

SPRING 2025

# THE UNIVERSITY OF AKRON MAGAZINE

*Uniquely UA*



# FROM THE PRESIDENT

For many college students, positive outcomes depend heavily on how institutions, including The University of Akron (UA), nurture their creativity, support them through connection and innovation, and foster their personal and professional growth. If we do our job, students emerge with the tools they need for success.

One of the most effective ways to ensure successful outcomes is by presenting students unique opportunities and experiences that challenge them to think differently, overcome obstacles and meet people with whom they might not otherwise interact in their daily lives.

The spring 2025 issue of The University of Akron Magazine focuses on some of the unique opportunities and experiences the University has created for its community, and features other exceptional UA programs and initiatives from which we all benefit.

“*From singular academic programs and student organizations to comprehensive programming and distinctive facilities, UA has a unique identity and is an incredibly special place.*”

For example, you will read about UA's partnership with the Cleveland Browns. Our status as the team's official university boosts student opportunity and represents a very unique affiliation with a professional sports team. As a component of the partnership, we're offering new academic courses and events for both students and faculty to gain access and insight into the operations of a professional franchise.

The magazine also highlights academic programs in aerospace systems engineering, criminal intelligence analysis, emergency management and homeland security, and applied politics. Some of these offerings were among the first, or are one of few, of their kind offered at a public university in the country.

Several distinctive student organizations are also featured. As a university located in an urban setting, who would have thought UA has an equestrian club that competes for national championships?



This issue also examines some of the unique spaces and sights on campus, such as the E.J. Thomas Performing Arts Hall, which is one of the only facilities in the country with a counterweight system to raise and lower the ceiling. The Archives of the History of American Psychology, located inside the Cummings Center for the History of Psychology, is the only collection of its type in the world. And did you know the University campus is the home to 12 works of art created through the Ohio Percent for Art program?

UA also serves the community in unique ways. This issue of the magazine includes a story about the Center for Structured Literacy, whose core mission is the translation of scientific research on reading instruction, intervention and dyslexia for educators. With a recent state mandate requiring all school districts to use the science of reading curriculum, UA is now the leading resource for Ohio teachers.

From singular academic programs and student organizations to comprehensive programming and distinctive facilities, UA has a unique identity and is an incredibly special place. When students move on from the University, we know the unique experiences and opportunities they've had here will inspire them to think critically and contribute meaningfully to our society.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "R.J. Nemer". The signature is stylized with a large, flowing "R" and "N".

R.J. Nemer  
President





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## UA AND THE CLEVELAND BROWNS DEVELOP GAME-CHANGING PARTNERSHIP FOR STUDENTS



BY CRISTINE BOYD

Above: Taking apart helmets in the Materials Science of Football course.

Below: Browns personnel speak to UA students.

In fall 2024, The University of Akron (UA) and the Cleveland Browns forged a strategic partnership that is already making a significant impact on students. This collaboration, marking UA as “The Official University of the Cleveland Browns,” provides students with hands-on learning opportunities in the world of professional sports. From credit-bearing courses to exclusive networking and volunteer experiences, UA students are benefiting in ways that go far beyond the classroom.

### A Winning Play for Education and Experience

The Browns and UA have long been central to Northeast Ohio’s culture, and their partnership creates a bridge between academia and professional sports. Students across multiple disciplines now have direct access to Browns executives, marketing professionals and team personnel, providing a dynamic educational experience that is as real as it gets.

“This is a touchdown for both organizations,” said UA President R.J. Nemer. “Given the prominence of professional sports in our region and the comprehensive educational programs we offer at UA, we’re creating a pipeline

of talent and jobs that will benefit our students, the Browns and the entire community.”

The collaboration opens doors for students pursuing careers in sports management, marketing, business analytics, engineering and more. Whether learning about materials science through football equipment or developing international marketing strategies for the Browns, students are gaining unparalleled industry exposure.

### Classroom Meets the Field with Unique Course Offerings

Three newly introduced, credit-bearing courses provide a rare behind-the-scenes look at the intersection of sports and business. These courses allow students to engage with industry experts while working on real-world projects.

#### CHEE496-003 – Materials Science of Football

*Taught by Dr. Jennifer Lillard, associate professor and director of the corrosion engineering technology program, this course explores the science behind football equipment and materials. Students examine how innovations in materials such as ceramics, metals, plastics and composites have influenced the evolution of the game. Students use Browns-provided equipment, giving them hands-on experience in evaluating and developing football gear.*





*Students also interact with representatives from Xenith Helmets and tour an advanced sports facility, further enriching their understanding of sports materials engineering.*

### **MGMT470 – Sport Consulting Project**

*Led by Dr. Seungbum Lee, professor of management, this course immerses students in the complex world of sports marketing and consulting. The capstone project for this course involves identifying a second international market for the Browns as part of the NFL's "Global Markets Program." Through teamwork and strategic planning, students develop engagement opportunities to expand the Browns' brand worldwide.*

*Browns Director of Marketing, Matt Papatheodorou, is actively involved, providing mentorship and feedback to students throughout the semester. His insights offer a rare look into the strategic decision-making process of an NFL franchise.*

### **MGMT404 – Business of the Browns**

*This course, also taught by Lee, provides an in-depth look at the Cleveland Browns organization. Topics covered include technological advancements in sports, athlete branding, fan engagement strategies and the impact of social media. Throughout the semester, various Browns executives visit the class to share their expertise and discuss current trends in the sports industry.*

### **Beyond the Classroom: Volunteering and Networking**

In addition to the structured coursework, UA students have had the chance to participate in Browns events, gaining firsthand experience in game-day operations. These volunteer opportunities provide valuable insights into the logistics, marketing and community engagement aspects of professional sports.

Plans are also underway for students from MGMT470 and CHEE496-003 to present their research and findings at the Browns' practice facility, where Browns personnel and UA faculty will be in attendance. This culminating event will be followed by a networking reception, giving students a platform to showcase their expertise and build meaningful professional connections.



UA and the Browns also hope to make a lasting impact on the Northeast Ohio community. Through initiatives like the "Browns Give Back Movement," students will be involved in volunteer service projects that emphasize leadership, teamwork and civic responsibility.

Furthermore, Browns personnel will have the opportunity to continue their education at UA, taking advantage of the University's online and in-person degree programs to further develop their skills.

### **Looking Ahead**

The University of Akron and the Browns have set the stage for a transformative educational experience that will prepare students for careers in the sports industry and beyond. As this partnership evolves, it promises to provide even more opportunities for students to learn, engage and grow in ways that extend far beyond the classroom.

By leveraging the strengths of both institutions, this collaboration ensures that UA students gain a competitive edge in an increasingly dynamic job market. Whether in materials science, business strategy or event operations, students are developing skills that will serve them well in any field. ■

**UA students experience game-day operations at a Browns game.**

*Stay up-to-date at [uakron.edu/browns](http://uakron.edu/browns).*

## UA offers special CHILDCARE *assistance*

Balancing both college and parenting can be challenging, especially when it comes to finding reliable and affordable childcare. To help address this need, The University of Akron (UA) and the Akron Area YMCA have teamed up to launch a new Childcare Assistance Program designed specifically for UA students who are raising a young family. This initiative is aimed at easing the financial burden of childcare so that students can focus on their academic goals.

With \$100,000 in initial funding from UA Women in Philanthropy, the program offers grants to enrolled UA students to help cover the cost of daycare at local Akron Area YMCA facilities. Eligible students can receive up to \$3,000 per semester and may qualify

for additional financial assistance through the YMCA's resources, ensuring minimal out-of-pocket costs for childcare.

Students do not need to be full-time or meet specific financial aid requirements to access this support, making it a viable option for all parenting students enrolled at UA. Students who wish to apply for the program can submit a Help-A-Zip referral at [www.uakron.edu/referral](http://www.uakron.edu/referral) and indicate "Childcare Assistance."



Those interested in donating to the program can contact: Alison Doebling, 330-972-6467 or [aer15@uakron.edu](mailto:aer15@uakron.edu). ■



## UNIQUE UA PROGRAM *expands scholarship opportunities* FOR INCOMING STUDENTS MAJORING IN STEMM FIELDS

The University of Akron (UA) proudly reaffirms its commitment to student success through the Choose Ohio First (COF) STEMM Scholarship program. Now in its 15th year, the COF program continues to empower students by providing scholarships and essential resources to students majoring in select science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medical fields (STEMM).

UA has been offering COF scholarships to undergraduate students since 2009 and, just last year, also began making them available to students pursuing graduate degrees in STEMM fields. Funding for the COF scholarships comes from the Ohio Department of Higher Education. The University recently received a new award for FY2025 of nearly \$1.2 million that will continue to provide vital scholarships for students in STEMM fields, advancing academic success and supporting Ohio's future workforce.

UA's COF program is the highest-funded and largest initiative of its kind in the state, solidifying UA's leadership in developing Ohio's future STEMM workforce. ■

## WZIP: Akron's unique voice in radio

WZIP, the University of Akron's student-run radio station, reaches between 80,000 and 100,000 unique listeners per week, making it a major player in the local media landscape. While it has often ranked as the No. 1 station in Akron among 18- to 24-year-olds, its influence extends across all demographics.



Unlike commercial stations, WZIP fills a gap in Akron's radio scene with its heavy concentration of hip-hop and rap, a genre largely overlooked by other local broadcasters. The station continues to evolve, recently expanding its Late Night Local Talent segment to spotlight more homegrown artists, with further expansion expected in the coming year.

In addition to music, WZIP has revived live sports broadcasting, reintroducing play-by-play coverage of boys' high school basketball in December 2024 — marking the station's return to live sports after more than 15 years. High school football broadcasts are also set to launch this fall, reinforcing WZIP's commitment to local content and community engagement. ■

*Listen online at [elasticplayer.xyz/wzip](https://elasticplayer.xyz/wzip) or locally at 88.1 FM.*

## UA TO LAUNCH OPERATION TEACH

In response to critical teacher shortages nationwide, UA will launch Operation Teach, aimed at helping military personnel and their spouses transition into teaching careers. Supported by a \$482,389 grant from the Ohio Department of Education and Workforce through the Governor's Ohio Military Veteran Educators Fellowship Pilot Program, the two-year initiative seeks to address both the national educator shortage and veterans' career transitions. Developed by UA's LeBron James Family Foundation School of Education and the Urban STEM Center, the program will support 15 military participants with tuition, fees and learning materials as they progress

from recruitment to their first year in the classroom.

Led by Dr. Karen Plaster, Operation Teach will partner with Barberton City Schools and Manchester Local School District to provide hands-on support and mentoring. UA's Military Services Center will assist participants in navigating their career change, while a professional development institute and individualized mentorship will ensure a smooth transition into the education workforce. Recruitment efforts will target regional military and veteran centers and digital outreach, with the first cohort beginning career planning with University advisors in spring 2026. ■



## New VICE PRESIDENT AND GENERAL COUNSEL APPOINTED

Mia Yaniko joined The University of Akron as vice president and general counsel on March 10.

Yaniko has dedicated most of her legal career to representing Ohio's public universities and colleges. She spent more than 12 years over two periods of service in the Ohio Attorney General's Office, most recently having served as chief of the Education Section. She previously served as assistant Education Section chief and assistant attorney general.

Between her terms of service at the Ohio Attorney General's Office, Yaniko served for more than two years as assistant general counsel in the Office of General Counsel at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio. ■

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# THERE'S NO MASCOT QUITE LIKE ZIPPY



BY CRISTINE BOYD

Zippy signing her NIL deal

For more than 70 years, Zippy has been an enduring symbol of spirit, pride and enthusiasm at The University of Akron (UA). As the only female kangaroo mascot in college sports, Zippy has always stood out from the crowd. Now, she's making history yet again — this time by signing a groundbreaking Name, Image and Likeness (NIL) deal. In doing so, Zippy has become the first female mascot to sign such a deal, setting a new precedent in college sports and paving the way for mascots to join the NIL movement.

This multi-year partnership with the County of Summit ADM Board will see Zippy playing a pivotal role in raising awareness for behavioral health initiatives. The Board provides life-changing services in prevention, treatment and recovery support, helping individuals navigate some of the toughest moments in life. Just as Zippy electrifies the crowd at UA games and events, she will now help energize Summit County by bringing attention to these critical mental health resources. With this partnership, Zippy is proving that a mascot's impact extends far beyond the confines of a sports arena.

## The NIL Era: Expanding Opportunities for Mascots

The NIL rule, introduced in 2021, revolutionized college athletics by allowing student-athletes to profit from their name, image and likeness. Until recently, this opportunity was primarily reserved for athletes, but Zippy's groundbreaking agreement is shifting that narrative. With this deal, she joins the ranks of a select

few mascots who have leveraged their brand to sign endorsement deals, make paid appearances and contribute to important causes. Zippy is leading the charge for mascots nationwide, demonstrating that they too can play a significant role in collegiate branding and community engagement.

## The Dedicated Team Behind Zippy's Success

Zippy's presence at events is made possible by a devoted team of 15 talented students who embody the spirit of UA's beloved mascot. These students receive scholarships for their dedication and are compensated for every public appearance they make. From campus events to community gatherings, and even local birthday parties, the Zippy program provides students with an incredible leadership experience while bringing joy to fans of all ages. Thanks to this new NIL deal, Zippy's appearances will only increase, creating even more opportunities for these students to shine.

## Looking Ahead

As the University of Akron's favorite marsupial continues to make history, one thing is certain — Zippy is more than just a mascot; she's a trailblazer, an ambassador and an inspiration to students and fans alike.

Go Zips! ■

Visit Zippy's page online at [uakron.edu/zippy](http://uakron.edu/zippy). Follow her on Instagram @uakronzippy.



## ZIPPY FUN FACTS:

- Zippy has been the University of Akron's mascot since 1953, when the student council voted for the creation of a mascot. They landed on a kangaroo, a decision that has certainly stood the test of time.
- Zippy's fame skyrocketed in 2007 when she took home the prestigious Capital One Mascot of the Year title after a flawless, undefeated performance in the competition.
- Zippy has appeared on several "best mascot" lists, including a 2024 Sports Illustrated ranking, where she snagged the top spot as the best NCAA Tournament mascot.
- Zippy loves a good costume! She's become known for her iconic Halloween costumes which have included Barbie, Cher from Clueless, Amelia Earhart, Wonder Woman and many more. ■



Pictured above:  
Zippy and friends at  
a Future Zips Day

Pictured here:  
Zippy at Homecoming

# UA OFFERS Dynamic Opportunities FOR STUDENT INVOLVEMENT

BY BEAU BALIZET '25



## AKRON DODGEBALL CLUB AND WOMEN'S DODGEBALL CLUB

The University of Akron is home to two powerhouse dodgeball teams, the co-ed Akron Dodgeball Club and the Women's Dodgeball Club both of which had standout 2024-25 seasons. The Akron Dodgeball Club captured the 2025 Ohio Dodgeball Cup and set a new NCD A home win streak record with 20 consecutive victories from November 2022 to March 2025. They finished the season with a 21-4 record, a Final Four appearance, a No. 2 national ranking — the highest in program history — and led the league in both total points and point differential. Meanwhile, the Women's Dodgeball Club secured back-to-back NCD A national titles after a thrilling 5-4 overtime win against rival Michigan State, capped off with a 10-2 season and the 2025 Club Sports Team Achievement Award. ■

## AK-ROWDIES

Have you ever wondered what connects UA soccer, football, basketball and volleyball? Is it that they're all sports? Or perhaps that they're all played on a court or field? The answer is very simple: AK-ROWDIES. Founded in 2005, the AK-ROWDIES have supported Zips athletics through promoting school spirit at games and community events. Their presence is unmistakable at every game, showing unwavering support for Zips athletic teams. Now, AK-ROWDIES have moved from a basic student club to an official affiliation with UA Athletics, making their presence and impact more expansive through UA and the Akron community.



"We feed off the energy of Zips athletic teams and the UA community, and they feed off us," said Ronald "Scottie" Spears, a freshman political science major and president of AK-ROWDIES. "We want to be loud and show UA and the Akron community that Zips athletics is the real deal." ■

## THE EQUESTRIAN TEAM

Few opportunities arise for individuals to compete in a niche sport. At the college level, even fewer sports involve competing on a 1,200-pound animal. The UA Equestrian Team allows students, beginners through experienced riders, to compete on the team for a chance to represent the University at the Intercollegiate Horse Show Association (IHSA) National Championship.

"Serving as president of the Equestrian Team has allowed me to connect with many students who share a love for horses," said Katie Szpak, a senior majoring in surveying and mapping. "It's incredibly rewarding to see them find a



sense of belonging within a community that shares the same niche passion, while allowing for the opportunity to compete against others at your skill level, which is something you don't often find in other competitive sports." ■



## RESTORATION AND SURVIVAL:

# Guzzetta Hall's one-of-a-kind sculpture

BY **BEAU BALIZET '25**

The University of Akron (UA) is home to many unique pieces of art, but none quite like the “Tactile Sounding Sculpture,” located in Guzzetta Hall’s atrium. The piece was created by renowned metal sculptor Harry Bertoia, a pioneer in the world of sound sculpture and the five-piece metal sculpture was originally meant to be played.

Originally designed for Guzzetta’s opening on March 31, 1976, the entire piece consists of five separate sculptures arranged on a stone base. Each sculpture features vertical metal rods, carefully spaced in a grid pattern and topped with small metal cylinders. When the rods are bent and released, they sway and collide, producing a metallic harmony. Because the rods vary in height, spacing and thickness, each one produces a slightly different sound, creating a beautiful melody.

Bertoia was an Italian-born artist and furniture designer, known for revolutionizing the metal sculpting space. He is also well known for creating the Diamond chair, alongside the Sonambient Sculptures, a series of metal artworks designed to produce sound, much like the Tactile Sounding Sculpture at UA. Over his career, he crafted more than 50 public sculptures, many of which remain standing across the U.S. today.



For decades, students and visitors interacted with the sculpture. However, over time, the rods began to deteriorate from continuous bending and pulling. The foundation and rods became severely damaged as a result.

Recognizing the sculpture’s importance, the UA Women’s Committee stepped in to fund its restoration. In 2009, Michigan-based sculptor Ken Thompson was tasked with bringing it back to life. He carefully replaced damaged rods, reinforced the structure with a stone foundation and cleaned the entire piece. On April 29, 2009, the sculpture made its grand return to Guzzetta Hall during a special unveiling ceremony.

Today “Tactile Sounding Sculpture” remains in Guzzetta Hall, a testament to Bertoia’s creativity and the University’s commitment to preserving art. However, due to its delicate nature, it is no longer played. Though its song may have faded, its legacy endures, reminding visitors that art is not just meant to be seen but, sometimes, to be heard. ■





# \$2 MILLION

## GRANT RECEIVED FOR DEVELOPING NEW WAYS FOR *recycling* PLASTIC

BY BREE SABIN

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) has awarded a \$2 million grant to The University of Akron (UA) as part of a national effort to advance electric vehicle (EV) battery recycling. On Oct. 31, 2024, the Biden-Harris Administration announced nearly \$45 million in funding aimed at reducing the costs associated with recycling electric vehicle batteries.

UA's College of Engineering and Polymer Science (CEPS) will receive \$2 million from the DOE, matched by an additional \$2 million in cost-sharing support. Dr. James Eagan, assistant professor of polymer science and polymer engineering, serves as the lead principal investigator and is joined by co-principal investigators Dr. Ajay Mahajan, associate dean for research, and Dr. Siamak Farhad, former professor of mechanical engineering. Farhad initially envisioned this project before moving to the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, and is still actively involved in the project.

### Recycling Plastics and Polymers

The project, titled "Development, demonstration and integration with the battery recycling plant — an efficient separation and recycling of plastics and composite polymers from EV battery packs," will involve three local industry partners: Schaeffler, Alterra and a startup company, Black Mass Recycling, to scale the project.

"We have spent almost two years laying the groundwork for this grant by redefining our focus areas, reinvigorating our research center and fostering a dynamic environment for research and innovation," said Mahajan. "I am proud of our faculty for reimagining a world where we are creating advancements in artificial intelligence, robotics, materials science, clean energy, advanced manufacturing, health care and many other areas."

Mahajan explained the project's process. "We take end-of-life EV batteries from manufacturers, separate and recycle the plastics at UA (TRL4), then hand off the materials to a partner company to scale the operation to TRL7, which means producing pellets that battery manufacturers can use to create new battery packs."

Technology readiness levels (TRLs) are a method for estimating the maturity of technologies during the acquisition phase of a program. TRL is determined during a technology readiness assessment (TRA) that examines program concepts, technology requirements and demonstrated technology capabilities. TRLs are based on a scale from 1 to 9, with 9 being the most mature technology.

Motaz Hassan, a Ph.D. student working in Dr. Mahajan's lab, highlighted the role of advanced robotics in this effort. "We are driving advancements in auxiliary plastic recycling through a cutting-edge system featuring a robotic arm, working in tandem with infrared and ultrasonic sensors and guided by a camera performing image processing along a conveyor belt assembly line. This innovative approach demonstrates a proof of concept for efficient plastic separation while paving the way for new recycling processes in electric vehicle batteries."

### Influencing Innovation

Beyond EV battery recycling, Hassan also emphasized UA's broader contributions to innovation. "At the same time, the Autonomous Systems Lab (ASL) is spearheading innovation across biomedical and mechanical fields, developing optimized tympanostomy tubes and kidney stone baskets for minimally invasive medical procedures. Numerous students are working on robotic systems tailored for space servicing operations, validated under zero-gravity conditions. These systems integrate cutting-edge autonomous navigation, precise localization techniques and adaptive intelligent technologies to ensure reliable and efficient performance in dynamic space environments. With expertise in control systems, microcontroller programming and robotics, ASL collaborates with government, commercial and academic partners to advance transformative technologies for a wide range of industries."

### Reskilling for New Roles

This partnership focuses not only on educating students but also on reskilling and upskilling current employees.

Reskilling refers to equipping workers with new skills for jobs that may be phasing out, while upskilling allows those already in the workforce to acquire additional expertise to advance in their current roles. Both approaches are critical for ensuring that the workforce is well-prepared to meet the challenges posed by emerging industries such as battery recycling and sustainable manufacturing.

In addition to the educational benefits for students, the grant will enable current industry workers to gain new capabilities, ensuring that Ohio's workforce remains competitive in an increasingly sustainable energy economy.

"This DOE grant will not only help create a new industry but will also offer research and educational opportunities for individuals across all backgrounds and experiences," added Dr. Craig Menzemer, dean of the College of Engineering and Polymer Science. "It aligns perfectly with our mission to reskill and retool our industrial workforce." ■



# A LEGACY of MAKING LEARNING EXTRAORDINARY

BY ALEX KNISELY

The University of Akron (UA) has long been a trailblazer in higher education, earning accolades at state, national and global levels for its distinct academic programs and research contributions.

That energy comes from passionate students and expert faculty dedicated to their success, and bettering our world. It also helps that many of UA's programs are the first or only of their kind, because UA is a university of opportunity for students.

## Global Pioneers in Emergency Management

Imagine being part of the world's first accredited bachelor's program in emergency management and homeland security (EMHS). At UA, students gain cutting-edge knowledge in a field that has become vital in today's interconnected world. Co-developed with FEMA more than 20 years ago, this program equips students with the skills to navigate crises, making them indispensable in safeguarding communities. Notably, it remains the only accredited EMHS program among public universities in Ohio.

## Cybersecurity Trailblazers

With cyber threats becoming more sophisticated, UA launched Ohio's first public university degree in cybersecurity in 2017. But UA didn't stop there — it also became one of the nation's earliest adopters of undergraduate courses in applied cryptography, teaching students the art of code-making and breaking. To enhance the experience, the R.C. Musson and Katherine M. Musson simulation lab, a one-of-a-kind facility in Ohio, allows students to simulate and counter cyberattacks.

UA's role as a regional programming center for Ohio's Cyber Range Institute under-scores its leadership in preparing tech professionals for high-stakes environments.



## Forensic Edge on Criminal Intelligence Analysis

For crimesolvers at heart, UA offers Ohio's first and only bachelor's degree in criminal intelligence analysis. Recognized as one of the top 25 intelligence analysis degrees nationwide, the program combines academics with hands-on experience. Students train in crime analysis labs using the same tools as professional investigators, bringing them one step closer to solving the mysteries of tomorrow.



## Polymer Science Powerhouse

Polymers may sound technical, but their everyday applications — from medical devices to sustainable materials — are transformative. UA made history as the first public university in Ohio to launch a Bachelor of Science in Polymer Science and Polymer Engineering. Starting in 2022, this program has attracted students worldwide, eager to make an impact in industries that shape modern life. This program complements the graduate programs, which are ranked as top in the nation. ■



## AEROSPACE SYSTEMS ENGINEERING DEGREE HELPS LAUNCH CAREERS

Outside of the U.S. Air Force Academy, UA is the only institution in the U.S. that offers a bachelor's degree in aerospace engineering.

The curriculum focuses on designing and building vehicles that fly, including rockets, satellites and planes.

Students participate in a mandatory co-op program, which gives them industry experience and earnings up to \$45,000

while they are enrolled. Graduates have a 99% employment or graduate school placement rate. Alumni work at companies such as SpaceX, NASA, Lockheed Martin, Collins Aerospace and PCC Airfoils.

The program was created approximately 15 years ago to expand the pool of qualified scientists, engineers and managers for the aerospace industry, which is particularly strong in Northeast Ohio. ■



## E.J. THOMAS CEILING HELPS RAISE UNIVERSITY'S PROFILE

The University of Akron's E.J. Thomas Performing Arts Hall may be the most unique building on the UA campus — because it's believed to be one of a few of its kind in the nation.

The Hall is home to the Witzman Counterweights system that raises and lowers the ceiling inside the performance space. The facility, which has three tiers, seats nearly 3,000 at its greatest capacity. It's transformed into a more intimate venue for around 750 when the ceiling is at its lowest level. The process takes about 15 minutes.

The 27 chrome counterweights, which weigh a combined 47 tons, hang in the Hall's Goodrich Lobby, making for a stunning sight for visitors. Counterweights are common in performance spaces to raise and lower scenery and curtains, but E.J.'s ceiling system is unique.

The Hall was recognized upon the occasion of its opening in 1973 by a New York Times architecture critic, who called it "a splendid performing arts center, synthesizing all that has gone before it." ■



# LEADING THE STATE IN LITERACY EDUCATION



BY ALEX KNISELY

The ability to read is fundamental to educational success, yet literacy challenges persist across the nation.

To align with Ohio's dyslexia support laws and Ohio's science of reading initiatives, The University of Akron (UA) is stepping forward to address these issues through the establishment of its Center for Structured Literacy (CSL), a hub dedicated to equipping educators with evidence-based reading instruction techniques and is poised to shape the state's educational landscape.

The CSL, housed in the LeBron James Family Foundation (LJFF) School of Education, is all about the science of reading. It's designed to support Ohio's aspiring and current K-12 teachers in mastering structured literacy with the latest scientific research on reading instruction. This is an approach that is essential, and effective, for all students

especially those with reading difficulties. The CSL was established last year thanks to a \$950,000 grant from the Ohio Department of Higher Education (ODHE).

As of 2022, state law requires districts to establish a Structured Literacy Certification process for teachers providing instruction in kindergarten through third grade. That process must align with Ohio's guidelines on best practices and methods for universal screening, intervention and remediation for children with dyslexia or displaying characteristics of dyslexia.

Structured literacy is a systematic and explicit approach to teaching reading by breaking language into core components like sound patterns, connections between spoken sounds and written letters, and how words are formed with prefixes, suffixes and roots. It empowers instructors to teach all the concepts of reading and writing through continuous evidence-based lessons with students while progressing the difficulty of concepts.

Unlike traditional methods, structured literacy doesn't assume that each student will perfectly comprehend the lesson; instead, its multi-tiered system of support provides direct instruction tailored to the needs of all learners through ongoing progress-monitoring assessments.

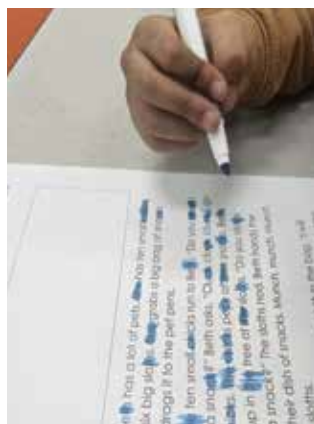
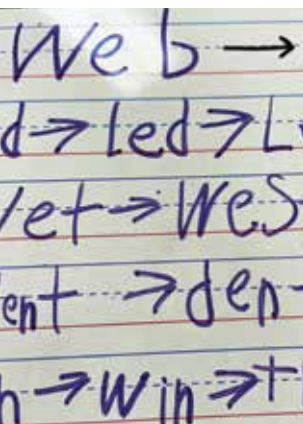
"It's the manner in which we are teaching reading and writing skills that's the game-changer," said Dr. Rebecca Tolson, the CSL director. "Through a combination of coursework and real-world practice, our students develop a deep understanding of language structure — knowledge that will make them more effective educators from day one."

## Addressing Literacy Gaps Through Education and Training

Practical experience is a cornerstone of UA's teacher education program. The CSL offers structured experiences where undergraduate and graduate students engage in assessments, data analysis and direct instruction, making their skills even more unique and based on the latest literacy research.

Because UA is the only institution in the area extensively preparing teachers in structured literacy, its graduates have a distinct hiring advantage over education students from other local institutions. School districts benefit as well, as hiring UA-trained teachers reduces the need for costly additional training. Since schools are now required to implement structured literacy, having pre-service teachers who are already proficient in these methods saves both time and resources.

"In the end, this saves school districts lots of money that would have gone toward



training existing teachers in the ways of structured literacy,” said Dr. Lisa Lenhart, retired school director and principal investigator for the ODHE grant. “Our Center is a community-wide solution to a literacy crisis. When pre-service teachers leave UA, they’re ready to make a difference from day one. That benefits everyone — students, schools and communities alike.”

A key component is a vigorous practicum course in structured literacy, which faculty members completed as part of their yearlong professional development. The practicum includes tutoring young students and instructs educators to perform assessments and analyze data to inform their instructional planning, ensuring every student understands the material.

Now, those education faculty members are passing that knowledge on to undergraduate and graduate students. The school’s curriculum underwent revision to align with structured literacy, and now students graduate as certified structured literacy/dyslexia interventionists.

“Through this practicum, future educators gain the confidence to step into a classroom and implement research-backed strategies from the start,” said Dr. Sarah Cooley,

assistant director of the Center. “When I first started teaching, I wasn’t trained in structured literacy. Now, knowing what I do, I see how essential it is for all students. I do think, moving forward, this is how all teacher candidates are going to be trained and how practicing teachers will get their professional development. Structured literacy is where we’re all headed.”

Because of this training, fourth-year student Chelsea Shaffer can be sure she’s creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment when she becomes a middle-level teacher in science and social studies.

“Before joining the Center, I hadn’t given much thought to teaching literacy — after all, why would a middle school science and social studies teacher need to know how to teach reading?” said Shaffer. “However, I quickly realized that no matter the subject, literacy is fundamental to student success, and I’m grateful for the knowledge and experience I’ve gained in this area. Seeing the effectiveness of structured literacy firsthand and knowing that I have the tools to support students’ reading development has strengthened my confidence.”

Beyond its teacher preparation programs, the CSL is committed to ongoing

professional development for in-service educators. For now, as the Center continues to take shape, initiatives such as the Summer Literacy Institute, scheduled for July 30, offer educators the opportunity to learn from literacy experts. The Center also collaborates with local school districts to provide targeted training, ensuring that best practices in reading instruction reach classrooms across the region.

### Looking Ahead

The CSL is also seeking accreditation from the International Dyslexia Association, highlighting its commitment to high-quality, science-based literacy instruction. This accreditation affirms UA’s alignment with the latest research and best practices in reading education.

“I always say teachers are the main ingredient,” said Tolson. “You need a teacher who has been an apprentice; that’s why our practicum is so robust and why we work with students in our partner school districts directly in their classrooms. It’s that teacher interaction that creates literacy and empowers families to encourage their children to read at home.” ■

## UA HOME TO ANNUAL AA EVENT



Did you know that UA is home to the annual Alcoholics Anonymous Founders’ Day? The three-day event, held each June, will celebrate its 90th anniversary this summer. The event brings more than 10,000 people each year to Akron, considered the home of AA. Over the years, visitors have come to Akron from every state in the U.S., and as far away as Australia and Mongolia.

Founders’ Weekend attendees come to Akron to honor Dr. Robert “Bob” Smith and Bill W. The men met in 1935, meeting at Stan Hywet Hall & Gardens, laying the foundation for the AA movement, which has helped millions of people. Dr. Bob, a successful Akron surgeon,

took his last drink a few weeks after that meeting on June 10, which is considered AA’s founding date.

In addition to staying on campus and attending lectures and meetings, attendees also tour Akron to visit popular locations such as Dr. Bob’s home, the phone booth at the Mayflower Manor where Bill W. made his first call to Dr. Bob, and to Stan Hywet Gate Lodge where the tenets of AA were established. ■

*For more information, visit [foundersday.org](http://foundersday.org).*



# National Center for Choreography-Akron

## OFFERS RARE OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS

Larry White – Ashton Black/Blaak Media photo



Christy Bolingbroke – Shane Wynn photo

BY JESSICA WHITEHILL



Dale Dong photo



W. Tanner Young photo

Guzzetta Hall at The University of Akron (UA) is home to some of the region's finest performing arts and artists, with offices, studios and performance facilities for musicians, dancers and more.

It also houses the National Center for Choreography-Akron (NCCAkron), one of only two U.S. organizations that focuses on research and development in dance. In addition to offering residencies for the creation of new works of dance, NCCAkron's activities focus on sparking dialogue and experimentation, bringing together artists and thinkers, and gathering resources around dance and choreography.

NCCAkron is independent from the University but provides around 26 opportunities each year for UA students to learn from working artists about the creation of new works in dance, the professional landscape and networking.

Larry White '24, who earned a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Dance, said guest artists are a given in college-level dance programs, but those relationships usually do not extend beyond the studio. NCCAkron's collaborators, however, offers students something unique.

"NCCAkron brings in choreographers and artists who specialize in research, and this helps students have more of a collaborative experience and feel more like equals. It's much more engaging," said White, who is from Howland, Ohio.

NCCAkron brings in many of its guest professionals through its Ideas in Motion program, a partnership with UA and the University of Akron Foundation's Mary Schiller Myers Lecture Series in the Arts, which challenges students to be versatile and open to new ideas in dance. In the fall, the Community Commissioning Residency engages students and the community with a nationally recognized contemporary dance artist for two weeks. In the spring, the 21st Century Dance Practices program offers a capsule series of classes that are guest-taught by professionals from around the country who work outside the traditional modern dance and ballet worlds.

An urban research university environment like UA enables NCCAkron to expose students to the broader world of dance and center the creative process and experimentation for American choreographers almost unlike anywhere else," said Christy Bolingbroke, NCCAkron's founding executive/artistic director.

White found his experience at UA and with NCCAkron to be especially impactful. For example, he said, when nationally known choreographer Kimberly Bartosik visited Akron to create "The Encounter: Akron" in 2023, White was impressed that Bartosik got to know each cast member and made it clear she wanted to stay in touch. ■

Learn more at [nccakron.org](http://nccakron.org).

# PSYCHOLOGY ARCHIVES AT THE HEART OF THE CUMMINGS CENTER



BY JESSICA WHITEHILL

There's only one place in the country that cares for, provides access to and interprets the historical record of psychology and related human sciences. And it happens to be located on the University of Akron (UA) campus.

The Drs. Nicholas and Dorothy Cummings Center for the History of Psychology houses the Archives of the History of American Psychology, the National Museum of Psychology, and the Institute for Human Science and Culture. The Center is the only Smithsonian Institution affiliate based on a university campus in Ohio.

The Archives opened 60 years ago thanks to the visionary leadership of UA psychology professors Dr. John A. Popplestone and Dr. Marion White McPherson. Neither the University nor the city have a particular connection to psychology, but the two faculty members felt driven to create an entity to preserve and honor the field of study.

"People ask, why is psychology's history preserved in Akron and not in a major population center? We always say, because Popplestone and McPherson were the ones with the good idea and the fortitude

to make it happen. And they made it happen right here in Akron," said Dr. Cathy Faye, the Margaret Clark Morgan executive director of the Cummings Center for the History of Psychology.

The Archives were originally kept in the Polsky Building. Transformational funding from Drs. Nicholas and Dorothy Cummings allowed Dr. David Baker, who succeeded Popplestone as the Center's director, to secure a building for the archival collections and eventually complete an expansion to include the Museum. The building's third floor was renovated to house the Institute thanks to a gift from donors Jim and Vanita Oelschlager.

Today, the Archives has more than 6,500 linear feet of items and is the world's largest archival repository of materials related to the history of psychology. The collection includes a wide range of information from how psychologists helped design airplanes in World War II to the impact of psychology on how we train our pets.

The Archives continue to receive important papers. In 2022, psychologist R. Allen Gardner, who famously taught American

Sign Language to a chimpanzee, bequeathed his intellectual property to the Archives along with a \$5.9 million gift to the Cummings Center to care for and manage the Archives and Museum collections.

Faye's focus is on safeguarding the collections' future. Working with archives specialists and architects, she is transforming the existing Archives space into a world-class storage facility to ensure the preservation of century-old materials. She is also looking to expand the space with compact mobile shelving, so that the collections can continue to grow.

"As we celebrate 60 years of the Archives," Faye said, "we are securing the long-term preservation of the irreplaceable materials we have collected and planning for the expansion of this rich repository into the future."

The exhibit "Why Akron? Reflecting on 60 Years of the Archives of the History of American Psychology" opens May 2025. For other anniversary events, go to [uakron.edu/chp](http://uakron.edu/chp). ■



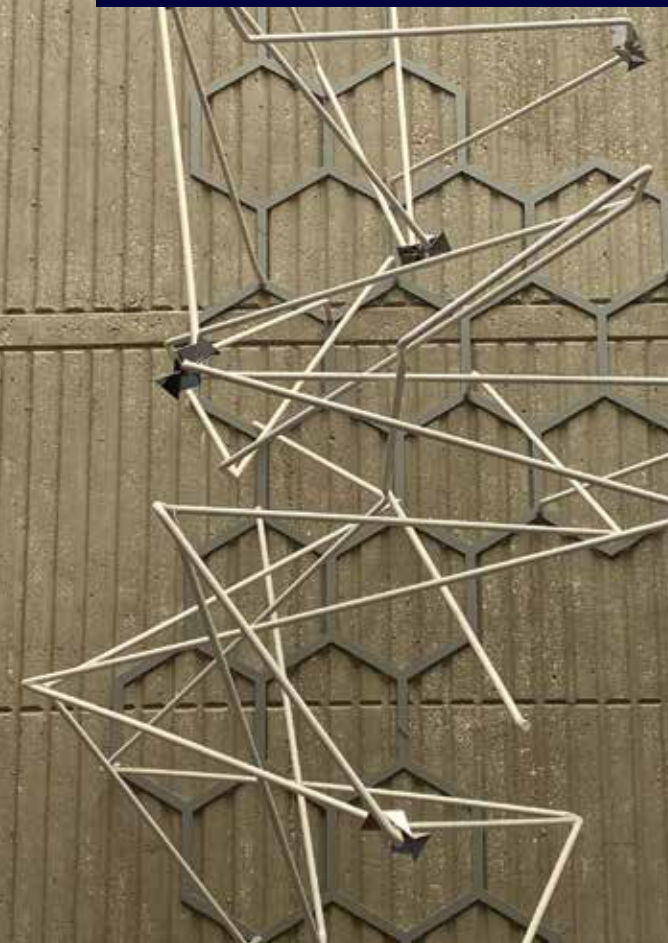
Dr. John A. Popplestone





# UA campus ENHANCED *by* one-of-a-kind artwork

STORY COLLABORATED  
BY JESSICA WHITEHILL  
AND LISA CRAIG '89,'24





## THE UNIVERSITY OF AKRON (UA) IS HOME TO MANY UNIQUE PUBLIC WORKS OF ART THAT **SPARK** CREATIVITY, **HIGHLIGHT** THE UNIVERSITY'S CAMPUS, AND **CREATE** OPPORTUNITIES FOR REFLECTION AND CONTEMPLATION IN AN ACADEMIC SETTING.

### Percent for Art Brings Art to Campus

Art on the UA campus makes it unique and interesting. Twelve of these works were created thanks to the Ohio Percent for Art program, an initiative of the Ohio legislature to recognize the state's responsibility to foster culture and the arts, and to encourage the development of artists and crafters. The newest of these works is a large-scale sculpture called "Octahedral Fields," which was installed outside Crouse Hall in 2024.

Ohio's Percent for Art law requires that whenever the legislature appropriates more than \$4 million for a public building, one percent of the total appropriation is to be allocated for artwork. The renovation of Crouse Hall, which was completed in 2023 and brought the Departments of Geosciences and Physics into one building, fell into this category.

"We have been fortunate to partner with Ohio Percent for Art on multiple pieces," said Andrew Hostetler, UA's director of architecture and design. "The partnership has been a great opportunity to display local and national artists and enhance our community. It provides another opportunity for us to engage students and enrich our physical environment in a meaningful way."

The Ohio Arts Council administers the state's Percent for Art Program. The contracting agency — in this case, The University of Akron — coordinates all elements of the project, including the planning, formation of a

selection committee, implementation of commissions and maintenance.

The committee selected a proposal by Akron-based metal sculpture artist Michael Marras, who created "Octahedral Fields."

In his artist statement, Marras notes the strong connection between his artwork and the teaching and research that take place inside the building.

Crouse Hall's renovations included the updating of laboratories and classrooms.

"Octahedral Fields' ... embodies the power of science to uplift our lives along with the educators who cultivate our future," Marras wrote. "Many elements of both physics and geosciences are represented, such as time and Earth materials."

### UA Student Assists with Latest Sculpture

Liam Kidd, a student in UA's Myers School of Art, worked as an assistant to Marras during the sculpture's construction. What started as a simple act of support, however, quickly evolved into an essential mentorship, with both artist and student learning from one another as they spent

almost 18 months — nine of which were taken up by fabrication — working on "Octahedral Fields."

Kidd's unique opportunity started with a recommendation from Director of University Galleries Arnie Tunstall. Marras unexpectedly needed wrist surgery and three months of rehab, so he knew

**Pictured far left:** "Point and Line," by Freecell Architecture, aluminum tube sculpture with waterjet cut plate and polished stainless steel reflectors located in Guzzetta Hall; completed March 16, 2012.

**Left:** "Double Bond," by David Tonnesen, oxidized Cor-Ten steel and stainless-steel sculpture with a poured concrete base located in Auburn West Tower — Biology Building; completed Sept. 24, 2010.



**Octahedral Fields**

**"Untitled (Signs, Pictures and Elements),"** by Matt Mullican, rubbings on painted canvases located in Buchtel College of Arts and Sciences; completed June 1, 2003.



**"Polymer Circle,"** by Richfield Landscape, concrete base located in Goodyear Polymer Circle; completed June 6, 2006. This piece was designed for and installed in the lawn area around the Dale Chihuly sculpture in Goodyear Polymer Circle. **"A Synoptic System #7,"** by Gregory Little, pigment/canvas with embedded augmented reality located in National Polymer Search Center; completed Oct. 10, 2015.



**"Together in Service and Community,"** by April Bleakney, wraparound mural in vinyl and offset letters located at University of Akron School of Law; completed Jan. 15, 2023.

**"Untitled,"** by Jun Kaneko, clay mosaic tile located in the Polsky Building; completed Nov. 15, 1993.

**"Circulation Paintant,"** by Fabian Marcaccio, digital prints, polymer, silicon located in Jean Hower Taber Student Union; completed Feb. 28, 2006.



**"#449, Moment/Momentum/Momentous,"** by Janice Lessman-Moss, made of linen wrap with a weft of predominantly nylon monofilament line. The wrap is hand-painted with dye in a gradient of color evolving from light fuchsia to light lime green located in National Polymer Research Center; completed Oct. 10, 2015.

**"Fissure diptych,"** by Dana Oldfather, acrylic, ink and spray paint on linen located in National Polymer Research Center; completed Oct. 10, 2015.

**"Flux Chandelier,"** by Jen Lewin, interactive LED tubes located in Zook Hall; completed April 24, 2017.



he would need additional help with creation and installation.

At the time, Kidd was just starting to take sculpture classes, and Tunstall thought the opportunity would be an ideal match. Kidd had been curious about all kinds of art making and was just beginning to see himself as a sculptor and to weld and work in metal.

"I was working on this really complicated steel piece in class, and Arnie saw it," Kidd said. "He told me he was impressed and then mentioned Michael, who has a massive commission on campus in the works, and said he'd put in a good word for me."

Marras had worked with apprentices but rarely with students. He quickly saw Kidd's potential and work ethic, which became essential when Marras had to deal with his wrist.

The project required creativity, problem-solving and a rigorous level of commitment from both artists. Kidd's knowledge of anatomy and form, honed through his art studies, contributed directly to the sculpture's design.

"He made a lot of great suggestions, which usually doesn't happen when someone's new and might be afraid to speak up," Marras said. "I'd be scratching my head about a problem, and Liam would say, 'What if we tried this?' Many times, he was spot-on."

The unique demands of constructing a 20-foot sculpture also gave Kidd firsthand insight into the challenges of large-scale metalwork. With the sculpture nearly twice the height of Marras' studio, they developed an unconventional setup, using the wall as a vertical floor to piece the sculpture together limb by limb. Kidd's contributions were essential throughout, providing fresh ideas and an extra set of capable hands.

Reflecting on the collaboration, Tunstall observed the growth in both artists. "A lot of hard work went into creating this sculpture, and both men grew as artists in the process — a wonderful byproduct of all that effort," he said. "It is a generous gift to share a skill and passion for your work with someone who wants to learn."

For Kidd, who is an Akron native, the mentorship was invaluable. "I learned so much from Michael's stories about his career path and the strategies he uses to navigate it," he said. "This experience has really shaped how I'll approach my work." ■

# THE UNIVERSITY of AKRON FINANCIAL PLANNING PROGRAM OFFERS **UNIQUE** **PATH TO SUCCESS**

BY **CRISTINE BOYD**

*The University of Akron's Financial Planning Program stands out as one of the nation's top programs, ranked 11th by WealthManagement.com in recent years. What makes it unique is its comprehensive, hands-on approach to financial education, blending rigorous academics with real-world experiences that prepare students for high-demand careers in finance.*

Unlike many programs, UA's curriculum is carefully designed to align with the Certified Financial Planner (CFP) Board of Standards, Inc., ensuring that graduates meet the highest professional standards and are fully prepared to sit for the CFP® certification exam. This commitment to excellence gives students a competitive edge in the job market, opening doors to careers as financial advisors, securities brokers, portfolio managers and more.

Another distinguishing feature is UA's strong emphasis on experiential learning. Students gain practical experience through internships with top financial firms, industry mentorships and national competitions. In 2023, UA's excellence was recognized when both of its student teams placed among the top five finalists in the Financial Service Professionals Career Exploration

Competition — a rare achievement in which most universities only have one team qualify.

Additionally, students have access to vibrant finance-focused organizations, including the Financial Planning Student Association, Beta Alpha Psi and the UA Investment Club, providing valuable networking and leadership opportunities.

With its nationally recognized curriculum, hands-on learning experiences and proven student success, UA's Financial Planning Program offers an exceptional, career-focused education that sets it apart from other programs. ■

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Learn more at [bit.ly/42Kgkue](https://bit.ly/42Kgkue).





# TOP ART SCHOOL

IN 'CADILLAC'  
OF FACILITIES



The Mary Schiller Myers School of Art at The University of Akron is one of the largest academic art facilities in the region, offering an inspiring and comprehensive environment for aspiring artists. Housed in Folk Hall — originally a Cadillac dealership with spacious showrooms and service bays — the facility now boasts 28 studios, a Student Projects Gallery, an auditorium, classrooms, faculty offices, and specialized resources such as the Visual Resource Center and Graphic Services Center.

At the heart of the school is the nationally recognized Emily Davis Gallery, which hosts approximately eight exhibitions annually, featuring acclaimed artists from around the world. These exhibitions, along with lectures and workshops, are free and open to the public.

Students engage in hands-on experiences beyond the classroom through initiatives like the Art Bomb Brigade, which transforms struggling neighborhoods with vibrant public murals, and Arts LIFT, an award-winning summer apprenticeship program for Akron high school students. Additionally, annual study abroad opportunities to destinations like Venice, Italy and New York City enrich students' artistic perspectives.

Recognized as one of the top art schools in the nation by Newsweek, the Myers School of Art provides expert instruction and career preparation, fostering creativity and success in the ever-evolving world of art and design. ■

*Learn more at [uakron.edu/art](http://uakron.edu/art).*

## UA ROTC PROGRAM — A FIRST OF ITS KIND

The Army Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) at The University of Akron traces its origins to the Students' Army Training Corps, activated in 1918. Following World War I and the flu pandemic, local leaders and University President Dr. Parke Kolbe successfully petitioned the War Department to establish an official ROTC unit. Approved in 1919, ROTC initially began as a voluntary program before becoming mandatory for male freshmen and sophomores later that year. It was among the first Army ROTC programs in the country.

Under early leadership, the program developed a structured four-year

curriculum emphasizing military tactics, leadership and physical fitness. Training included field fortifications, map reading and infantry tactics, with cadets first attending summer camp at Fort Knox in 1923. The program quickly became ingrained in campus life, hosting military balls and forming student groups like the Pershing Rifles.

Through wars, social change and policy shifts — including the admission of female cadets in 1970 — the ROTC program has remained a foundation of leadership development. Today, UA's ROTC program



continues its century-old tradition of producing outstanding leaders, offering scholarships and career pathways through military service, while honoring its long history of excellence and commitment to national defense. ■

*Learn more at [uakron.edu/armyrotc](http://uakron.edu/armyrotc).*

# A TRADITION WITH UNIQUE TIMING: 7:17, 8:08 and 9:09



BY BREE SABIN

*At The University of Akron, student entertainment is more than just a good time — it's a tradition with unique timing. Three distinct show times — 7:17 p.m., 8:08 p.m. and 9:09 p.m. — have become part of the campus culture, each with its own story and significance. These times have shaped the way students experience campus life, from comedy shows to live performances. But how did they come to be, and what makes them work so well?*

## 9:09

The story behind the iconic 9:09 time slot dates back to 1995, when Thomas Faessel, associate director of residence life activities and the driving force behind student entertainment, noticed something interesting: students weren't arriving on time for events that started at 9 p.m., because they were glued to their favorite TV shows. Faessel and student leaders discussed shifting the showtime to accommodate the end of popular programming, and the idea of starting at 9:09 was born. This allowed students more time to make it to the event after their TV shows concluded.

"We figured out it would take about nine minutes to get

across campus," Faessel recalls, "and the 9:09 time stuck." What started as a practical solution quickly became a beloved part of Akron's entertainment culture. Today, 9:09 is reserved for major events, like comedians, performers and shows held in E.J. Thomas Performing Arts Hall.

## 7:17

In 2005, when the new Jean Hower Taber Student Union was built, a new coffeehouse series was created. Faessel, a fan of Disneyland, drew inspiration from the park's 50th anniversary celebration. Disneyland opened on July 17, 1955, so Faessel suggested 7:17 as the perfect time for these more intimate performances.

"It's all about the connection to Disneyland," Faessel explains, adding that his family had taken many trips there over the years. The timing accommodated both residential and commuter students, especially with the new student union coffeehouse setting, which was an ideal space for singer-songwriters, open mic nights and spoken word performances.

## 8:08

In response to feedback from students, particularly during Akron's cold winters, Faessel and his team decided to create a new series aimed at a middle ground between the late 9:09

and the earlier 7:17. In 2024, the 8:08 Comedy Club was born.

"9:09 is a bit too late in winter, and 7:17 was too early for some," Faessel explains. "So, we created 8:08, and it's become a popular middle ground for comedy lovers." The 8:08 shows are more casual, catering to a different audience than the larger, high-profile 9:09 events.

The success of these series lies not just in the time slots, but in how well they meet the needs of students. Faessel notes that even as the University's student population fluctuates, the tradition of these time slots has persisted. "Students may change, but they still know about 9:09, 7:17 and now 8:08. These times have become ingrained in the culture."

As Akron continues to evolve, so will the entertainment offerings. While the University has adapted the times to meet the needs of students, the iconic times are still alive and well. The entertainment programming at Akron stands as a testament to the creativity and adaptability of student leaders and the commitment to offering engaging, accessible experiences for the campus community. Akron's unique start times ensure that there's always something to enjoy, no matter the hour. ■



# HONORING EXCELLENCE

## AND 50 YEARS OF HONORS PROGRAMMING

BY ALEX KNISELY

**FOR 50 YEARS, HONORS EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF AKRON (UA) HAS BEEN A POWERHOUSE OF ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE — NURTURING BRIGHT MINDS, BOLD LEADERS AND BOUNDARY-PUSHING THINKERS. WHAT BEGAN AS A SMALL, AMBITIOUS INITIATIVE IN 1975 HAS GROWN INTO A THRIVING COMMUNITY WHERE HIGH-ACHIEVING STUDENTS UNLOCK EXTRAORDINARY OPPORTUNITIES INTELLECTUALLY, PROFESSIONALLY AND PERSONALLY.**



Honors programming at UA began in 1975 and, thirty years later, it grew into a full-fledged college. Then, in 2015, thanks to the vision and generosity of Drs. Gary B. and Pamela S. Williams, it was renamed the Williams Honors College (WHC), further solidifying its mission to enrich scholars and changemakers ready to leave their mark on the world.

Now, as the WHC marks its 50th anniversary, a number of special events are being planned to bring together students, alumni and faculty, culminating in a grand gala celebration in October. The lineup includes an Emerging Leaders breakfast, a special guest lecture and complimentary tickets to the Homecoming football game. More information will be released as the celebration is planned.

In the meantime, as this milestone draws near, current Williams Honors Scholars take a moment to reflect on their journeys — how their experiences shape them and how they contribute to the 50-year legacy they will soon carry forward as part of a proud network of 8,000 and growing Honors alumni.

### Opportunities That Shape Futures

From research projects and networking events to Honors Colloquia and the Emerging Leaders program, the WHC offers its students a wealth of opportunities to enhance their academic and professional journeys. Research opportunities, student clubs and learning from expert faculty drive these students forward, laying the groundwork for future success.

For Honors Scholar Rhea Mahajan, a third-year biomedical science major from Orange, Ohio, that means gaining critical experience to be ready for medical school.

“As a pre-med student, the Honors College has provided me with opportunities to engage in research, develop critical thinking skills and gain leadership experience — key elements for a future in medicine,” she said. “And alongside the pre-med peers I met within the WHC community, I’m able to foster a strong sense of partnership as we push each other to achieve our dreams.”

### Inspiring Each Other

Beyond academics, the WHC cultivates a sense of belonging among students. Living in the Honors Complex and engaging in exclusive events has empowered them to form meaningful connections with like-minded peers.





Left: Rhea Mahajan  
Center: Tate Miller  
Right: Nicholas Michael

"Being a part of the Williams Honors College has offered me many opportunities for success and relationship building at UA," said Tate Miller, a second-year biomedical science major from Canal Fulton, Ohio.

Honors Scholars are able to participate in a number of Honors clubs and organizations, including groups for students interested in engineering, education, nursing, business, community service and more.

"The Honors College has become a safe place for me on campus," Miller added. "I have lived in the Honors Complex for both of my years at Akron and because of this, I have made many friends of both similar and different backgrounds."

### Marking a Legacy of Excellence

As the WHC marks the 50-year milestone, these students are keenly aware of their role in its ongoing legacy.

For Nicholas Michael, a second-year chemistry major from Akron, "it feels great to be a part of the WHC during such a big milestone."

"Being an Honors Scholar means that you come to UA with more than a degree in mind," he said. "I think that being an Honors Scholar means that you have a desire to become a well-rounded individual who is involved in campus life, creates a sense of community and is always looking for ways to improve themselves."

### Looking Back, Moving Forward

Reflecting on the past, students appreciate the advancements that have shaped the WHC into the dynamic institution it is today. While early Honors Scholars navigated their academic journeys without modern technology and global resources, today's

students benefit from a wealth of digital tools and international connections.

"We sometimes take for granted the ease with which we can access an infinite amount of information, connect with experts across the world and collaborate on research in realtime," said Mahajan.

Students gather information about campus events and news in ways that were not available in 1975.

"The UA Mobile app is a big help," Michael said, "as well as having My Akron to navigate my degree progress, register for classes and housing, and stay informed on the latest events and news via Zipmail."

It's clear that the WHC continues to ignite curiosity, challenge boundaries and inspire scholars to embrace new opportunities.

"Today, the Honors College has an incredible number of opportunities and resources offered to students that assist them in reaching for their goals," said Miller. "It has grown to be a very diverse institution as it is reflective of the world we live in." ■

### HEY, HONORS ALUMNI! WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU.

Scan here to update your address and contact information with us.

<https://fundraise.givesmart.com/f/582s/n?vid=1hrqvl>

Scan here to stay posted about 50th anniversary events.

[https://akron.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_8uGq8eoercMcWb4](https://akron.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_8uGq8eoercMcWb4)



# CARVING A UNIQUE PATH AS AN INTERNATIONAL ZIP

BY BREE SABIN

When Axel Ortega arrived at The University of Akron (UA) to begin the MBA program, he wasn't just starting another academic journey — he was carving out a path uniquely his own. Originally from Nicaragua, Ortega is a Fulbright Scholar with a deep passion for economic and social development through entrepreneurship.

Ortega first learned about UA while collaborating with his Fulbright placement advisor. He sought a program that aligned with his professional aspirations, and UA's MBA program stood out for its strong curriculum, global focus and strategic location, offering him the perfect environment to develop his distinct approach to business and leadership.

"This collaborative process ensured that I could maximize my learning experience and make a meaningful impact during my graduate studies," Ortega explains.

Adjusting to life in the United States presented both excitement and challenges. Adapting to a new culture, language and academic system required flexibility, but UA's welcoming community and supportive faculty helped ease the transition.

"I embraced the opportunity to step out of my comfort zone, learn from diverse perspectives and develop both personally and professionally," he says.

Ortega's passion for business stems from his experiences in Nicaragua, where he witnessed the obstacles businesses and communities face in developing economies. His MBA studies at UA are equipping him with the knowledge and skills to create change, empower others and contribute to economic development in Latin America.

Becoming a Fulbright Scholar was a rigorous and rewarding process. Ortega first learned about the program through the international office at his undergraduate university. The journey required extensive preparation, from improving his English proficiency to excelling in the GRE and building a strong professional portfolio.

Through Fulbright, he has gained access to a global network of scholars and professionals, as well as exclusive leadership and professional development opportunities. "Getting the chance to study in the leading country for high-quality education was always a dream for me," Ortega says.

"Fulbright scholars like Axel bring a wealth of global experience and fresh perspectives that elevate discussions in our classrooms. Their presence not only enhances the learning environment but also strengthens Akron's connections to the international business

community," stated Dr. Mahesh Srinivasan, executive director of global engagement and director of UA's Institute for Global Business. "Axel's ability to bridge markets and apply digital marketing strategies globally is exactly the kind of innovation we strive to foster at The University of Akron."

Ortega is currently working alongside faculty and two undergraduate students to establish a new student organization focused on entrepreneurship and innovation. "This project is one of my main initiatives, and we hope to launch it this year to further promote a culture of innovation," Ortega states.

Beyond the University, Ortega is also collaborating on a digital entrepreneurship platform with another Fulbright Scholar, aiming to create a meaningful social and economic impact.

Ortega explains, "My goal is to contribute to economic and social development, not just through commercial success, but by generating jobs and improving living conditions for vulnerable populations."

He encourages other international students and aspiring Fulbright Scholars to embrace opportunities with an open mind and a strong sense of purpose.

"The Fulbright program offers a unique chance to expand your horizons, not only academically but also personally and professionally. It requires dedication and hard work, but it is worth every effort," Ortega states.

As Ortega continues his MBA journey at UA, he remains focused on his long-term vision of fostering entrepreneurial success and driving innovation in Latin America. His experiences in Akron have given him a global perspective, invaluable skills and a strong support system that will continue to shape his path forward.

"Being here has reinforced my appreciation for cultural exchange and strengthened my determination to make a meaningful impact in my community," Ortega reflects. ■



# CLIMBING TO NEW heights AT UA



BY **BEAU BALIZET '25**

Since its grand opening in 2002, the Student Recreation and Wellness Center (SRWC) has been a defining feature of student life at The University of Akron. Designed to promote fitness, adventure and community, the facility has provided students with countless opportunities to challenge themselves in new ways. Among its standout features is the 52.5-foot rock wall that draws climbers of all skill levels to test their limits.

More than just a striking centerpiece, the rock wall has become the heart of UA's Outdoor Adventure programs. It serves as a starting point for students eager to explore activities like backpacking, mountain biking

and whitewater rafting. For many, what begins as casual curiosity about climbing quickly turns into a passion for adventure that extends far beyond the walls of the Rec Center.

## The Heart of Adventure

In April 2002, the SRWC and the Stile Athletics Field House were opened as part of the \$300 million Landscape for Learning deal, a campus enhancement program that started in 2000 and added new buildings, green space and amenities.

The rock wall, which is located to the left of the front entrance, was always part of the SRWC's original plans. Its dazzling presence grabs visitors' attention as soon as they enter the building.

The wall has three main sections: the center features a 52.5-foot tower, to the left is a 26-foot climb and three 40-foot climbs are found on the right. In all, there are seven ropes — three for the center tower and the 26-foot climb and three for the 40-foot tall section, one of which is an auto belay. An auto belay is a mechanical device for belaying in indoor climbing walls, in both training and competition climbing formats. It's hard not to admire its impressive scale.

Jon Dent, manager of Outdoor Adventure at the SRWC, explains how the rock wall connects students to Outdoor Adventure. "The rock wall serves as a gateway to deeper

interests," Dent adds. "Both climbers and non-climbers will stop and ask questions about climbing, which leads them to explore Outdoor Adventure's other programs and activities. Often, students will end up asking about the climbing classes that we offer, which are Intro to Belay and Lead Climbing.

Keana Royce, a junior majoring in biology, echoes the sentiment. "Prior to climbing at the rock wall, I only visited the Rec Center to lift," she said. "Though I've always wanted to try climbing, I simply didn't know how. When I heard of the introductory rock-climbing course offered through UA, I could not pass it up."

As students become more familiar with the rock wall, many realize its true appeal. "Students are drawn to the challenge. There's a healthy sense of competition, both with peers and themselves," Dent says.

And once they grasp the deeper attractions of climbing, students are drawn into the sense of community the wall builds. "Many students find like-minded friends through climbing. These friendships often extend to outdoor climbing and other Outdoor Adventure activities," Dent explains.

"Through this course and spending time at the rock wall, I have made many lifelong friends and learned a new skill that I will hopefully pursue for the rest of my life," said Royce. ■





# HOW MICHAEL GRAHAM TURNED HIS PASSION INTO A *thriving* Roller Coaster Engineering Firm



BY BREE SABIN

For many kids, an obsession with LEGO sets and thrill rides is a childhood passion, but for University of Akron (UA) alumnus Michael Graham '99, it was the blueprint for an extraordinary career. Graham is co-founder of The Gravity Group, a premier roller coaster design and engineering firm.

Graham's fascination with engineering began in sixth grade when he learned that mechanical engineers design machines. His early years were filled with building projects — both from LEGO sets and whatever materials he could scavenge around the house. His interest in roller coasters took off after a family vacation, where he realized these thrilling rides were feats of engineering.

Despite his enthusiasm, Graham soon learned that breaking into the niche field of roller coaster design was statistically more challenging than becoming an astronaut. Undeterred, he pursued his passion while keeping a sensible alternative plan: aerospace engineering.

Graham chose UA for its hands-on engineering approach. He appreciated the University's Zips Aero Design Team and the mentorship he gained from his professors, who assisted him in securing scholarships

and guided his academic journey. While at UA, Graham's roller coaster models gained recognition — one was even sold to the Ontario Science Centre in Canada for an exhibit.

After completing several co-op experiences with an aerospace pump company, Graham graduated and set his sights on the roller coaster industry. He landed a dream job at Custom Coasters International (CCI) in Cincinnati, where he contributed to the design of numerous wooden roller coasters, including The Villain at Six Flags Ohio (the former Geauga Lake amusement park).

In 2002, CCI faced financial difficulties and went bankrupt, leaving Graham and three other engineers at a crossroads. Instead of searching for new jobs, they took a leap of faith and co-founded The Gravity Group.

"We started with four computers, four guys and no venture capital — just a passion for designing roller coasters," Graham recalls.

Operating from home before remote work was trendy, the team secured engineering contracts, slowly building a reputation. Over the years, their expertise expanded beyond design into manufacturing and

general contracting through their sister company, Gravitykraft Corporation. Today, The Gravity Group boasts a 32,000-square-foot headquarters and a global portfolio of award-winning roller coasters.

Additionally, Graham's talent for building roller coaster models created a separate business path. His work caught the eye of Jack Rimer, an entrepreneur in the hobby industry, and together they formed Coasterdynamix, a company now known worldwide for its roller coaster models and souvenirs, found in nearly every amusement park.

Reflecting on his career, Graham emphasizes the value of hands-on experience and industry networking. He advises engineering students to attend trade shows, connect with professionals and get involved in standards organizations like The American Society for Testing and Materials.

"Networking is key," shares Graham. "Face-to-face interactions are far more effective than sending a digital resume into the void."

He also champions entrepreneurship courses for engineering students. "I wish I had more business education. Whether you work for a big corporation or a startup, understanding the business side of engineering is incredibly useful," he said.

From building LEGO creations as a child to engineering some of the most thrilling rides in the world, Graham's story is a reminder that childhood dreams can indeed become lifelong careers — especially when paired with the right education and a willingness to take the plunge. ■



## FINDING A NEW FIELD: from the Gridiron to Gigafactories

### *How a Mentor Changed Antonio Samuel's Path to Success*

BY SARAH STEIDL '03

*Antonio Samuel, '10, had his sights set on a career in the NFL when he arrived at The University of Akron (UA), ready to dominate the football field and study business management. But the relationships he developed at UA would ultimately lead him in an unexpected direction.*

#### Finding a New Field

After his first semester as a business major, Samuel, a standout football recruit from Cleveland's John F. Kennedy High School, shared with his academic advisor that the only class he enjoyed was his Calculus for Business course. Upon learning about Samuel's love for math, his advisor encouraged him to explore an engineering degree.

"I didn't even know what engineering was," he admitted. Despite his uncertainty, his natural interests in math and technology led him to switch his major to electrical engineering.



This new degree path, along with a football injury and a serendipitous meeting with Dr. Julie Zhao, who was a graduate student at UA and is now assistant dean in the College of Engineering and Polymer Science, changed the course of Samuel's future.

#### A Mentor's Impact

At the end of his second semester, Samuel received an email celebrating his strong academic performance and an invitation to meet with Zhao and Dr. Paul Lam, the College of Engineering's former dean of undergraduate studies. The pair urged Samuel to consider co-ops or research opportunities.

The dream of football stardom was still driving him, but with Lam's encouragement and Zhao's guidance, he pursued many academic opportunities provided by UA.

"Julie helped me see a future beyond football," Samuel recalled. "She became my informal mentor. I leaned on her for advice about co-ops, research and even my first job offer. Before meeting her, I was planning to transfer to a Division II school to continue my football career. I don't even know if they had an engineering program."

#### Becoming a Leader

With Zhao's encouragement, Samuel blossomed into a leader on campus. He joined student organizations like the National Society of Black Engineers and the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers, and served in student government. These experiences helped him develop the professional skills he would need to thrive in his career.

"Students like Antonio have helped me grow as an educator by showing me the impact of simple encouragement and the power of seeing potential in others," said Zhao.

#### Leading at Tesla and Giving Back

Today, Samuel oversees operations and engineering at Tesla's Buffalo Gigafactory, where his team manufactures solar roofs, superchargers and residential energy solutions. He's also giving back to the community that shaped him. He recently visited UA to participate in the annual Co-op and Career Fair and to meet and share advice with current students.

Looking back, Samuel reflects on how meeting the right person at the right time led him to become a leader at one of the most innovative companies in the world.

"That chance meeting with Julie gave me a way to view my life outside of football. It changed everything." ■





Visit [akron.edu/magazine](http://akron.edu/magazine) for the entire list of Class Notes, Farewells and other alumni news. You'll also find full-length versions of the stories in this issue, along with videos and additional images.

## Class Notes

### 1960s

**Charles L. Greene, B.A.E. '62, J.D. '77, Ph.D. '77**, was recognized by the Northeast Ohio Chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals at its National Philanthropy Day Celebration Luncheon on Nov. 7, 2024, with a Special Recognition Award. The award is presented to an individual, family or group whose philanthropic contributions are "unique and impactful and whose work supporting a nonprofit organization or cause is innovative."



### 1970s

**Paul W. Phister, Jr., B.S.E.E. '77**, was appointed to the board of directors of the International Space Elevator Consortium. In 2000, Phister retired from the United States Air Force as lieutenant colonel.



**Donn A. Swartz, B.S.I.M. '72**, worked for both Firestone Tire and Rubber Company and The Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company in Brazil, Argentina, Ghana and India. He also owned a business franchise, AMPM, in San Diego, Calif.

### 1980s

**Richard I. Cohen, J.D. '80**, has joined the executive team as managing director of member experience and chief legal officer at R360, the premier global community for ultra-high-net-worth individuals. Cohen's proven ability to drive growth, transform business and lead with vision has delivered extraordinary results across industries.



**Annalisa S. Williams, M.A. '80, J.D. '84**, Akron municipal court judge, partnered with the Hower House Museum in Akron to host weddings on Dec. 4, 2024.



### 1990s

**Michael S. Dingus, J.D. '98**, was elected as a judge to the 10th District Court of Appeals in Nov. 2024 and took office on Feb. 10, 2025.



**Roger E. Gordon, B.A. '92**, recently had his 12th book published, "The Forgotten Decade: Compelling Stories of the 1970s Cleveland Browns." Gordon's next book, "Cleveland Indians A-Z", is scheduled to be published in Nov. 2025.



**Christopher P. Helsel, M.S.M.E. '93**, senior vice president and chief technical officer at The Goodyear Tire and Rubber Company, joined the company in 1996 as part of a tiny team doing computer tire simulation. Back in the '90s, Goodyear was trying to use technology to predict things like contact patch shapes. Now, it can model tires in full fidelity, including in different climatic conditions. In silico tire development now extends much further into the tire testing process, as Goodyear is using driver-in-the-loop simulators, like the kind used in motorsport, to perform dynamic tire testing.



**Greta L. Johnson, B.A.E. '99, M.A.E. '01, J.D. '04**, was honored in Crain's Cleveland Business' Notable Leaders in Communications 2024. Johnson is assistant chief of staff and communications director at the Summit County Executive's Office.



**Theresa A. "Teri" Lash-Ritter, B.S. '92**, has been

named president of Cleveland Clinic's Akron General and Lodi hospitals. Lash-Ritter's oversight also includes Medina, Mercy and Union hospitals, three health and wellness centers, and many family health centers and outpatient facilities. She will focus on safety, quality and providing the best possible experience for patients and caregivers.



**Shawn D. Scharf, J.D. '98**, was

named managing partner of the law firm of Green Haines Sgambati Co., LPA in Youngstown, Ohio. He has been with the firm since 2000 and focuses his practice on representing injured workers in the Ohio Workers' Compensation system.



### 2000s

**Anthony O. Dalton, II, B.A. '08**, is an active

film actor, and recently starred in the film, "Blended Christmas." The film tells the story of when a Christmas honeymoon turns into a holiday with a husband's ex-wife and kids. Thankfully, a guardian angel steps in to help this newlywed couple navigate the chaos.



**David H. Hamilton, B.A. '07**, will serve

as the administrative/presiding judge of the Akron Municipal Court for 2025. In this role, Hamilton will oversee the court's administrative, docket and court calendar, as well as the observance of the rules of superintendence and the timely reporting and termination of all cases in the court.



**Matthew P. Meduri, B.A. '09**, had his debut novel, "Collegiate Gothic," published by Bordighera Press in Oct. 2024.

**C. Daniel Miller, M.T. '03, J.D. '23**, has joined the team of Hahn Loeser & Parks as an associate attorney in the firm's Cleveland office, following the Ohio Supreme Court's recent swearing-in ceremony, admitting him to the Ohio Bar. Miller will focus on tax law, corporate transactions, mergers and acquisitions, estate planning and the Corporate Transparency Act.



**Jessica L. Tepus, B.S.A. '04, M.T. '10**, has been promoted from CPA tax

services to director at Bober Markey Fedorovich. Tepus joined BMF in 2010 and brings more than 15 years of experience with income tax, estate and succession planning needs of business owners, high-net-worth individuals and their families.



**Michael Van Duyn, B.S.C.E. '05**, was honored at the 2024

American Society of Chemical Engineers, Outstanding Projects and Leaders Gala in San Diego with the Gold Award for work on the structural engineering design of the Sixth Street Viaduct in Los Angeles. The Sixth Street Viaduct project has been a significant undertaking, involving cutting-edge structural engineering solutions to replace the original 1932 structure. The new 3,058-ft-long viaduct opened in July 2022 and features a series of ten pairs of continuous arches, creating a visually striking and seismically resilient bridge that enhances connectivity and serves as a landmark for the city.



## 2010s

**Neriah-Shae Licata, B.S.B.E.**

'19, has joined the team of Hahn Loeser & Parks as an associate attorney in the firm's Cleveland office, following the Ohio Supreme Court's recent swearing-in ceremony, admitting her to the Ohio Bar. Licata will focus on trademarks, copyrights and patents and bringing technical insight to clients' legal challenges.

**Joseph A. Manno, B.S. '11, J.D. '14,**

has been elected to Tucker Ellis LLP's partnership effective Jan. 1, 2025. Manno defends companies against claims alleging federal and state statutory liability, product liability and general negligence in repeat, mass tort and individual high-stakes litigation.

**Jessica A. Renner, B.A. '12,**

a Jarrett Cargo claims and risk manager, was recognized as the 2024 Women in Supply Chain Award Workforce Innovator winner by Food Logistics and Supply & Demand Chain Executive, in Sept. 2024. The award honors female supply chain leaders and executives whose accomplishments, mentorship and examples set a foundation for women in all levels of a company's supply chain network. Renner, who is most notable for her expertise in cargo theft and fraud mitigation, is recognized as an industry leader.

**David T. Robinson, B.A. '18, J.D. '22,**

has joined the firm Critchfield, Critchfield & Johnston as an associate. Robinson focuses his practice on corporate and business law, as well as real estate transactions.



## 2020s

**Haley J. Bonnot-Orr, J.D. '24,**

recently passed the Ohio State bar exam. She began her career at Black McCuskey Souers & Arbaugh, LPA, as a law clerk in 2023 and is now an associate. She focuses her practice in the areas of business and corporate law, litigation and real estate law. Black McCuskey delivers legal assistance to individuals, businesses, professional associations and public agencies.

**Xul Perez, J.D. '23, M.T. '23,**

became staff attorney at the Low-Income Taxpayer Clinic at Community Legal Aid Service (CLAS) in Akron last August. Perez can make a difference in his own community by assisting low-income taxpayers with IRS's controversies, educating about tax rights and responsibilities and advocating for equitable tax policies.

**Samantha M. Rathburn, M.T. '20,**

was promoted from CPA tax services to director at Bober Markey Fedorovich. Rathburn focuses on serving a variety of industries including service, manufacturing, distribution, real estate, investment companies and restaurant hospitality. Her expertise includes C-corporations, S-corporations, limited liability companies, partnerships and multi-state companies.



## MISC.

Former U. S. President Joe Biden signed a measure honoring one of Akron's pioneering Black elected officials, naming the city's main mail facility the Judge James R. Williams Post Office Building. Judge Williams was a legal luminary, whose unwav-



ering dedication to justice paved the way for future generations of leaders in Akron and across the country. Williams, B.A.E. '60, J.D. '65, was a civil rights leader, a former Akron city councilman and the first African American to serve as a Summit County Court of Common Pleas judge. He was among the first African Americans to graduate from the University of Akron School of Law after it became affiliated with the University in 1959.

## Farewells

*For more Farewells, visit the website.*

**Mildred T. Apicella, B.S.E. '74, M.S.E. '83,** Sept. 19, 2024

**Delores Beyer,** March 18, 2024

**William H. Beyer, B.A. '52,** March 18, 2024

**Bruce O. Bowers, B.S.B.A. '76,** Nov. 7, 2024

**V. Phil Brumbaugh, B.S.A. '82,** Nov. 7, 2024

**Nikki I. Cannon, B.S.E. '68, B.A. '71,** Nov. 3, 2024

**Kathleen Considine, B.A. '76,** May 6, 2024

**Anita M. Davis, B.A. '79,** Sept. 30, 2024

**Richmond L. Davis, B.S.I.M. '75, M.S.T. '06,** Nov. 18, 2024

**Kay E. Franks, B.A.E. '71, M.A. '78** Aug. 6, 2024

**Virginia L. Fitch-Mallo,** Nov. 9, 2024

**Nickole M. Forbes, B.S.B.A. '78, MBA '80,** Dec. 21, 2024

**Marilyn S. Foster, B.A.E. '59,** Oct. 13, 2024

**Anne Frankhouser, B.A. '78, J.D. '81,** July 27, 2024

**Norman H. Green, B.S.C.E. '53** Nov. 15, 2024

**John O. Hurd, B.S.C.E. '68, M.S.C.E. '70,** Dec. 12, 2024

**Thomas E. Infante, J.D. '72,** Nov. 18, 2024

**Joseph P. Kennedy,** July 19, 2024

**Robert K. McClister, B.S.I.M. '81,** Sept. 1, 2024

**William J. McGrath Jr., B.S.B.A. '55,** March 27, 2024

**Marna L. McGrath, B.A. '48,** April 29, 2024

**Marianne L. Moore, B.S.E. '64** Jan. 11, 2025

**James D. Oelschlager,** Sept. 29, 2024

**Emeka O. Ofobike,** Feb. 24, 2024

**William M. Oldham, B.A. '64, J.D. '67,** Dec. 30, 2024

**Suzanne T. Rogers, B.S.E. '53,** Aug. 18, 2024

**Walter Rusnak, D.E.D. '84,** Jan. 3, 2025

**Ginger P. Sheavly, M.S.T. '96,** Sept. 21, 2024

**Richard R. Smith, M.S. '67, Ph.D. '74,** Sept. 2, 2024

**Michael J. Vargo, B.S.T. '76, MBA '94,** Nov. 25, 2024

**H. Reid Wagstaff,** May 2, 2024

**Lauren M. Wisz, A.A.S. '89,** Oct. 23, 2024

**Pamela A. Wolford, B.S.E. '91, M.S.E. '02,** Jan. 19, 2025

## Moved? Changed Names? New Job?

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# MAP PROGRAM GIVES STUDENTS HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE WITH *the* MECHANISMS of American Politics

BY JESSICA WHITEHILL



As Grace Edwards '24 was getting ready to graduate from The University of Akron (UA) in spring 2024, she was unsure of her next steps. Edwards had been a political science major and a Drs. Gary B. and Pamela S. Williams Honors College Scholar. She completed a minor in history and

a certificate in museums and archives, competed as a student-athlete on the Zips women's track and field team, and founded the UA chapter of IGNITE, a nonpartisan group that empowers women in politics.

Law school was a possibility. So was joining a political campaign. She also considered a gap year to gain life experience.

Edwards decided on a different option that will help her stand out for whatever comes next. She opted to pursue a master's degree in applied politics, known as the MAP program, through the University's Ray C. Bliss Institute of Applied Politics and the Department of Political Science.

"I had plans, but I was tempted by the MAP program," Edwards said. "I had previous relationships with professors who I knew were good, it's affordable and there is a strong connection to the community.

It made sense to take advantage of a great opportunity in my backyard."

The program is one of four in the country and the only one at a university not located on the east coast, according to Bliss Institute Director J. Cherie Strachan, a professor of political science and MAP alumna.

Applied political science is a comprehensive study of American politics that focuses on tangible, practical skills gained through hands-on experiences. Students learn skills that are applicable to political and campaign communications, digital strategy, community organizing, government relations and lobbying, party or group leadership, policy analysis and political consulting, nonprofit management and fundraising.

"Our students are interested in public service careers that keep the mechanisms of democracy functioning," Strachan said.

Bipartisanship is a hallmark of both the MAP program and the Institute. Strachan noted that the executive directors of both the Democratic and Republican party offices in Summit County are MAP graduates.

Edwards, who is a first-generation college graduate from Garrettsville, Ohio, decided on the MAP degree program because she felt it best matched her political interests. While working on her Honors College project, Edwards researched the potential of higher education to build civic skills. She was also interested in reaching young people

who do not go on to higher education and therefore miss out on opportunities to learn those skills.

As a graduate student, Edwards is now creating civic education programs that align with state standards for high school students, with the goal of building more informed and involved communities.

Whatever path she chooses, Edwards knows her time as an undergraduate and in the MAP program have been incredibly influential.

"The support and resources are the best," she said. "I feel so fortunate that we have a strong political science department and the Bliss Institute, which is a gem on this campus." ■

Learn more at [uakron.edu/polisci](http://uakron.edu/polisci).



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