THE UNIVERSITY OF

AKRON

CAMPUS. COMMUNITY. ZIPS. | FALL 2026



THE POWER OF YES

UA's bold brand vision **PAGE 6**

HEART VALVE INNOVATION
Page 10

RESIDENCE HALLS REIMAGINED
Page 16

NASA LEADER
Page 28



THE UNIVERSITY OF AKRON: THE STORY OF WHAT'S NEXT

The University of Akron community is global. It transcends the footprint of our campus in our great city and extends into the far reaches of intellectual inquiry, scientific discovery, health and wellness, international commerce and so much more. Our meaningful influence across the world weaves a narrative we want to continue telling.

That's why we're so excited about the return of The University of Akron Magazine, enthused at the chance to tell you about our refreshed brand and encouraged by the opportunity to reinforce our institutional purpose.

Locally in Akron, we continue our role as the intellectual center of our region. We remain a student-centered, community-engaged, growth-driven campus — a place for education, connection and reflection. Those themes reverberate throughout the enterprise-wide revitalization we're currently undertaking.

Last year, our 155th as a higher education institution, we introduced a comprehensive revitalization plan. As part of that initiative, more than a dozen large-scale projects are underway in key areas, from renewed financial confidence to renovated facilities, refocused academic programs, revamped athletics operations and more.

As we restore institutional certainty and revive our commitment to positivity and expanded reach, storytelling will play an instrumental role. To celebrate the magazine's return, we're launching a UA memory contest and spirit giveaway. Email president@uakron.edu or scan the QR code to share your favorite University of Akron memory. No matter where you are across the globe, we want to hear from you! Contest winners will be invited for a special UA Spirit Experience.

I often request that people I encounter help reframe the rhetoric about The University of Akron. UA is not a best-kept secret. The University's impact is not merely regional. We are not defined by realities of the past. Instead, The University of Akron is revitalizing! In this issue, we are thrilled to share highlights of our incredible initiatives, our local contributions and our global reach.



R.J. Nemer '90 '95
president@uakron.edu

IN THIS ISSUE



05


06


10


14


16


20


24

Zips Moving Forward	02
UA's Bold New Brand	06
Heart Valve Research	10
Composition Student's Premiere	11
America 250 Insights	12
Unique Research Supports Industry	14
Home Sweet Campus	16
Preparing Students for AI	18
Bloomberg Intern Takes on NYC	19
Health and Safety Career Pipeline	20
Zips in the Spotlight	22
Campus Cupboard Volunteers	24
Zips at Play	26
Zips Forever	28
Class Notes	30
Zips Who Support	32



NEW OPPORTUNITIES ON CAMPUS

The University of Akron is always seeking new ways to advance student success while deepening ties to industry and community. Three new University entities launched in 2026 are designed to advance those goals and more.

SOPA

Expanding opportunities in the performing arts

UA brought together its music, dance and arts administration programs into the School of Performing Arts (SOPA). The move offers students connected, performance-based learning in one academic home, aligning operations under a unified structure. SOPA also creates more opportunities for students to work across disciplines as musicians, dancers and arts administrators on productions and projects that reflect how the performing arts operate in professional settings.

DATA+

Preparing students for the future of work

The Institute for Data, Analytics and Technology Advancement (DATA+) brings together data science, artificial intelligence, computing and cyber forensics under one University-wide initiative. DATA+ serves as an interdisciplinary hub for data literacy and applied data skills, connecting academic programs, hands-on learning environments and employer partnerships. Students in every major can build skills that apply to their fields and gain experience using emerging technologies to solve real-world problems — preparing them for a workforce in which data and AI are becoming essential across nearly every profession.

CEBR

Leading the way in economic and business research

The Center for Economic and Business Research (CEBR) in the College of Business's Department of Economics positions the University as a leading source of independent economic and business research for the state. Whether evaluating the impact of a new development, assessing the return on a public investment, analyzing industry trends or measuring the contribution of a nonprofit organization, CEBR provides the rigorous analysis organizations need to make sound strategic decisions.

NEW DEANS BRING EXPERIENCE AND FRESH PERSPECTIVE

The University of Akron welcomed new leaders to the College of Business and Buchtel College of Arts and Sciences in 2026.



A familiar face to the UA community, Dr. Terry Daugherty is the new dean of the College of Business. Daugherty previously served at UA as a faculty member in the Department of Marketing and associate dean of the college from 2019 to 2020. Daugherty also served as the academic director of the Suarez Applied Marketing Research Lab, the chair of the Department of Marketing, and assistant dean and director of graduate programs.



Dr. Peter Q. Pfordresher is the new Buchtel College of Arts and Sciences dean. He came to UA from the University at Buffalo, where he was the associate dean for academic affairs. An internationally recognized expert in the field of music cognition, Pfordresher is a fellow of the Association for Psychological Science, past president of the Society for Music Perception and Cognition, and an author of the textbook "Psychology of Music: From Sound to Significance" (third edition).

AKRON LAW CONTINUES BUILDING ACCELERATED PATHWAYS TO A DEGREE

The University of Akron School of Law has reached a milestone in its effort to make law school accessible for students. Akron Law now has agreements — known as 3+3 pathways — with more than 20 colleges and universities whose students can earn an undergraduate degree and law degree in just six years. Typically, it takes students seven years to complete both degrees.

In the 3+3 model, eligible students spend their first three years completing undergraduate coursework before transitioning into three years of law school. Students may be able to apply to law school as early as their first year of undergraduate study, allowing them to plan their academic path from the beginning and potentially reduce the overall time and cost required to earn both degrees.

For students considering careers in law, combined pathways can offer significant advantages, including earlier entry into the legal profession, reduced educational expenses and a more structured transition from undergraduate study to law school.

While most of Akron Law's partner institutions are in Ohio, the program has expanded to include schools in Indiana, Pennsylvania and West Virginia. University of Akron undergraduate students have their own pathway, too — just one more reason for those interested in law school to choose UA.

UNIVERSITY'S COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT EFFORTS RECOGNIZED

The community engagement opportunities at UA are boundless, thanks to faculty and staff who build impactful connections with organizations in Akron, Summit County and beyond.

In January 2026, the University announced that it had been recognized nationally with the 2026 Carnegie Community Engagement (CE) Classification. This is an elective designation that highlights an institution's commitment to building prosperity in its community, fostering civic engagement, expanding usable knowledge and catalyzing real-world learning experiences for students. The University was among the first institutions in the country to achieve CE Classification in 2008.

To earn the reclassification, UA underwent a self-study that involved around 100 members of the UA community.

The EX[L] Center for Community Engaged Learning is UA's hub for this work. The center's [Un]class program, which offers unscripted, transdisciplinary, community-engaged courses that lead to real-world impact, was recognized in 2026 with a Civic Engagement and Community Service Award from Insight Into Academia magazine.

UA's Carnegie Community Engagement Classification self-study found:







TWO APPOINTED TO BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Dr. David W. James and Carter D. Ridgway '26 have joined the University's Board of Trustees. James and Ridgway were appointed to the Board this summer by Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine.



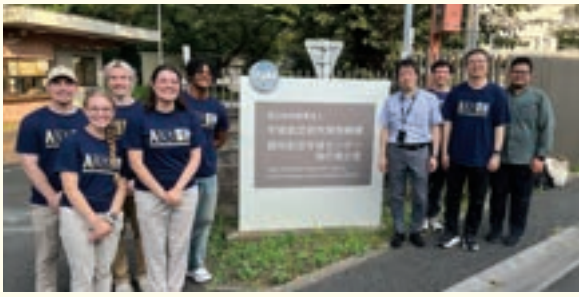
James (top) is a former Akron Public Schools (APS) superintendent, and served as a UA Advisory Trustee since 2019. He is the executive director of Summit Education Initiative, and was deputy superintendent of operations at Columbus City Schools after his retirement from APS, where he worked for 29 years. James' term will expire on July 1, 2032.



Ridgway (bottom), a second-year student in The University of Akron School of Law, graduated summa cum laude with a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science. In addition to pursuing his law degree, Ridgway is the treasurer for UA's student chapter of the Federal Bar Association. He also is a member of the Moot Court Honor Society and serves as an assistant editor of the Akron Law Review. His term as a Student Trustee will expire on July 1, 2028.

UNIQUE JOURNEYS

For University of Akron students, unique and valuable learning experiences don't only happen in the classroom – in fact, those experiences can happen far from Northeast Ohio. In spring and summer 2026, students were in the field and on the ground in the U.S. and around the world for transformative experiences they will carry with them long after they graduate. For more unique journeys, go to uakron.edu/magazine.







JAPAN

Six undergraduate and graduate mechanical engineering students spent eight weeks in Japan this summer conducting research in sustainable composite materials through a National Science Foundation-funded International Research Experiences for Students program led by Dr. Kwek-Tze "KT" Tan, professor of mechanical engineering. Working alongside Japanese students and faculty at The University of Tokyo, Tokyo University of Agriculture and Technology, and Nagoya University, the UA students' advanced research projects focused on sustainability in composite materials. Their work has already yielded significant results, with all six students' abstracts accepted for presentation at the American Society of Mechanical Engineers International Mechanical Engineering Congress & Exposition in Vancouver, Canada. The students also presented their research to and and received feedback from scientists at the Japan Aerospace Exploration Agency's Composite Materials facility.



ENGLAND

Students in the Drs. Gary B. and Pamela S. Williams Honors College, led by Dean Fedearia Nicholson, explored London, Bath and the Cotswolds during spring break. The group visited landmarks such as the Tower of London, Westminster Abbey, Windsor Castle and Stonehenge, took a cruise on the River Thames and saw a West End theater performance.

ALASKA

UA students representing a range of majors from biomedical sciences to dance spent 10 days during summer vacation exploring marine ecosystems, coastal rainforests, Indigenous culture and local industries, while learning alongside classmates with varied academic interests. Drs. Stephen Weeks and Lara Roketenetz of the Department of Biology led the trip.





CAN A NEW BRAND INSPIRE A UNIVERSITY?

YES

By Jessica Whitehill



When Braxton Moore returned to The University of Akron (UA) in fall 2025 for his junior year, the exercise science major was trying to decide if he could handle the tough course load he had envisioned for the semester.

Most of the well-meaning people around Moore advised him that he might not be able to handle a heavy academic schedule, especially with his increasing responsibilities, including national travel to represent his fraternity, Omega Psi Phi.

But when Moore arrived back on campus, he saw a much different message.

"It was, YES, all around campus, and on the website," said Moore, who along with his twin brother Brandon Moore is set to graduate in December 2026. "I thought, yes, I can do this. Yes, I can put forth an honest effort and try. It really forced me to think about challenging myself. I thought about how the University was pushing the idea of YES, and so how can I embody that?"

Initiated by UA President R.J. Nemer '90 '95 to highlight the incredible opportunities at the University, the new "The World Needs More YES" brand initiative was unveiled in August 2025. More than a year later, YES has become more than a simple word. It's a mindset that has driven community connection and student success across the University.

"YES seems simple, but it's really a thoughtful and quick way to share the vast opportunities the University offers," Nemer said. "Students thrive here, regardless of their professional and personal passions. And when it comes to expanding opportunity, we're laser-focused on how we can best affirm a meaningful experience for all we interact with."

The new brand wasn't the only change last fall that has carried into 2026. The University posted enrollment gains over the past two years for the first time since 2011. UA has a new website with a refreshed look and improved usability. A new housing partnership has meant improved facilities for students. Academic and athletic achievement have also grown.

The University community has embraced the new brand, and that energy and enthusiasm have spread throughout campus.

A brand built on collaboration

Nemer, who was named president of the University in May 2024, knew then that he wanted to embark on a rebrand that would reflect all the ways in which UA is a special community.

"Coming from a marketing and entrepreneurial career background, I felt we could do more to spread the great news about UA," he said. "We have a responsibility to share more of the components that contribute to our unique institutional narrative."

The University engaged the firm 160over90, a global leader in higher education marketing and branding, to develop concepts for the new brand. The company spent time on campus with faculty, staff and students to get a feel

for the community. 160over90 worked closely with the University's internal marketing team to refine the concepts, and the YES brand emerged.

YES is a nod to the idea that the University is a place where ambition meets opportunity — where students are forging their individual and unique pathways, both personal and professional. The brand also encourages a strengthened institutional culture, with a bright, promise-filled future and a healthy respect for UA's past.

The tone of the YES brand is meant to showcase the community's confidence. Its industriousness and commitment. And its intentionality and authenticity. New primary colors were designated Buchtel Blue and Prezi Gold, connecting UA's founder John R. Buchtel to Nemer, who often uses the term "Prezi" for Office of the President-based initiatives. A palette of secondary and tertiary colors, including an electric Zippy Green as a nod to the University's iconic mascot, was introduced, as were new typefaces and other design elements.

The University integrated the new messaging across campus and beyond, from event flyers and recruitment materials to billboards, digital advertising and other brand touchpoints.

College fair attendees saw, for example, "YES is just the beginning" on the cover of the annual University viewbook and in event marketing.





A mailer sent to high school seniors had "See where YES can take you" on the front.

The first image visitors to the University's new website see is a YES graphic with the phrase, "The world needs more YES."

Nemer was pleased with how the branding effort came together — and with the outcome.

"160over90 brought some dynamic looks and messages to the table," he said. "The UA team ultimately chose the positive message from one option and the vibrant look from another option, and we asked our partners at 160over90 to combine them. That process allowed us to create a brand that is uniquely Akron."

From message to momentum

Last fall, Nemer hosted a Call to Celebrate party outside Jean Hower Taber Student Union to kick off the new brand, and to mark the increasing energy and positivity on campus.

The celebration also marked another indicator of meaningful institutional growth — positive enrollment gains. Fall 2025 represented a 3.4% increase over 2024 in total enrollment, with growth seen across undergraduate, graduate, law and College Credit Plus student enrollments. This headcount increase was the largest University enrollment since 2021.

Enrollment was up again in fall 2026, marking the first time in 15 years the University had consecutive years of enrollment growth.

Progress has also carried into the University's physical landscape. Nemer directed the repair of the fountain in Les and Kathy Coleman Common, enhancing the sensory experience for students walking and relaxing in the area. The state-funded renovation of Buchtel Common, nearly completed in fall 2026, has added more greenery, gathering spaces and decorative entrances to the heart of campus.

"We wanted to create communal spaces for a sense of comradery and liveliness, where people feel they can collaborate and gather," Nemer said.



The University's residence halls are also undergoing a major transformation, reshaping the campus living experience for students. Thanks to a public-private partnership, several residence halls are undergoing capital improvements that will modernize the buildings, even as they continue to be among the most affordable in the state.

The changes, including new furniture, upgraded common spaces and elevators, and improved heating and cooling systems, were evident in several buildings this fall, while other buildings will undergo renovations during the school year. Perhaps the most unique change is the addition of private pod-style bathrooms in two residence halls.

The University is also removing financial barriers for students from Ohio who want to attend UA. Eligibility for the Making Akron Possible grant was extended from Summit County and five other local counties to now cover the entire state. The adjusted gross income threshold for eligibility is now $85,000, which means more students qualify for full tuition and general fee coverage.

"The YES brand accurately reflects our commitment to students," Nemer said. "It is multi-faceted and bold. It considers our time-honored past, and prepares us for a sustainable future."

The evolution of YES

Student saw plenty of YES messaging when they returned to campus for the fall 2026 semester. The annual Convocation celebration for first-year students and welcome lunch, held the Friday before the start of classes, featured a large YES chalk mural on the wall of Zook Hall. Throughout the University's Weeks of Welcome events, the YES theme was a running thread through signage and materials — a show of support that the campus community continues to stand behind and find inspiration in the brand.

In his Convocation address to the Class of 2030, Nemer urged the new UA students to try something new and different that might take them out of their comfort zone.

"That's when you will experience your growth, and I want to see that more than anything," Nemer told them, urging them in a subtle way to say YES to challenges and opportunities.

"To signal our commitment to comprehensive progress, we've chosen themes to drive our momentum during the past two years," he said about his speech. "So far, we've declared last academic year as 'a year of celebration' and announced we're currently in a 'year of growth.' Those sentiments remind our community to honor all that makes UA a special place to learn, work and connect. They inspire us to propel ourselves and our institution forward. The brand keeps us focused on those important tasks."

The YES brand will evolve a bit for the 2026-27 academic year, with a new UA pitch to the community: YES, The University of Akron is WORTH IT.

Like his twin brother Braxton Moore, Brandon Moore said the YES concept continues to drive his achievement and success.

"It helped me realize that at Akron, if you put your mind to it and if you believe it, you can do it," he said. "Can I do that coursework? Yes. Can I join that club? Yes. Can I meet with these people I've never met before? Yes. Can I help create the next generation of leaders? Yes. Can I leave this university a better place than I found it? Yes."

"YES seems simple, but it's really a thoughtful and quick way to share the vast opportunities The University of Akron offers," Nemer said. "When it comes to expanding opportunity, we're laser-focused on how we can best affirm a meaningful experience for all we interact with."

ENGINEERING THE NEXT BEAT IN HEART VALVE IMPLANTS

By Jessica Whitehill

Heart valve implants transform the lives of millions of people worldwide who have cardiovascular disease. Yet current valve replacement options are not suitable for everyone. Valves may require invasive open-heart surgery or have limitations in durability and performance, especially for older and high-risk patients.

Dr. Hossein Ravanbakhsh, a University of Akron (UA) assistant professor of biomedical engineering, is leading undergraduate and graduate student researchers who are developing the next generation of heart valve implants.

To support development of these implants, Ravanbakhsh received a $200,000 American Heart Association Institutional Research Enhancement Award. "This project represents a shift toward smarter, less invasive and more patient-centered cardiovascular implants, solutions designed not just to replace damaged tissue, but to work with the body," Ravanbakhsh said.

Compared with traditional open surgeries, minimally invasive procedures offer faster patient recovery and lower health care costs. The challenge, however, is that these procedures require implants that can be introduced in a compact form and reliably change shape to conform to the patient's body.

Researchers will create heart valve implants that can be delivered through small incisions and adapt to the body after implantation. The project will generate insights into the behavior of shape-memory polymers during high-resolution 3D printing, provide design guidelines for shape-morphing constructs and establish foundational principles for future deployable biomedical devices.





Ravanbakhsh was also the recipient of a $150,746 grant from the National Science Foundation to investigate innovative additive manufacturing methods for stimuli-responsive biomedical implants.

Crucial outcomes

As the worldwide population ages, this research has become crucial for future treatment of heart disease and other conditions.

"Developing materials and manufacturing methods that allow implants to undergo predictable shape transformation after delivery could open new possibilities for minimally invasive treatments," Ravanbakhsh said.

The award gives students in UA's BioEngineering for Translational Applications Laboratory (BETA Lab), which Ravanbakhsh directs, the opportunity to work at the intersection of engineering, materials science and medicine. The BETA Lab is focused on functional biomaterials and biofabrication technologies for tissue engineering, regenerative medicine and therapeutic applications.

"Students gain practical expertise in heart valve engineering, additive manufacturing, and interdisciplinary research, preparing them for impactful biomedical engineering careers," Ravanbakhsh said.

COMPOSING HER FUTURE

By Jessica Whitehill



University of Akron (UA) music composition major Sarah Hegenderfer was just a second-year student when the Akron Symphony Orchestra premiered her piece "Clearing of Snow" in January 2026 at E.J. Thomas Performing Arts Hall.

For Hegenderfer, having her piece performed by a professional orchestra was a transformative moment. A few months later the Cleveland Women's Orchestra performed one of her works at the legendary Severance Music Center (see image below). The Alliance, Ohio, native looks to be on her way to a major composing career.

YOU STARTED AT UA AS A MUSIC EDUCATION MAJOR, AND YOU ALSO PLAY A VARIETY OF INSTRUMENTS. WHAT DRAWS YOU TO COMPOSITION? I like to tell a story, to convey emotion and connect with the audience and the performers. I write a lot of double meanings into my work. With "Clearing of Snow," I wanted to portray that feeling of stepping outside in winter but it's slowly transitioning into spring. It's also a play on moments when you get glimmers of hope amid grief.

HOW HAS STUDYING UNDER THE DEPARTMENT OF MUSIC FACULTY INFORMED YOUR WORK? The faculty members are very willing to open their arms to me and mentor me in a way that has developed my composition skills. There is a lot of variety here and I have dipped my toes into every program. For example, in the last few weeks of my Music Theory 4 class we had a jazz unit, and the lectures gave me so much to add to my compositional toolbox.

WHAT WAS IT LIKE TO SIT IN THE AUDIENCE FOR THE "CLEARING OF SNOW" PREMIERE? There was so much to take in. After it was over, a girl came up to me and told me her mom had passed away and that this piece helped her feel a sense of hope. Connecting with that one audience member was the most impactful thing.

WHAT OTHER ACTIVITIES HAVE YOU BEEN INVOLVED IN AT UA? I am the president and founder of a student organization called the Akron New Music Society, which fosters collaboration between living composers and performers to grow the new music scene. I'm hoping to start a two-day residency program to bring composers to campus every year.

HOW DOES YOUR PHILOSOPHY MINOR INTERSECT WITH YOUR MAJOR? Philosophy really informs my compositional storytelling. I think experiencing the world is what helps you create things. My motto is that creation is the most human thing we can do, and philosophy has helped me develop that mindset and understanding of the world around me.

WHERE DO YOU ENVISION TAKING YOUR COMPOSING CAREER? Eventually I'd like to compose for film and animation. I'm inspired by the Studio Ghibli movies such as "Spirited Away." I love the soundtracks and I think there's a lot of storytelling there.



AMERICA 250: PUBLIC EDUCATION'S DEEP ROOTS IN OHIO

Essay by Dr. Kevin Kern,
University of Akron
professor of history



Incorporators and trustees of Buchtel College (above), the precursor to The University of Akron, pose in this 1872 image in front of the old Buchtel Hall. Ohio's public university system, of which UA is now a member, was an early model for public higher education. UA played a major role in another historic moment (right) when the federal government contracted with the University to establish the Rubber Research Laboratory to support the development of synthetic rubber needed for World War II.

As the United States celebrates the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence this year, one might suppose that Ohio, which did not become a state until 1803, and the city of Akron, founded in 1825, have little connection to the events that happened decades earlier. However, a closer look reveals that the state and the city both played key roles in one particular vision of the nation's founders: a commitment to widespread public education.

One of the most overlooked but consequential founding documents of the United States was the Land Ordinance of 1785. Passed by the Continental Congress less than a decade after the Declaration, and two years before the Constitution, this law set out how the nation's public land system would be surveyed and distributed for centuries to come. One especially far-sighted provision of the Land Ordinance was its requirement that one square mile of every 36 square-mile township be used to support public schools. At a time when most of the country outside of New England had no public schools, this was a revolutionary concept.



As the first territory carved out of the public land system, Ohio essentially became the guinea pig for this new experiment in U.S. public education, and hosted the first public schools provided for by the Founding Fathers.

As well-meaning as this provision was, the funding arising from the Land Ordinance was insufficient to support all the schools needed as Ohio exploded in population during the early 1800s. One of the least-populous states when admitted in 1803, Ohio was already the third-largest by the 1830s. In the 1840s, educational reformers in Akron convinced the city to pass a new act that reorganized and secured better funding for public education. The Akron School Law of 1847 consolidated all of the schools into a single school district financed by local property taxes, with each elementary school subdivided into different grades — first grade, second grade, third and so on — and the provision for a public high school. An elected board of education would oversee the system and hire administrators to run it. If this sounds familiar, it should. The Akron School Law was so successful that the state of Ohio adopted it as the Ohio School Law of 1849, and other states followed suit afterward. In short, this law that arose in Akron became the model for public K-12 education across the country.

Paving the way for public higher education

Ohio was also a pioneer in public university education going all the way back to the nation's earliest years. As the Continental Congress began to sell Ohio lands under the Land Ordinance of 1785, it also approved two major bulk sales. One transaction was the sale of a large area of southeast Ohio to the Ohio Company of Associates, a group of New England Revolutionary War veterans to whom the government still owed money for their service. Another was an area of southwest Ohio to a group led by New Jersey Judge John Cleves Symmes, who also held unpaid notes issued by the Congress. A provision of both of these sales was that land be set aside to create and support a public university in each area. These grants ultimately resulted in the founding of Ohio University in Athens (1804), and Miami University in Oxford (1809). These pioneering acts established the important precedent of Congress authorizing land-grant universities. The Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 greatly expanded on this idea, giving states federal lands to create public universities. Scores of U.S. universities from coast to coast resulted from this law.

Today's public university landscape would look very different without the land-grant university precedent Congress set for Ohio land sales in the 1780s.

So, we can see that Akron and Ohio indeed played important roles in the Founders' expansive educational vision. From pioneering and expanding the nation's K-12 school system to helping establish government-supported college education, Akron — and, of course, The University of Akron — played a vital role in almost 250 years of experimentation in bringing public education to the people of the United States.

UA'S MASS SPECTROMETRY CENTER
AN ESSENTIAL PARTNER FOR INDUSTRY AROUND THE WORLD

By Jessica Whitehill

Dr. Chrys Wesdemiotis has worked for decades in the same lab space located behind an unassuming door on the first floor of Knight Chemical Lab Building at The University of Akron (UA).

The work that he does, however, is hardly a secret. A distinguished professor of chemistry, Wesdemiotis is the director of UA's Mass Spectrometry Center (MSC). The center collaborates with researchers and industry partners from the UA campus and worldwide to provide critical measurements about the chemical makeup of materials used in a wide range of fields including health care, environmental science and forensic science.



Most mass spectrometers are used solely to assess biological materials. The University's MSC is one of few centers in the country that can assess the composition of materials that contain synthetic chemicals such as polymers. Wesdemiotis trains his student researchers to handle these samples, which behave differently than naturally occurring materials.

"Most people don't want to analyze polymers in their instruments. But for me, it's my life," said Wesdemiotis, whose nearly 40-year career was celebrated in the November/December 2025 issue of the academic journal "Mass Spectrometry Reviews."

"That's why we are contacted so often from industry here and globally," he said. "Companies want to know if they made the desired product, and we can confirm that."

Why are polymers hard to handle?

A mass spectrometer determines what molecules, based on mass, are present in a sample and how much of each molecule is there. It also detects any impurities. The instrument can detect the smallest quantities of pollutants in water, soil, air and biological samples. It can also determine the chemicals present in coatings or additives. A forensic investigator might request analysis of a sample to determine if there are drugs or toxins present.

The polymers in these samples, however, provide a unique challenge for delicate instruments that use a high-strength vacuum.

The same instruments valued for their sensitivity in detecting molecules can also can also be easily contaminated

UA is one of few places in the country that trains students how to handle synthetic chemicals such as polymers in a mass spectrometer.





by the smallest fragment during the measurement process, making the instruments harder to maintain. Polyethylene glycol, a synthetic compound in laxatives and rocket fuel, for example, tends to stick to the walls of a mass spectrometer.

The MSC, however, focuses on the structural analysis of synthetic polymers, biomaterials and polymer-biopolymer compounds. The center's partners are confident that Wesdemiotis and his team can handle these materials and come up with accurate measurements.

Global and local industry partners

Most of the center's international partners find UA though online searches or presentations at conferences. Over the years the center has analyzed samples for universities and companies in Greece, the Netherlands, Germany, France and Japan. A few local industry partners come in person to use the instruments.

"There are a lot of very complex industrial problems I could not solve without this center," said Dr. Christina Mastromatteo, a scientist from the Lubrizol Corporation, a global chemical company based in Wickliffe, Ohio. Mastromatteo visits the center weekly to test samples.

"We rely on the instrumentation here," she said. "Having access to all of these novel pieces of equipment is so important."

Preparing the future job force

The MSC also draws UA undergraduates, graduate students and faculty who want to do research with the spectrometers and learn how they work. The training Wesdemiotis offers helps prepare students for careers in the polymer and materials science industries.

"There are very few groups, if any, in the United States that train students specifically to apply this method," Wesdemiotis said. "That's why these students tend to find jobs quickly after, or even before, they graduate."

Recent MSC student research projects included analyses of the chemical makeup of the natural glue that sea urchins secrete to help them cling to rocks, and the chemicals that may leach out of tires and contaminate the environment.

Camden Doerrer, a junior biomedical science major from Uniontown, Ohio, is working with Summa Health to determine the presence of microplastics or additives in infant stool, known as meconium. If the mass spectrometers confirm the presence of synthetic molecules, it would indicate they had passed from the mother to the child in utero.

"I had (Wesdemiotis) as a chemistry teacher, and I was interested in his use of the mass spectrometers," Doerrer said. "I talked to him at the end of my freshman year and asked if I could join his research group. It's been incredible to have the opportunity to be introduced to mass spectrometry."



One of the Mass Spectrometry Center's graduate students is researching the chemical makeup of the natural glue that sea urchins secrete when they cling to rocks.

HOME SWEET CAMPUS: RESIDENCE HALLS GET A GLOW-UP



University of Akron students returned this fall to a new chapter in campus living. Through a partnership with nationally recognized campus housing leaders, UA offers reimagined residential spaces with affordability, accessibility and student success at the heart of the experience. More than a facilities upgrade, this initiative reflects a renewed commitment to vibrant, modern communities where students can feel at home, build connections and succeed. Work on the improvements began over summer break, during which time the Spicer Residence Hall and Honors Complex were completely renovated, and continues during the fall semester.

Planned enhancements include:

- Private pod-style bathrooms in Bulger and Spanton halls;
- Modernized finishes, flooring and refreshed interiors;
- New furniture and upgraded study and social spaces;
- New common kitchens and shared gathering areas;
- Electronic/keyless building access;
- Elevator upgrades; and
- Improved heating and cooling systems.



Renderings (above) show a connector to be built between Bulger and Spanton halls. Renovations to spaces in other residence halls (right) were completed during the summer. Work continues this year.



















Zips Discover

READY FOR AI:
NEW DEGREE PREPARES STUDENTS FOR THE INTERSECTION OF DATA AND STRATEGY

By Jessica Whitehill

In this day and age, any conversation about career preparation and workforce readiness must include ensuring students have AI skills and understanding. The University of Akron (UA)'s College of Business is a statewide leader in delivering programs that support graduates in this new world.

Earlier this year, the University introduced a Bachelor of Business Administration in Applied Artificial Intelligence and Information Systems program — one of the first programs of its kind in Ohio. The degree will prepare students for the intersection of technology and business, supporting their understanding of how data, strategy and information play a role.

UA graduates will leave with more than a working knowledge of artificial intelligence. They'll have the technical fluency to understand how AI works and the business savvy to put it to work responsibly. They'll learn to use AI-powered tools to sharpen decision-making, streamline operations and drive innovation, while also examining the ethical, cultural and organizational issues that come with integrating these technologies into the workplace.

"I chose the Applied AI and Information Systems program because of the incredible relevance and opportunity surrounding AI and technology as a whole," said Aaron Murphy, a UA sophomore and Bolivar, Ohio, native who is the president of Society for Information Systems, Technology and Analytics, a UA student organization.

"When I visited The University of Akron and the College of Business, I learned about its culture of providing students with the opportunities and experience to land a great job in their desired field," Murphy said.

According to the National Association of Colleges and Employers' 2026 Jobs Outlook Spring Update survey, 35% of employers who responded will require AI skills for entry-level jobs. In 2025, that number was 13.3%.

"As the demand for AI skills continues to grow rapidly, our students will be among the first in Ohio to graduate with this kind of specialized training," said College of Business Dean Terry Daugherty. "We're excited as they step into leadership roles and help organizations navigate the opportunities and challenges of an increasingly AI-driven world."



"Graduating from this program will give me the chance to help people and businesses through technology, which is what I am passionate about."

Aaron Murphy, UA sophomore

UA'S FIRST BLOOMBERG INTERN TAKES ON NEW YORK CITY

By Jessica Whitehill

A lot of persistence and networking paid off this summer for Denzel Kodua-Sarpong, a senior cybersecurity major.

He became the first University of Akron (UA) student to land a prestigious internship at Bloomberg, a New York City-based global leader in business and financial information and news.

Kodua-Sarpong worked as an equity research analyst intern in Bloomberg Intelligence, where he was a member of the general ETF (Exchange-Traded Fund) team. ETFs are type of investment that allow investors to buy a collection of investments, such as stocks or bonds, with a single purchase. Kodua-Sarpong's project was to build and present an ETF model, then write a primer on the ETF and pitch his findings to senior Bloomberg staff.

This experience was an incredible learning opportunity, he said, but his lunch breaks may prove just as valuable in the future. Whenever he had a few minutes to spare, Kodua-Sarpong watched the Bloomberg anchors and reporters filming their shows. He made a point to meet the shows' guests — typically high-level financial executives — after they filmed their segments. He networked with as many people as he could, including Michael Bloomberg himself. The billionaire businessman and former New York City mayor was sitting at his desk when Kodua-Sarpong approached him.



Kodua-Sarpong shaking hands with Michael Bloomberg.

"I shared a lot personally about where I come from and where I live," said Kodua-Sarpong, who was born in Ghana, moved to the U.S. permanently in 2020 and graduated from Copley High School near Akron. "It was a good conversation."

Kodua-Sarpong was also recognized on-air when Joel Weber, head of Bloomberg Explains & Games, noted that Kodua-Sarpong had helped with a segment on the Bloomberg show "ETF IQ."

Kodua-Sarpong was introduced to the Bloomberg company as a UA student representative on a February 2025 trip to New York with College of Business donors. The group had the unique experience of meeting some big names in the financial world, including Jason Kelly, a chief correspondent for Bloomberg Originals. The two kept in touch, and Kelly gave Kodua-Sarpong a key referral to the internship program.



A Dean's List student, Kodua-Sarpong received some great news at the start of the fall 2026 semester — he was offered a full-time job at Bloomberg after graduation.

"I'm feeling confident in the work I did this summer and how things have gone," Kodua-Sarpong said. "It was quite the experience and great to meet a lot of people."

Zips who Achieve

BUILDING THE WORKFORCE, TOGETHER

By Alex Knisely

Health care providers, behavioral health agencies and public safety organizations across Northeast Ohio face a common challenge: finding enough qualified professionals to meet growing workforce demands.

Rather than simply recruiting graduates, many organizations are partnering directly with The University of Akron (UA) College of Health and Human Sciences to help educate and prepare the next generation of professionals.

By aligning academic programs with workforce needs, the college is helping students launch meaningful careers while strengthening the communities the University serves. These partnerships, along with other recruitment efforts, are helping drive momentum across the college, with undergraduate enrollment increasing 115% since 2024.

"With this creative response to changing enrollment trends, our employer partners are helping shape the workforce they need, our students gain affordable pathways to meaningful careers, and our communities benefit from a steady pipeline of well-prepared professionals," said Daniel Friesner, dean of the College of Health and Human Sciences.

Summa Health Smart Start grows the field

One of the college's longest-running workforce partnerships is with Summa Health through its Smart Start Program, which helps employees earn degrees while preparing for careers within the health system.

Current Summa employees can enroll in UA's School of Nursing or School of Allied Health to pursue degrees including nursing (traditional, or RN to BSN), respiratory therapy or health services-radiologic technology. Students receive tuition and fee support from Summa and continue working during the program before transitioning into full-time clinical roles after graduation through a two-year employment commitment.

The program has already demonstrated its success: five RN to BSN students and one respiratory therapy student have graduated so far. The first radiologic technology cohort will graduate in summer 2027, with the first BSN cohort expected in spring 2028.



Summa Health employees who have taken advantage of the Smart Start program to pursue degrees at UA.

Akron Children's Career Launch removes barriers

Akron Children's Hospital is taking a similar approach through Career Launch, a workforce development program designed to eliminate financial obstacles for aspiring nurses.

In partnership with UA's Associate Degree in Nursing program, Career Launch covers 100% of tuition, books, uniforms and required supplies. It also provides transportation and childcare assistance when needed, along with mentorship, professional development and a guaranteed nursing position at Akron Children's following graduation. UA's Associate of Applied Science in Nursing degree is offered exclusively at UA's Wayne College Campus in Orrville.

Now educating its third cohort, Career Launch is helping nearly 90 students pursue nursing degrees.

Summit County ADM Board strengthens behavioral health professionals

The need for behavioral health professionals continues to grow, and UA is addressing that challenge through an innovative partnership with the County of Summit Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health (ADM) Board.

Established in 2023, the collaboration created a dedicated behavioral health campus coordinator who bridges UA's School of Social Work and Family Sciences with community agencies. The coordinator recruits students into social work programs and helps place them with partner agencies for field experiences.

UA and AMD also established the Behavioral Health Partnership Program, giving social work students field placements within the ADM Board's provider network, along with scholarships, specialized training and professional development. Coupled with new online offerings, the approach has resulted in more than 30% growth in the undergraduate incoming class this fall.



"We are incredibly grateful for this public partnership between the University of Akron and the ADM Board," said Aimee Wade '05, the Board's executive director. Wade is a member of the CHHS Alumni Advisory Committee and earned a Master in Social Work degree from UA. "By bringing together public higher education and our community behavioral health system, we are investing in students while building the skilled, committed workforce Summit County will depend on for years to come."

Peace Officer training raises the standard

The college's workforce partnerships extend beyond health care into public safety through its collaboration with the Summit County Sheriff's Office.

Together, UA and the Sheriff's Office operate an Ohio Peace Officer Training Commission-certified police academy that combines law enforcement and University expertise.

Each year, about 75 cadets complete more than 700 hours of training before taking Ohio's Peace Officer Certification Exam. The curriculum goes beyond state-required training, providing hands-on experience with specialized equipment and vehicles and access to instructors from 25 law enforcement agencies. Cadets may also earn up to 15 hours of college credit.

"Our partnership with The University of Akron gives our cadets a lot of opportunities that go beyond traditional police academy training," said Commander William Holland, who also serves as chief deputy with the Sheriff's Office. "We have high standards for our cadets, and we challenge them throughout their training in a positive learning environment that emphasizes character, problem-solving and safety."

The academy was the first open-enrollment police academy in Ohio to receive the state attorney general's STAR Award, which recognizes law enforcement training programs that voluntarily exceed minimum state standards.

Future opportunities for collaboration

As workforce needs evolve, the College of Health and Human Sciences is committed to helping employers build the skilled workforce they need. Organizations facing critical shortages in health or human services are encouraged to partner with the college to explore new ways to support students and strengthen their talent pipelines.

"These partnerships represent the best of what higher education in the healing, helping, and justice-seeking professions can be," said Friesner.

LEARN MORE

Contact the College of Health and Human Sciences about potential partnership opportunities.

chhs@uakron.edu



UA FACULTY'S FULBRIGHT STARS



DR. PATRICK GAUGHAN
An associate professor in the School of Law, Gaughan will travel to Vietnam, Cambodia and Peru as a recipient of a U.S. Fulbright Global Scholar Award. He will teach economic analysis of law methods in developing countries.

The University's reputation for research excellence, academic leadership and global engagement continues to shine as three faculty members each earned a prestigious Fulbright research award for the 2026-27 academic year, and a fourth was named a Fulbright specialist.

STUDENT DESIGN TEAMS MAKE THEIR MARK

The College of Engineering and Polymer Science student design teams have continued to break barriers. The Akronauts Rocket Design Team found success with the largest and most powerful engine it has ever tested. Zips Racing finished second at the 2026 Formula Hybrid+Electric competition. The Zips Aero was fifth at the American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics Design Build Fly Competition. And Zips Drone placed second among a group of international teams at Vertical Flight Society's Design-Build-Vertical Flight Student Competition.



WATCH

Check out a Zips Drone video:





DR. NITA SAHAI

A professor and Ohio Scholar in the School of Polymer Science and Polymer Engineering, Sahai was awarded a Fulbright-Nehru Distinguished Scholar Award to conduct research in India. Sahai will study astrobiology and the origins of life at Lonar Lake, the only freshwater impact structure in basalt on Earth.



DR. MARIA HAMDANI

A professor in the Department of Management, Hamdani will teach and research in Malaysia as a Fulbright distinguished scholar. Hamdani will examine how Malaysian organizations accommodate neurodivergent employees.



DR. BRAD MAGUTH

A professor in the LeBron James Family Foundation School of Education, Maguth was selected by the U.S. Department of State as a Fulbright specialist, which is a program that brings leading U.S. faculty and professionals to institutions abroad for short-term, collaborative projects.



POLYMER PIONEER

Pailey Vitale graduated from UA in May 2026 with an important distinction – she is the first UA student to earn a Bachelor of Science in Polymer Science and Polymer Engineering. UA is the first Ohio higher education institution to offer this undergraduate degree. The 2025 Homecoming Queen, Vitale was a Williams Honors College scholar, served as a student responder at the College of Engineering and Polymer Science Commencement ceremony and earned a certificate in Professional Selling for Engineering Majors. The Freeport, Pa., native started her career as an associate chemist at Sherwin-Williams.

MAKING ART POSSIBLE

Thanks to the generosity of donors, the cost of the supplies required for each first-year student's three foundation classes in UA's Mary Schiller Myers School of Art's fine art and graphic design majors is now covered. The initiative removes the burden from students who require a steady stream of items such as sketchbooks, flash drives, metal rulers and drawing media like charcoal pencils that may run them in the hundreds of dollars before they're finished with the classes. Distinguished Professor Emeritus and former Myers School director Janice Troutman started the initiative, which continues under new director Anthony Samanga.

#88

UA's ranking on the National Academy of Inventors list

of top 100 U.S. universities granted U.S. utility patents in 2025, demonstrating the University's commitment to research excellence and innovation leadership. The ranking is derived from calendar-year data provided by the United States Patent and Trademark Office.

CAMPUS CUPBOARD VOLUNTEERS SUPPORT FELLOW UA STUDENTS

By Emma Wharton '26



Sonnie Emmerling was a first-year psychology major at The University of Akron (UA) during the 2025-26 academic year when she saw an interesting request in the weekly student Zipmail newsletter. The University's ZipAssist program was seeking students to volunteer in the Campus Cupboard, an initiative that ensures all enrolled students have access to the necessities of daily life.

"I saw a note about volunteering and I thought, why not? I just kept going back because I liked it," Emmerling said. "I volunteer because I could be sitting in my room, or I could be helping people who are going to come in and need food. I know how it feels to struggle, so I take my energy and use it towards something good."

Individual students and student organizations are encouraged to take

CAMPUS CUPBOARD

2025-26 Impact

advantage of accessible on-campus volunteer opportunities, including those at the Campus Cupboard. The Cupboard's programs and resources include a food pantry, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program support, the Campus Community Garden, a clothing collaboration featuring gently used professional clothing, a menstrual supplies program and the Roo-Store, which has low-priced furniture and household items.

The Campus Cupboard also offers six grab-and-go locations across campus, online grocery ordering, $15 student coupons for the Summit Fresh Mobile Market, which is a grocery store-on-wheels that visits the UA campus, and a monthly large-scale food distribution in partnership with the Salvation Army and Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank. The Cupboard's impact is driven by donors including the FirstEnergy Foundation, whose gift funded more than 50 meal kits, including birthday bags, soup mixes and crockpot bundles.

The Cupboard is always in need of volunteers to help maintain daily operations, initiatives and events. Student volunteers restock food and hygiene items in the pantry, and support food distributions, garden maintenance and the Roo-Store. There is also a satellite Campus Cupboard location at UA's Wayne College Campus.

With the help of these volunteers, the Campus Cupboard operates smoothly, providing support to students who need extra assistance. "Having volunteers takes the burden off of (staff)," said Heather Barhorst, ZipAssist senior assistant director and manager of the Campus Cupboard program. "It just goes more



smoothly. Everything is efficient and it's more fun because everyone is paired off into groups and meeting other people. We have more time to be personal."

Logan Simas, a history major, also volunteered last year as a first-year student. A member of Phi Gamma Delta fraternity, Simas needed volunteer hours. Volunteering at the Campus Cupboard worked around his busy schedule. Flexible scheduling means students can volunteer between classes or around other commitments.

The flexibility and accessibility of the Campus Cupboard's volunteer opportunities make it easy to serve the community.

"It's a great way to give back to our campus community and make sure that all students have access to the food they need," said Simas. "I feel like I'm helping make campus a better place in general. Community, I believe, is one of the most important things we have, and it's important that everyone here feels comfortable. I like to do what I can to help bring that to fruition."

For Emmerling, the experience has also created opportunities to connect with other students while giving back.

"I fully recommend volunteering," she said. "I think it's a way to meet people. You're doing an activity. You're keeping your body moving. You're doing good for others. It's just all around a good experience."

LEARN MORE

Learn more about the Campus Cupboard and ZipAssist:

www.uakron.edu/ZipAssist

352 student volunteer hours completed

3,535 student food panty visits

21 free food distribution events held

WELCOME COACH FORD!



Dustin Ford was named the University of Akron men's head basketball coach on March 30, 2026. Ford is no stranger to the Zips program, however. He has been the associate head coach for the past nine years — a pivotal stretch in which the team has dominated the Mid-American Conference (MAC) and appeared in the NCAA Tournament — and has deeper roots at UA and in Ohio.

Foundations

As a player, Ford was a four-year starter for Ohio University. He began his coaching career at Jackson High School in Jackson, Ohio, and moved into the collegiate coaching ranks as an assistant coach and recruiting coordinator, and later associate head coach at Western Carolina University.

Rising in the ranks

Ford was a member of the Ohio University coaching staff from 2008-12, helping then-head coach John Groce — who would eventually bring Ford to Akron — lead the Bobcats to two MAC championships and two NCAA Tournament appearances, including a Sweet 16 run in 2012. Ford then spent five years as an assistant coach at the University of Illinois. The Illini had a 95-72 record with Ford and went to the NCAA tourney in 2013.

A home in Akron

Ford played a key role as the Zips won six MAC titles, including the last three conference championships, and earned four NCAA tournament berths in the past five years.

> **"This is a program with a rich tradition, and I'm honored to be the one to help continue to move it forward. We've built something special here in Akron, and I look forward to working with our players, staff and the community to build on our success."**
>
> **Dustin Ford,**
> **UA men's basketball head coach**

WHAT THEY'RE SAYING ABOUT FORD:

"Dustin Ford is the right leader to guide Akron men's basketball into its next chapter. He has been a key part of our sustained success and brings the integrity, leadership and competitive mindset that define this program."

University of Akron President R.J. Nemer

"Dustin is highly respected by his peers and our student-athletes. His passion for developing young men both on and off the court is exactly what we need to continue the success of Akron basketball. We have complete confidence he is the right leader to guide our program into the future."

Director of Athletics Andrew T. Goodrich

ZIPS ATHLETICS SUCCESSES (2025-26)

7
CONFERENCE CHAMPIONSHIPS

162
CONFERENCE ACADEMIC AWARDS

20%
TICKET REVENUE INCREASE

SOFTBALL SWINGS FOR THE FENCES IN HISTORIC SEASON

The University of Akron softball team recorded a historic season in spring 2026. The Zips won the regular-season Mid-American Conference championship, followed by the MAC tournament championship. The conference title meant the Zips earned the team's first berth in the NCAA softball tournament. At the NCAA regional site in Baton Rouge, La., UA beat South Alabama 1-0, logging their first-ever tournament win, before falling to No.14 Virginia Tech, which needed a late rally to beat the Zips 7-6.

UA logged a lot of individual honors, too. Four players, including MVP pitcher Madie Jamrog, were named to the all-tournament team. Craig Nicholson was named the MAC Coach of the Year. Infielder Sophia Wygast, whose 60 RBIs set a new UA team record, was named to the 2026 National Fastpitch Coaches' Association (NFCA) DI All-Region Team for the Great Lakes Region. UA also placed 10 student-athletes on the academic All-MAC team.





FOOTBALL PROMOTION PUTS ZIPS IN SPOTLIGHT

It was the opening drive heard 'round the world! Zips football gained global attention with a unique promotion that offered one season-ticket holder the opportunity to serve as the offensive coordinator for the first possession of the team's 2026 home opener against Robert Morris University. Several national media pundits signed on for the contest but Marty Whims II '02, a Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, resident who has a Bachelor of Science in Accounting, was thrilled to have his name pulled. He worked with Head Coach Joe Moorhead to design the drive. The Zips gained some offensive ground and went on to win the game 45-10. The winner was selected through a random drawing conducted by UA's College of Business.

TO THE MOON WITH JOHNSON SPACE CENTER'S KOERNER '92

The world was riveted last spring by the historic Artemis II space mission that orbited the moon. The systems behind the safe and successful voyage of the Artemis astronauts, and dozens of others who have participated in space missions, were the responsibility of Johnson Space Center (JSC) in Houston and its deputy director, Stephen Koerner '92.

Koerner, who has served in his current role since 2021, earned a Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering — a degree that at the time required three semesters of co-op experience. The University of Akron had a connection to JSC and sent several students each year to the center. Koerner spent a year there and was immediately hired after graduation.

"Had I not chosen Akron, I would not be here at NASA," said Koerner, who is from Stow, Ohio. "The University of Akron afforded me a huge opportunity."

He never left JSC, working in roles of increasing responsibility over the years. As deputy director, Koerner oversees human spaceflight resources and facilities, including workforce planning, to ensure mission objectives are executed safely and successfully. For several months in 2025, he was the center's acting director.

While at UA, Koerner minored in math and participated in a student group that worked with remote control airplanes, a precursor to the College of Engineering and Polymer Science's highly regarded student design teams.

Recalling his college experience, Koerner said the rigors of his engineering degree were extremely valuable and applicable to the work he's doing today. Faculty members such as Dr. Paul Lam, a former associate dean of the then-College of Engineering, were incredibly influential on him. Lam often spent time with students outside the classroom, attending sporting events and playing golf.



Steve Koerner '92, with his wife, NASA engineer Catherine Koerner, and UA mascot Zippy, received a Distinguished Alumni Award from the College of Engineering and Polymer Science in 2023.



NASA's Artemis II Space Launch System (SLS) rocket and Orion spacecraft. Image courtesy of NASA.

"People like him helped me to realize that the relationships with people that you're surrounded by, and how you influence that sphere of people positively, is so important," Koerner said.

Koerner applies those life lessons to working with his JSC colleagues as they ensure the success of the Artemis mission.

"Artemis is our generation's opportunity to put people back on the moon, so it's super exciting to be here at this time," he said. "We're marching toward Artemis III being an orbital rendezvous mission in 2027, and then the following year, hopefully Artemis IV will be boots-down on the surface of the moon."

ZIP INTO SCHOOL SPIRIT AT THE 1870 MARKET

FULL CIRCLE: MINNS '20 '23 COMES HOME TO WORK WITH THE UA DANCE TEAM

Natalie Minns '20 '23 travels the world as a sought-after dancer, teacher and choreographer. Recently, however, one of her choreography bookings brought her home to UA.

A Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio, native, Minns was on campus in November 2025 to co-choreograph a jazz routine for the UA dance team. Under the direction of Lauren Hesley, the UA spirit teams coordinator and head dance coach, the Zips took the routine to the 2026 College Classic competition in Orlando, Fla., where they finished fourth — their best finish ever at the national-level competition.

Minns earned a Bachelor of Arts in Dance with a business cognate, a program that offers students a broad learning experience in dance while preparing them for dance studio management, graduate studies in the fields related to dance such as arts management, dance history, physical therapy, dance therapy or dance ethnology, as well as teaching in private studios.

"I knew I wanted to study dance, but I was interested in the business side of it too," Minns said. "I want to continue to dance professionally while my body allows, and continue to teach and choreograph after that. My experience as a student at UA definitely prepared me for my career. I grew up, gained a lot of independence, learned a lot about dance and trained in many different styles, and learned so much from the faculty."

Minns was a Williams Honors College student and joined the UA dance team. She earned an MBA from the College of Business.

Minns has had several unique opportunities in front of the camera, such as dancing during New York Fashion Week and in several music videos. She appeared in the video for TV and pop star JoJo Siwa's songs "Karma," which has more than 56 million views on YouTube, and "Serendipity."



Natalie Minns '20 '23 (right) with UA head dance coach Lauren Hesley (center) and elite dance teacher and choreographer Gianna Martello.

Minns' co-choreographer for the UA dance team routine was her frequent collaborator and good friend Gianna Martello, who appeared on the TV show "Dance Moms." They will be back on campus again this fall — the Zips dance team enjoyed working with Minns and Martello so much that Hesley invited them back to choreograph what they all hope will be another historic performance.

The University of Akron Alumni Association is celebrating its 150th anniversary this year, and there's no better way for alumni to mark the occasion than a purchase from the 1870 Market. Managed by the UA Office of Alumni Relations, the market offers throwback-themed apparel, accessories, glassware, home and office items, and perfect gifts for the holidays and graduation.

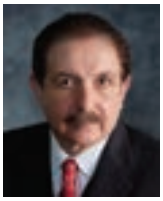
Not only is the 1870 Market filled with many unique items not found anywhere else, but most purchases include a donation to the University of Akron Alumni Association Legacy Scholarship. Check out all the items at 1870market.uakron.edu and in the team store at InfoCision Stadium to show off your UA pride, and support current and future Zips!



CLASS NOTES

Visit **uakron.edu/magazine** for the entire list of Class Notes, Farewells and other alumni news.

1970s



Gust Callas, BSA '75, JD '78, an attorney with Black McCuskey Souers & Arbaugh, LPA, has been named by Ohio Super Lawyers magazine a top attorney in Ohio for 2027. This is an exclusive list, recognizing no more than five percent of attorneys in Ohio.

Margaret M. Semancik, BSN '76, and William J. Semancik, BSEE '77, celebrated 50 years of marriage on Sept. 11, 2026. The couple met at UA during freshmen orientation in 1972 and were married on Sept. 11, 1976.

1980s



May J. Chen, MAE '88, was one of 10 outstanding Ohioans inducted into the state's Senior Citizens Hall of Fame in 2025 by the Ohio Department of Aging. The Hall of Fame honors older Ohioans who represent a positive image of aging and have significant accomplishments in their professions, vocations and communities.



Lori Shells Simmons, BS '85, MPA '91, and JD '91, was honored with Crain's Notable Women in Law for 2026. Shells Simmons is the current law director for the city of Youngstown.

1990s



Tierney J. Bates, BA '99, MAE '02, vice chancellor for student affairs at the University of South Carolina-Upstate, was named one of NASPA Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education Foundation's Pillar of the Profession Award recipients.



Laura B. Culp, MT '91, will be honored with the 2026 Bert A. Polsky Humanitarian Award on Nov. 17, 2026. She will be the 57th recipient of the award, which recognizes those who show "selfless dedication to humanitarian causes in Akron." Culp has given decades of nonprofit board service and volunteerism to the greater Akron community, as well as generous charitable contributions.



Michael A. Discenza, BA '93, MA '94, has been named chief financial officer at Timken Co. Discenza has worked for a quarter-century at Timken in financial and accounting roles of increasing responsibility, including the last 10 years as vice president, finance and group controller. The Timken Co., based in North Canton, is the maker of engineered bearings and industrial motion products.



Donna M. Haire, BS '92, has been appointed chief operating officer at FluoGuide. Haire will lead development, including regulatory strategy and the U.S. clinical program toward the first approval of FG001 in high-grade glioma. Haire has more than 30 years of global R&D leadership experience, with a focus in regulatory affairs and clinical development.



Alice I. Kim, BS '93, has been named by Cleveland Clinic the new vice president and chief medical officer of Marymount Hospital, effective Sept. 15, 2025. This is the top leadership role at the hospital. Kim is returning to Cleveland Clinic after serving as the president and chief executive officer of ID Care, LLC, in New Jersey, the largest infectious disease group practice on the East Coast and the second-largest in the U.S.



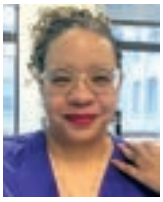
Eustacia O. Netzel-Hatcher, BSA '98, MBA '05, will serve as Trailhead Community Health Foundation of Greater Akron's inaugural CFO, a position she assumed on March 30, 2026. Netzel-Hatcher's experience in nonprofit financial leadership, consulting and commercial banking will help her build up the foundation's financial operations.

Andrew J. Rubino, BSIM '97, MBA '01, has been named chief operating officer at Third Federal Savings and Loan Association of Cleveland. Rubino joined Third Federal Savings and Loan in 2000 and has served as a manager in areas including loan production, customer care, internet services and operations support. He also served as the company's chief marketing officer.



John M. Vasuta, BS '90, JD '92, MBA '92, has been named president and chief executive officer at Johns Manville (JM), effective Aug. 1, 2026. JM is a global building and specialty products manufacturer and a Berkshire Hathaway company. Vasuta's proven leadership, industry expertise and strong relationships with both customers and employees make him exceptionally well-suited to lead JM into the future.

2000s



Stephanie D. Adams, JD '06, was honored with Crain's Notable Women in Law 2026. Adams is senior corporate counsel at Sherwin-Williams Co.



Jamie E. Bromley, PhD '04, received the Clifford and Paula Dietz Award for Faculty Excellence at Franklin College. The award recognizes a faculty

member who demonstrates extraordinary dedication and commitment in service to the college. The award, which provides a prize of $5,000, plus a professional expense allowance of $1,000, is made possible through the generosity of late trustee Dr. Clifford Dietz and his wife, Dr. Paula Dietz. Bromley, a member of the Franklin College faculty since 2009, is a professor of psychology.

2010s



Kevin D. Burwell, JD '19, has joined the Wall Street Journal Council of Chief Compliance Officers. Burwell is vice president and general counsel at Kloeckner Metals.



Mohsen Zaker Esteghamati, MS '18, is one of just two people nationwide to receive the American Institute of Steel Construction's Terry Peshia Early Career Faculty Award.

Shawndell Hood, AAS '11, BS '12, was elected president of COMTO Boston for the 2026-28 term. Hood also serves on the Board of Directors of CMAA New England and works as a program coordinator III and EBO-B2Gnow system coordinator within the Massachusetts Department of Transportation's Office of Diversity and Civil Rights. A U.S. Navy veteran, Hood is committed to expanding professional development opportunities, strengthening connections across the transportation and construction-management industries, and supporting historically underrepresented professionals.



Anthony Ponikvar, BS '12, has been elected to firm partnership at BakerHostetler, effective Jan. 1, 2026. Ponikvar (Cleveland Office) is a go-to litigator for clients' most important and contentious cases. From pre-suit investigations to trial advocacy, he has extensive experience with nearly every aspect of litigation. Ponikvar has overseen complicated discovery efforts and is well-versed in modern e-discovery protocols.

2020s



Alexis M. Schultz, BSME '26, has been named to Team USA for the 2026 World Dodgeball Federation World Championships, which will be held in Dec. 5-13 in Bangkok, Thailand. A three-time National Collegiate Dodgeball Association Women's Player of the Year, Schultz will compete on Team USA's women's foam squad.

FAREWELLS

Julie L. Acus, MBA '94, Jan. 20, 2026

Marcia Adair, Aug. 3, 2026

Dr. Raj Aggarwal, Aug. 17, 2025

Daniel G. Alderman, Dec. 19, 2025

Patricia D. Ballard, June 1, 2025

Ruth O. Barnum, BSBA '07, July 6, 2026

Neil P. Baumann, BFA '93, June 12, 2026

Rauslynn M. Boyd, BA '13, MA '17, Dec. 13, 2024

James E. Buck, BS '58, March 5, 2026

Margaret R. Burnley-Bird BSE '71, May 14, 2026

Bonnie L. Childs, BSE '69, Aug. 14, 2026

Gary D. Collier, BSE '74, July 4, 2026

Thomas P. Considine, BSBA '58, March 30, 2026

Thomas R. Crowley, April 21, 2025

Joanne D. Dannemiller, Aug. 23, 2025

James L. Dennison, MAE '68, Jan. 4, 2026

Joseph T. Dick, BSE '56, May 16, 2026

Thomas J. Dillon, BSBA '53, Feb. 10, 2026

Nicholas T. George, BA '68, JD '70, July 21, 2025

Suzanne M. Gill, BSN '88, MSN '94, Dec. 19, 2024

John C. Gillette, BSBA '63, June 10, 2025

Dr. Yvonne M. Gillette, Feb. 15, 2026

Robert P. Herbst, MSE '72, June 26, 2026

John W. Heslop, Nov. 13, 2025

Nancy C. Heslop, BA '79, Nov. 11, 2025

Nicholas Katanic, Jan. 28, 2026

Philip S. Kaufman, JD '71, July 28, 2025

M. Sue Larson, May 12, 2025

Lucinda S. Lavelli, Nov. 24, 2025

Anne E. Lazzerini, BSBA '04, MBA '07, Jan. 22, 2026

Thomas J. Liggett, BA '87, May 29, 2026

Daniel F. Luff, BA '73, April 6, 2025

Gwendolyn R. Mack, June 25, 2026

James D. Markov, BSEE '61, Sept. 8, 2025

R. Kent Marsden, BSE '70, Feb. 19, 2025

Carl E. Meador Jr., BS '59, JD '66, Dec. 13, 2024

Dr. Albert E. Myers, BA '54, May 22, 2026

Miwako Ohta, BS '58, Dec. 1, 2025

W. Stuver Parry, BSBA '56, Aug. 15, 2025

Charles A. Scheatzle, BSEE '67, Nov. 11, 2025

Edward F. Steinkerchner, BSE '53, April 20, 2025

Shelby L. Stevens Kennedy Spinner, BA '21, April 30, 2025

Norbert D. Thompson, BS '51, Dec. 15, 2025

William B. Turanchik II, BSBA '91, Feb. 6, 2025

Kenneth D. Webster, BS '59, March 22, 2025

Robert L. Whitfield, Aug. 19, 2025

Lawrence R. Williams II, Oct. 16, 2025

William Zavarello, BAE '59, JD '64, June 2, 2026

CONTACT US

Moved? Changed names? New job? Update your information.

alumni@uakron.edu

SCAN THE QR CODE

THE UNIVERSITY OF
AKRON

FALL 2026

PRESIDENT
R.J. Nemer '90 '95

UNIVERSITY BRAND ORGANIZATION
Katy Brennan, *Chief Brand Officer*

EDITOR
Jessica Whitehill, *Communications and Content Manager*

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS
Anthony Barnes, *Senior Manager, Alumni and Development Communications*

Dr. Kevin Kern, *Professor, Department of History*

Alex Knisley, *Marketing and Communications Manager*

Kimberly M. Zebedis '17, *Executive Director, Center for Gift and Estate Planning, The University of Akron Foundation*

STUDENT WRITER
Emma Wharton '26

GRAPHIC DESIGN
Anne Vidmar, *Vidmar Creative*

BRAND CONSULTANT
Monica Mussulin, *Graphic Designer*

EMAIL
magazine@uakron.edu

SEND CLASS NOTES TO
alumni@uakron.edu

WEBSITE
uakron.edu/magazine

@universityofakron
@uakron
@the-university-of-akron
@uakron
@uakron
@uakron

The University of Akron Magazine is published by the University Brand Organization.

The University of Akron is an Equal Education and Employment Institution © 2026.

Zips Who Support

KANFER SUPPORT BOLSTERS CHILD LITERACY EFFORTS

By Anthony Barnes and Kimberly M. Zebedis '17

Few educational challenges carry consequences as profound — or opportunities as promising — as teaching children to read.

For students with dyslexia and other reading difficulties, early identification and intervention can mean the difference between frustration and confidence, between struggling to keep pace and discovering a lifelong love of learning.

The University of Akron (UA) Center for Structured Literacy, fueled by UA donors Joseph Kanfer and the earlier work of his late wife, Pamela Kanfer '78, and the PNC Bank Foundation, has been a champion in this fight. Their efforts are key in reshaping the preparation of educators to recognize, support and empower students with diverse learning needs.

The center serves as a hub for pre-service teacher training and professional development, advancing reading intervention, educator preparation and evidence-based instruction. Its work has become increasingly important as Ohio strengthens requirements for dyslexia screening and intervention, and the state has made the science of reading the mandated approach to reading instruction.

CENTER FOR STRUCTURED LITERACY
THE UNIVERSITY OF AKRON

PNC FOUNDATION

With an Ohio Third Frontier grant from the Ohio Department of Higher Education and the generosity of Kanfer, former CEO of GoJo Industries, UA established the Center for Structured Literacy to help meet these growing needs. Today, Kanfer is continuing his investment in UA and the center with a $1 million pledge over the next four years.

Pamela Kanfer, who had a master's degree in education from UA and who at the time of her passing was pursuing a Ph.D. with a focus on dyslexia, was a fierce advocate for teacher training. The Kanfers' philanthropy initially helped launch the Center for Structured Literacy in 2023. The center's work continues to honor her advocacy.

"Pamela was the most determined person I ever knew in her advocacy on behalf of children. Her mission has become my mission and that of the center," said Joseph Kanfer, a former member and vice chair of the UA Board of Trustees. "That the children of Ohio and elsewhere benefit from the center's great work is a gratifying, lasting tribute."

The PNC Bank Foundation joined Kanfer's support with a $1 million pledge over the next five years as part of its PNC Grow Up Great initiative, helping prepare children from birth to age 5 for success in school and throughout life. With PNC's support, the center can focus services and efforts on pre-k learners as well as traditional K-12 students.



A Charitable Gift Annuity (CGA) from The University of Akron Foundation secures you guaranteed fixed payments for life — payments that don't waiver with the market — while supporting the University's mission for generations to come. And when your giving continues beyond your lifetime, it becomes a legacy that a student will carry forward for decades.

GUARANTEED FIXED INCOME

POTENTIAL TAX BENEFITS

LASTING LEGACY GIFT

Learn how a CGA fits your financial and philanthropic goals.

Contact Kimberly Zebedis, executive director of the Center for Gift & Estate Planning, at 330-972-2819 or kzebedis@uakron.edu, visit uakron.giftlegacy.com or scan the QR code.

Show the next generation **what a little "YES" can do.**

The University of Akron Foundation

The University of Akron is an Equal Education and Employment Institution © 2026 — uakron.edu/eeo

The University of Akron

The University of Akron Magazine
University Brand Organization
Akron, OH 44325-0604

Nonprofit Organization
U.S. Postage Paid
The University of Akron

CELEBRATING 150 YEARS OF THE UA ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

This year, the University of Akron Alumni Association is celebrating the people, programs and stories that have shaped our history, and highlighting the connections that continue to bring Zips together today.

Join the celebration by making a gift to The University of Akron at UAKRON.EDU/ALUMNI

CELEBRATING 150 YEARS THE UNIVERSITY OF AKRON ALUMNI ASSOCIATION