arizona.

Tanya (Pell) Jones, '05, authored a debut horror novella, "CICADA," that will be published in September 2024. "CICADA" is about a woman stranded in a small Southern town during a horror film festival who realizes she is starring in the sequel when the screaming begins and the locals won't let her leave.

Megan Nagel, '02, was named chancellor and chief academic officer of Penn State Greater Allegheny. Nagel has served in the role in an interim capacity since June 2022. Nagel joined Penn State Greater Allegheny in 2010.

Melissa Nossal, '05, was appointed chief operating officer at Community Care Behavioral Health Organization, a nonprofit behavioral health managed care organization. Nossal has 18+ years of behavioral health care operations experience and will provide leadership, direction and administrative oversight for the operational functions of Community Care.

Matt Vannoy, '09, was appointed as Pennsylvania School Boards Association, Western 1 Sectional Advisor (Mercer, Crawford, Erie, Venango, Warren and Forest Counties). Vannoy will be serving a term as a sectional advisor representative to the 10 member PSBA governing board. Vannoy will also be serving on the governance and policy committee for the governing board.

2010s

Benjamin Snyder, '19, was selected as one of the distinguished "Steinhardt Singers." Snyder is a second-year master's candidate in vocal performance at New York University's Steinhardt School. This elite group of six performers will take center stage at all Steinhardt graduation ceremonies, as well as the all-school graduation, showcasing their exceptional talents. The Steinhardt Singers will perform at venues that include Yankee Stadium and Radio City Music Hall. ❻

Sammie Walker Herrera, '18, won one of two Estrella small business grants through the YWCA Greater Pittsburgh and Pittsburgh Metropolitan Area Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. The Estrella initiative embodies the commitment to empowering Latino-owned small businesses across the Greater Pittsburgh region. Walker Herrera is owner of Speak Y'all, a confidence consultancy.

2020s

Olivia Bazanos, '21, performed at the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade in New York as part of a "Saluting America's Band Directors" project. Bazanos teaches in Derby United School District 260 in Derby, Kansas, and was among 400 educators selected to perform. Bazanos met alumnus, **Scott Albert, '98**, who was also performing. 7

1st Lt. Nathan Marchand, '22, won the Top Intelligence Officer of the 2024 Top Intelligence competition (TOPINT). Top Intelligence is an annual competition that unites the best soldiers from across the U.S. Army Military Intelligence community to achieve the title of TOPINT among their peers.

Weddings

Wendi Barber, '95, and Anthony Colella were married Oct. 7, 2023, in Sharon. The couple resides in Saegertown. 8

Troy Doyle, '17, and **McKenzie Popatak, '17**, were married Oct. 14, 2023, in Canfield, Ohio. 9

Births

Brock Danneker, '16, and his wife, **Rachael (Case) Danneker, '19, '21DPT**, welcomed their first child, Wren Harper, Dec. 4, 2023.

Meghan (Rice) Reiman, '10, '11M, and her husband, Andrew, welcomed their daughter, Moira Helen, March 1, 2023. Moira joins her brother, Odin Henry. 10

Donald Toomey, '13, and his girlfriend, Kayla Whitlatch, welcomed their first child, Donovan Mikkell, July 15, 2023. 11



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In Memory

Eugene E. Shelar, '42
 Evelyn M. Knox (McBride), '43
 Jesse R. Meighen (Reed), '43
 Raymond Fioroni, '49
 Jack D. Hill, '50
 Joan E. Martsolf (Boyd), '50
 Roy M. Lytle, '51
 Doris W. Petrick (Witherspoon), '52
 Shirley B. Auld, '53
 John M. Cooper, '53
 Richard E. Buckley, '54
 Patricia J. Hamilton (McMichael), '54
 Thelma J. Kwolek (Davis), '54
 John Stemper, '54
 Barbara A. Tilley, '54
 David L. Geesey, '56
 Claire S. Olson (Salberg), '56
 Betty J. Short (Tartline), '56
 Lee V. Beatty, '57
 Dale E. Hassinger, '57
 Eugene A. Bolt, '58
 Shirley A. Radish (Martin), '58
 Emory B. Billingsley, '60
 Albert Helicke Jr., '62
 William F. Loper, '62
 Gus H. Nauman, '62
 Richard F. Rumbaugh, '62
 Lloyd E. Weidler Jr., '62
 Kathleen T. Bejbl (Toohey), '63
 Paul F. Black, '63 - Professor Emeritus
 Karen L. Carenbauer (Mann), '63
 Twila A. Clark (Martinez), '63
 David L. Hannah, '63

Mary Jane Lee (Kalmeyer), '63
 Jack G. Thomas, '63
 Patricia Erdos (Tiffany), '64
 Homer G. Philips, '64
 Edward L. Wilcox, '64
 James G. Mill, '65
 Frank L. Turner, '65
 Frank J. Lucido, '66
 Gary P. Demeter, '67
 Janet M. Hollack, '67
 Kathryn A. McClure (Miller), '67
 Richard G. Zets, '67
 Deborah K. Porter (Taylor), '68
 Margaret J. Ross (Pozzuto), '68
 Karen A. Stalneckner (Katuby), '68
 Sandra K. Manown (Hockenberry), '69
 Rosaline G. Shroat (Pensenstadler), '69
 Gary E. Czapor, '70
 Roger L. Kelly, '70
 Cheryl C. Paglia (Lundeen), '70
 William L. 'Bill' Pyle, '70
 R. David Farley, '71
 Ronald W. Rich, '71
 Joseph W. Green, '72
 Karen M. Kosarych (Roznowski), '72
 Carlotta M. Nichols (Hartzell), '72
 Thomas A. Cox, '73
 Michael F. Galante, '73
 Thomas Hepler, '73
 Robert L. Kwiatkowski, '73
 Terrance J. Zawacki, '73
 Corrine R. Bilock (Hobart), '74
 Lois A. Flanigan, '74

Shirley Kazdal (Marino), '74
 John W. Shenk, '74
 William E. Schwabenbauer, '75
 Roy M. Bonnar, '76
 William D. Crouse Jr., '76
 John C. Pukas, '76
 David E. Montgomery, '77
 Sharon L. Munson (Larson), '77
 Mary K. Phillips (Klacik), '77
 Edythe M. Schirra, '77
 Randy A. Bernstein, '78
 Deborah A. Fadool, '78
 Jay E. Hewitt, '78
 Kathleen J. Pino (Mick), '78
 Robert R. Perkoski, '80
 James D. Pursuit, '81
 Steven V. Spits, '81
 Sherri L. Stephens (Lining), '81
 Marylee Medve (Everett), '82
 Michael J. Sharr, '82
 Dwight W. Smith, '82
 Karen A. Bloom, '83
 Timothy A. Johnson, '83
 Margaret L. Pavelek, '83
 Eric S. McClain, '84
 Kenneth Wilson, '84
 Todd R. Pewterbaugh, '85
 Lori A. Yost, '85
 Valerie A. Sullivan, '86
 Eleanor V. Tarcha (Mikolas), '86
 Jeff E. Durbin, '87
 William Fillard, '87
 Karen C. Munson (Ezzo), '88

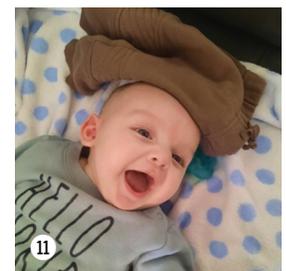
William J. Bajcz, '89
 Chad A. Kroll, '89
 Cheryl L. Hunt, '90
 Andrew E. Rich, '90
 Shelly L. DeMay (Jones), '91
 Suellen M. McCollim (Albert), '91
 Joanne M. Santus, '91
 Sandra L. Smith, '91
 Ronald Curry, '92
 Tammy S. Barr (Schandelmeier), '93
 Derek W. Collins, '93
 Darla S. Spaid (Anderson), '93
 Thomas J. Gricus, '94
 Timothy R. Settlemeyer, '94
 Kerri L. Collins (Collins), '95
 Christopher D. Twentier, '96
 Randy Fox, '00
 Kenneth Lukitsh, '00
 Ellen Pontius (Shaffer), '03 - Staff
 Andrew H. Reeder, '06
 Donald F. Ehrenberg, '07
 Nancy Hammond, '09
 Kyle R. McCoy, '12
 Kaitlin E. Stranick, '15
 Larry W. Gargasz - Retired Staff
 Richard K. Myers - Retired Faculty



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10



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SRU PROFESSOR AND FORMER AMATEUR BOXER DALLAS JACKSON TEACHES MIXED MARTIAL ARTS CLUB

There are many fields of study taught on college campuses that involve the sciences. None of these sciences, at least according to the thousands of recognized academic disciplines, has earned the colloquial designation of the "sweet science." That undisputed title belongs to the sport of boxing. One Slippery Rock University professor, who has won a few amateur boxing championships in his life, recently had the opportunity to lace up his gloves one more time and give his SRU students one of the more unique science lessons they've ever had.

Dallas Jackson, an associate professor of physical and health education, was recently invited by students in the Mixed Martial Arts Club at SRU to teach a 90-minute session on boxing. Club members train inside Morrow Field House three days a week during the semester.

"It was a perfect opportunity for me to combine my personal passion of boxing and my professional passion of teaching," Jackson

said. "I'm definitely an instructor who likes to employ active learning and that transfers well to an environment like that. Also, if I'm speaking about something I'm passionate about, then I think that comes through to the students."

Austin Rosemiller, a junior exercise science major from Kittanning, heard from one of his classmates that Jackson was a boxer. As president of the MMA Club at SRU, Rosemiller was intrigued. He saw Jackson on campus and asked him to give a lesson to the 20-25 students who regularly train in Morrow Field House. Jackson's one word response said it all: "Absolutely!"

"I could talk about 20 different things we learned and how we benefitted from it, but there's one that's most important, and that is his passion," Rosemiller said. "You could see it in his eyes and how he's moving and talking that he's passionate about boxing."

Jackson broke the lesson into three parts, each preceded by a talk and demonstration about the fighting style of three famous

"IT WAS A PERFECT OPPORTUNITY FOR ME TO COMBINE MY PERSONAL PASSION OF BOXING AND MY PROFESSIONAL PASSION OF TEACHING."



boxers: Mike Tyson (inside combinations with slipping and bobbing), Muhammad Ali (jabs to create space) and James Toney (counterpunching). Then he had each student try some moves out for themselves, either with a sparring partner or on the heavy punching bag.

Assisting Jackson were his friend Adam Ketler, a 2004 SRU graduate from Grove City, and Jackson's daughter, Sydney, who made sure the music on a portable speaker was cued for each round.

"I haven't had the opportunity to do something like this, so you can say I had it bottled up inside," Jackson said.

A native of Wichita, Kansas, Jackson learned boxing skills from his father, Robert Jackson, but he didn't start competing until 2003 as a college student at the University of North Texas. He entered the Dallas Golden Gloves tournament in the novice division for his weight class and won the city championship. A year later, he entered the open division at a lighter weight (154 pounds) and won that as well. He then advanced to the state tournament where he won a match but lost in the second round.

He finished his amateur boxing career with a 6-1 record. As Jackson began pursuing his doctoral degree, he didn't have as much time for boxing and rarely spars with opponents anymore.

"But not a day goes by where I'm not throwing punches, shadowboxing or maybe hitting a bag," said Jackson, with a smile. He thinks he still has it in him to enter a ring and compete. "But now, here I am, 20 years later interacting with students who would have been about the same age as I was when I started competing," Jackson said.

The MMA Club at SRU has about 35 members from all types of backgrounds and with different motivations for training.

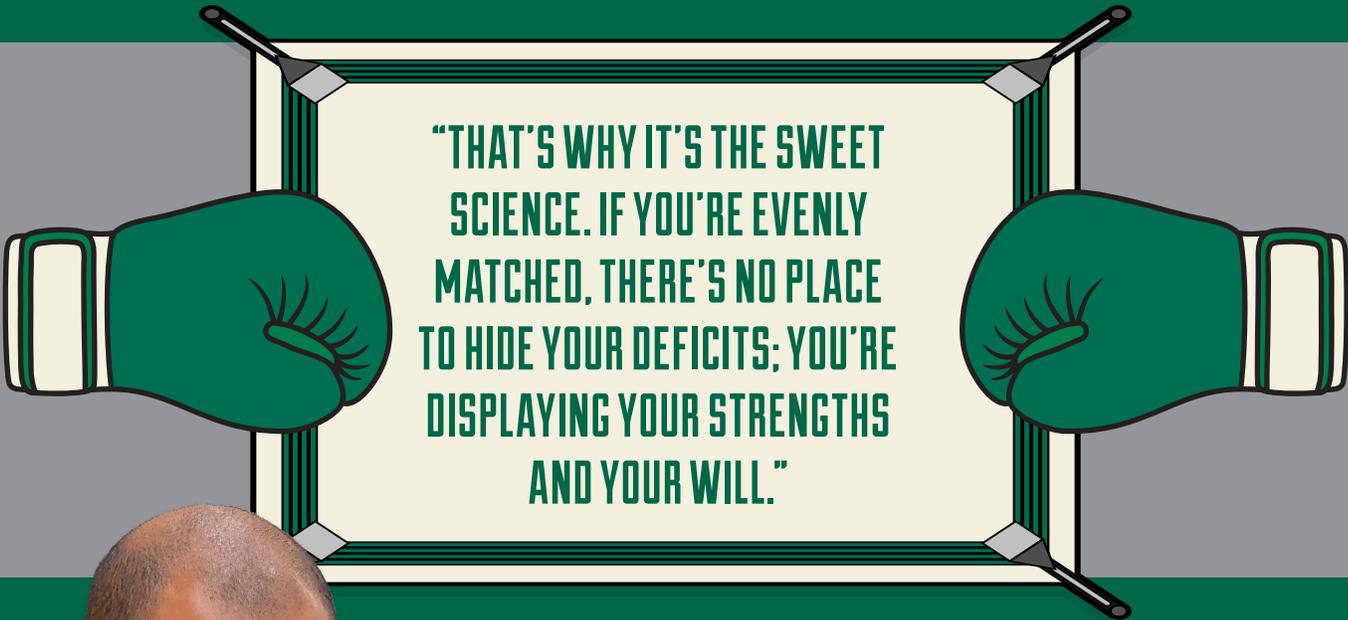
"Our membership includes people who want to know how to defend themselves, people who want to get a workout or relieve stress, and, of course, people who want to compete in combat sports," Rosemiller said.

"But the reason we've retained so much membership has been the variety of active lessons. There's always something new to learn, whether its striking, jujitsu or wrestling – we have all aspects of MMA."

Although the MMA Club at SRU doesn't compete as a registered club sport, with competitors against other schools or gyms, there are opportunities for the club to gain such status and compete at the intercollegiate level in the National University and College Association of Mixed Martial Arts. Rosemiller said at least five club members want to compete in MMA. Tournament fees and other expenses are a challenge, but the club has invested in equipment as interest has increased in the last few years.

"One thing I really like is how diverse the MMA club is by gender, ethnicity, and body type," Jackson said. "I designed the lesson to hopefully accommodate that, and I think everybody got something out of it. They are students first and eager to learn."





“THAT’S WHY IT’S THE SWEET SCIENCE. IF YOU’RE EVENLY MATCHED, THERE’S NO PLACE TO HIDE YOUR DEFICITS; YOU’RE DISPLAYING YOUR STRENGTHS AND YOUR WILL.”

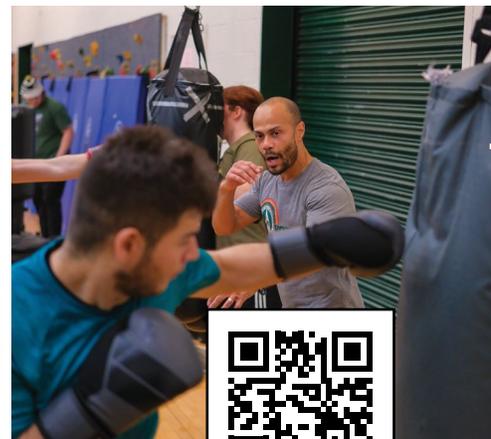


Jackson said boxing provides a great mixture of intellect and physicality through both strength and stamina. It’s more than just understanding technical skills but also about understanding one’s self.

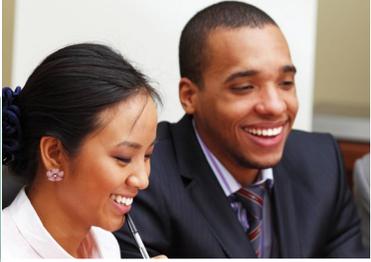
“For anyone who has boxed against another individual, whether it be sparring or competition, there’s not a more honest exchange with another person,” Jackson said. “That’s why it’s the sweet science.

If you’re evenly matched, there’s no place to hide your deficits; you’re displaying your strengths and your will. That’s why you see the fighters have a newfound respect for each other at the end of fights. They shared an experience that not a lot of people get an opportunity to share.”

Thanks to this unique interaction between professor and students, a lot more people have a newfound respect for each other and the sweet science of boxing.



Watch a video of Dallas Jackson teaching the class by scanning this QR code



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I am the rock

John White, '04 bachelor's in safety management

DAY JOB: I am the director of the environmental, health and safety department for inventory solutions of Cox Automotive, one of the world's largest automotive services providers. Our job is to continuously improve the company's culture so that we better understand natural human error and improve human performance while building resilient systems. Our work is very rewarding in a challenging and changing environment with auto auctions, reconditioning of vehicles and the transportation of millions of units throughout North America. My team is on the frontline of developing new electrical vehicle safety standards for the auto industry and pioneering battery recycling processes to reduce environmental impact on new battery manufacturing.

BACKGROUND: I grew up in the Philadelphia area before attending SRU. With a passion to do things differently and be the driver of change, I knew that my career had to give me the opportunity to be innovative. The trajectory of my life led me to The Rock and Dr. Joseph Cali's Health and Safety Department.

INFLUENCE OF SRU: I did not know anyone on campus on the first day of classes which pushed me to grow independently and to meet new people. Building lifelong relationships with my Theta Xi brothers and other friends outside of immediate group is something I still cherish. The Rock made me a better person and provided me the tools and education to succeed. The education gave me an advantage within my field as I started my career with Federal OSHA, before moving into the corporate world with billion-dollar companies. I hope to come back to share my story with today's students and let them know they are on the correct path.

