

THE Rock

Spring/Summer 2025 | Slippery Rock University Magazine



Concrete Knowledge

Pressure-Testing Cement Among
Engineering Students' Hands-On Research

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Alumni Success

ESPN DJ, Wine Connoisseur
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ON THE COVER

SRU civil engineering students Amina Tandukar and Amber Maurer place cement-based blocks in a Instron Universal Testing Machine at a lab on campus (see story on Page 6).



Centered on Success

Successful alums start with student success. The new Campus Success Center is where students meet with dedicated professionals to help them achieve their personal best. It's where eight certified academic life coaches engage and empower students through innovative methods that go beyond prescriptive advice, helping them design their own path.

The new space is also home to increasing opportunities for students to connect with future employers, with more than 10 hiring events featuring over 300 employers planned next year.

From career fairs and single-employer meet-and-greets to tailored sessions with coaches that optimize students for career success, the new center is the place where connections are made and dream jobs are shaped into reality.

See page 2 for more about the Campus Success Center and page 23 for a retrospective about the former University Union.

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Message from the President



W

elcome to this edition of the Slippery Rock University magazine. As I reflect on my first two years as president of this remarkable institution, I am continually inspired by the unwavering dedication and support of our alumni, faculty, staff, friends, and partners.

Your commitment means that SRU continues to thrive and provide transformative experiences for our students.

In this issue, you will find glimpses of what makes SRU truly extraordinary—our rich history, our present achievements, and the boundless potential that lies ahead, along with stories and images that serve as a celebration of our shared commitment to advancing the University's mission and shaping the future.

At SRU, we are building upon the strong foundation of our past while embracing the opportunities that define our future.

Our new Campus Success Center and Student Health Center, and innovative new academic programs that support our regional workforce, embody a spirit of renewal and progress that propels us forward.

These initiatives support the many students who call The Rock home and reaffirm our dedication to enhancing the student experience, strengthening the economic impact of our region, and making a positive impact on the world.

While challenges persist across the landscape of higher education—declining enrollment and shifting public perceptions—we are steadfast in our belief that collaboration, determination and a shared sense of purpose overcome adversity.

Our new strategic plan is the framework, guiding us toward continued success. It is built on commitments to delivering an exceptional education at an accessible cost, helping to ensure that we are serving the needs of our students, their families, and our community.

We are determined to have SRU be a first choice: for student learning, for employer hiring, for faculty and staff success, and for community groups and organizations looking for a partnership to advance our region.

I invite you to immerse yourself in the vibrant stories and accomplishments you will find in this magazine and to deepen your connection with us by attending campus events, contributing to scholarships, or mentoring our students.

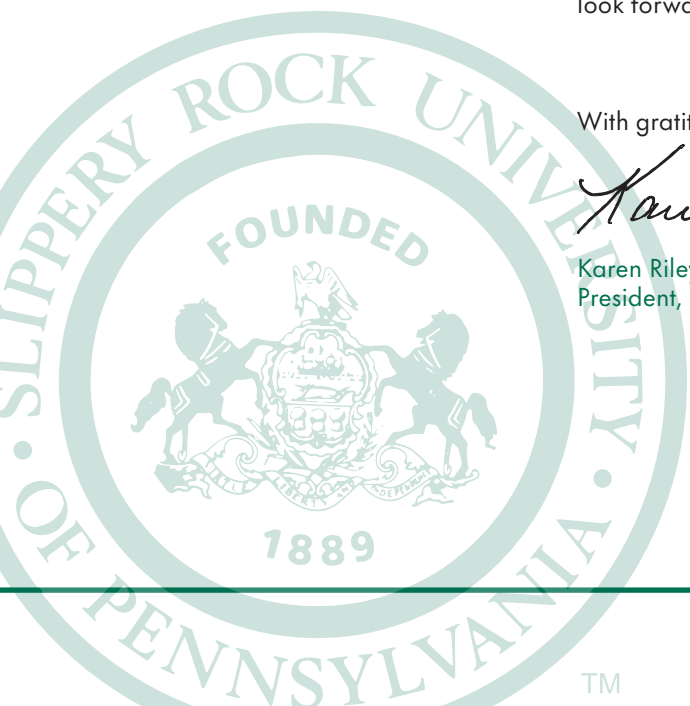
Your involvement strengthens us and inspires us. Together, we hold the power to shape lives, ignite dreams, and create a legacy that will inspire generations to come.

I am grateful for all you have done to support Slippery Rock University, and I look forward with optimism and enthusiasm to the future we will build—together.

With gratitude and best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Karen Riley".

Karen Riley
President, Slippery Rock University





Open for Success

SRU's Campus Success Center opened in January. The newly renovated center is the former University Union located at 103 Central Loop.

This modern facility houses the:

- Office of Disability Services
- Financial Aid Office
- Dean of Students Office
- Mailing Services
- Parking/ID Office
- Student Counseling Center
- Center for Career and Academic Progress
- Student Health Center

Student Health Center

In addition to having a new space, the Student Health Center is now managed by the Allegheny Health Network Primary Care Institute, providing students convenient, on-campus access to high-quality health care led by medical director and family medicine, along with a staff of experienced AHN registered nurses and advanced practice providers.

Rock-Solid Selectivity

SRU is getting recognized for selecting the best students who make The Rock their first choice for a college destination – and there are data to support it. A recent article published in the Pittsburgh Business Times revealed SRU as the:



#2

Most selective college or university in the Pittsburgh area (behind only Carnegie Mellon), and the



#11

Most selective college or university in Pennsylvania.

The PBT used a recent analysis conducted by its parent company, The Business Journals, that sourced U.S. Department of Education data and a weighted formula that considered both acceptance rates and matriculation rates.



Program Growth

SRU is adding programs and pathways for students to pursue careers in occupations that are in high demand. Starting in Fall 2025, students at SRU can begin building their future with Bachelor of Science programs in:



Electrical and Computer Engineering



Construction Management



Nursing 1+2+1



The first two join a suite of four engineering programs at SRU that are accredited by the globally recognized Accreditation Board for Engineering and Technology (ABET). The nursing pathway adds to SRU's existing online RN-to-BSN program where students take general education classes at SRU in their first year, earn their RN through

clinical rotations at Community College of Beaver County or the Allegheny Health Network Schools of Nursing in the second and third years, and complete their BSN degree from SRU completely online during their fourth year, allowing for full time work as an RN while completing their four-year degree.

Executive Hires

Prasad Vemala, Ph.D., is the new dean of the College of Business after he served as interim dean of Rockwell School of Business at Robert Morris University. Vemala will lead the college that consists of four departments, including the School of Business that is accredited by AACSB.



Timothy Slekar, Ph.D., is the new associate provost for academic innovation and dean of graduate and continuing education. The former executive director of Muskingum University's Department of Education Studies, Slekar will help identify and develop new opportunities for academic programming to enhance SRU's existing offerings by partnering with industry and state and local governments to better understand the workforce needs of the regional economy.



Economic Advocate

SRU President Karen Riley has been appointed by Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro to join two key commissions to drive economic growth in the state: the Pennsylvania-Ireland Trade Commission and the Rural Population Revitalization Commission. The first, pictured above with Riley behind Gov. Shapiro (middle), helps promote business and academic exchanges between Pennsylvania and Ireland and the second reviews and recommends solutions to attract and retain residents in rural areas of Pennsylvania.

Global Impact

By Aaliyah Thomas, '25

SRU students like Aria Kriebel expand their worldview through tailored study abroad programs, setting them up for personal fulfillment and professional success.

The clouds look the same no matter the country, but cultures across borders are unique. Aria Kriebel knows this. She always takes a moment to admire a new country as she prepares to land. Her destination: Japan.

Kriebel is a Slippery Rock University senior strategic communication and media major from Lyndora, Butler County. She accompanied her classmates for a trip to Japan last spring led by Yukako Ishimaru, an SRU instructor of language, literatures, cultures, and writing.

What Kriebel didn't know was that this trip would fulfill her lifetime dream of visiting Japan and deepen her passion for traveling.

"It is incredible to watch a classroom lesson turn into a real-world experience," said Ishimaru. "I have watched Aria and many of my students grow while abroad. To learn about a country and then experience it firsthand can be a transformative journey for many students."

During her 10-day trip, Kriebel spent an afternoon among Japanese students at Saga University, visited the Dazaifu Shrine, took painting and pottery classes, and explored other Japanese cities like Nagasaki. Prior to her trip, Kriebel had traveled to Canada and the Netherlands, but having

an organized trip with professors and fellow SRU students has expanded her horizons and stirred her wanderlust. She plans to visit the United Kingdom and France in 2025.

"The time and effort I put into learning Japanese inside and outside of the classroom paid off while visiting Japan," said Kriebel. "Having a prior knowledge of Japanese made me feel more connected to people I interacted with. I fell in love with Japanese music in high school and wanted to understand the lyrics, so I taught myself the writing systems of Hiragana and Katakana. Using those skills in Japan was incredible, and I'm so glad I didn't give up on my passion."

Study Abroad at SRU

Kriebel was one of more than 180 SRU students to travel abroad last year as part of the University's study abroad programs. They include 10 short-term programs led by faculty members and administrators, like the one Kriebel benefitted from, but there's also monthlong or semester-long programs where students earn academic credit at partner institutions that are applied to their SRU degree. Additionally, more than 20 education majors completed their student-teaching requirements in Spain. All told, SRU students learned in 30 different countries last year.



Far left, faculty member Yukako Ishimaru led a group of SRU students, which included Aria Kriebel (far right), on a trip to Japan, where they visited attractions such as Porcelain Park, a replica of a Zwinger palace in Germany, underscoring the cross-cultural influences.

"Students can study abroad from any major, for any length of time, in any place in the world — it is self-designed," said Jenny Kawata, SRU's director of global exchanges and partnerships. "Many of our students who travel abroad say that it is the most impactful experience that they've had during their time in college. It makes a big difference for attracting and retaining students, and, most importantly, setting them up to succeed."

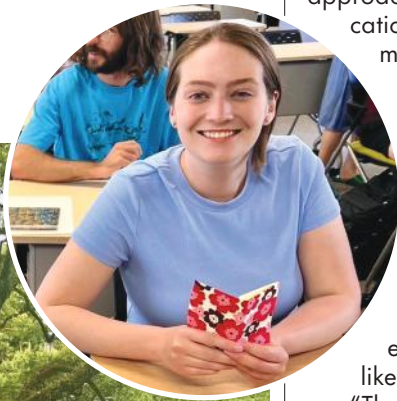
Turning Lessons into Lived Experiences

Kriebel's time in Japan was more than just a sightseeing tour, it was a personal, academic and professional journey that gave her new perspectives about herself and her field of study. Classroom lessons taught her how to communicate effectively with the right audience, but Japan gave her the chance to apply those skills in a real-world setting.

"Learning about a culture and experiencing it are two different things," Kriebel said. "In Japan, it was the small moments that left the biggest impressions on me, like how quiet a busy train station is or even basic eating etiquette. I am so grateful for the education I am receiving at SRU but experiencing Japan broadened my worldview in ways textbooks never could."

While in Japan, Kriebel spent an afternoon with students at Saga University, where she learned about their lives, education system and personal experiences. Learning about institutional structures and meeting the people within them was the bridge between theory and practice.

"The best part of my trip was meeting students my own age and learning about their lives. We had so much in common, but also so many differences like how we approach daily life, work and communication," Kriebel said. "Japan taught me how nuanced communication can be. It's not just about what you say, but how you say it, and the context in which you say it." This cultural immersion wasn't limited to conversations. Time spent at the Dazaifu Shrine taught Kriebel about traditional Japanese customs, which was further enhanced by hands-on activities like painting and pottery classes. "The shrines were beautiful, I even had the chance to wear a kimono and partake in a traditional tea ceremony," Kriebel said.



During her travel abroad, Aria Kriebel ingrained herself in Japanese culture, wearing a kimono and taking an Origami class at Saga University.



Building Bridges Across Cultures

Kriebel's experience wasn't just transformative for her, it also helped her see the power of cultural exchange in a world impacted by globalization. While she learned a lot about Japanese customs, food and language, she also shared pieces of her own culture with the people she met.

"I was able to introduce some of the students to American music, customs and even some interesting words we use," said Kriebel, who noted slang terms that amused the Japanese students, like "cookin'" to describe something impressive. "Just sitting down and having a conversation taught us all so much about our countries."

These exchanges reinforced her belief that despite the differences in customs, language or traditions, people around the world are trying to achieve similar things: they want to be understood, they want to grow and they want to connect with others.

Lasting Impact

Kriebel's story is just one example of how studying abroad can have a lasting impact on a student's life.

The experience in Japan allowed Kriebel to take the knowledge she had gained in the classroom and apply it in real-world situations. It contributed to a more well-rounded education, expanded her worldview and gave her a deeper understanding of a culture she has always admired. It will also help her develop skills and traits that employers desire.

According to Kawata, students who study abroad see boosts in their critical thinking, self-confidence, and cultural awareness and appreciation that leads to greater understanding in professional settings.

In other words, students like Kriebel are ready for whatever comes next, even if that's more stamps on her passport. After graduating from SRU, Kriebel is pursuing a master's degree in communications, culture and creative industries from an online school based in Sweden. She is interested in working abroad as a copywriter or for a nonprofit organization.

"I've learned that learning never stops," Kriebel said. "I have so much to learn about cultures around the world. I can't wait to see where my journey takes me next." ■

Aaliyah Thomas, '25, was a student writer for the University Marketing and Communication Office, who graduated with a degree in strategic communication and media.

Fixing on Six

The future is in the hands of SRU engineering students. Here are six items they handle in the labs that have real-world implications.

What does a concrete block, a plastic wrench, coffee grounds, an air heater, a spiked shoe and a bucket of sludge all have

in common? These aren't tools to survive a hypothetical scenario on a deserted island. They are six items that, on any given day in the engineering labs at Slippery Rock University, students are handling to solve real-world problems.

In the SRU Engineering Department, "practical, hands-on experience" is not an overused expression. That's because there's more action to back up those words. Faculty and students are busy getting their hands dirty, often literally.

Across six laboratories on campus, some of which also function as classrooms with modular equipment, SRU students are gaining experiences and learning through projects led by faculty with industry experience and insights. The work occurs in the labs and outside in the community. The following are only a sampling of projects happening at SRU, using six objects that might seem random or insignificant, but they tell a story that makes a huge impact for academic discovery and human growth.

From top down, Amina Tandukar and Amber Maurer, Nicco Mickens and Ashley Rimmel gain hands-on experience by working on projects in SRU's engineering labs.





From left, Ashley Rimmel learns from assistant professor Iuri Santos about how to use a triaxial machine in SRU's lab that tests properties of soil.



This mobile system at an acid mine drainage site in Morgantown, West Virginia, extracts water from soil on site rather than transporting it to a lab.



1

Sludge and a Nudge

“This project is a great way to move us forward as engineers because we are giving purpose to pollution.”



What good can come from acid mine drainage? Well, it turns out it's more than a bucket of sludge. There are rare earth minerals and metals that can be used to make batteries for smartphones, computers or electric cars and many other practical uses. The question researchers at SRU are trying to answer: How do you remove water from the sludge on site so that the byproducts can be delivered to a central facility for refining? Shipping the weighty sludge to a treatment facility to remove the water would otherwise be more costly than what it's worth.

Thanks to a grant from the U.S. Department of the Interior's Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement, three SRU civil engineering majors are digging into the research under the direction of Iuri Santos, assistant professor of engineering. They are working both inside SRU's environmental engineering lab and at an acid mine drainage location near Morgantown, West Virginia, where a mobile dewatering system sits on a trailer to filter the water from the sludge.

Josephine Reott, a senior from Butler, is working on the design of the mobile unit, including its greenhouse roof. Amina Tandukar, a sophomore from Kathmandu, Nepal, is working on the dewatering properties of the sludge and how much energy is required to obtain the solid byproduct. Ashley Rimmel, a junior from Ford City, is operating a triaxial machine in the SRU lab to test different loading conditions of soil to determine a safe way to slope the materials on the mobile dewatering system to prevent landslides.

“This project is a great way to move us forward as engineers because we are giving purpose to pollution, something that is not useful, and monetizing it or offsetting the costs that are needed to treat waste,” Reott said. “In our classes, we've done so many different tests, so it's cool to do some of the same tests but on site in projects as professional engineers.”

Civil engineering major Josephine Reott has the inside scoop on taking sludge from an acid mine to a commercially viable product.

2



Concrete Knowledge

Just across the hall, in the Mechanics of Materials lab at SRU, Tandukar is working on a separate project that compares different compositions of concrete. By experimenting with different synthetic fibers in cement-based composites, researchers at SRU are coming up with ways to make cement buildings and sidewalks more resistant to stress.

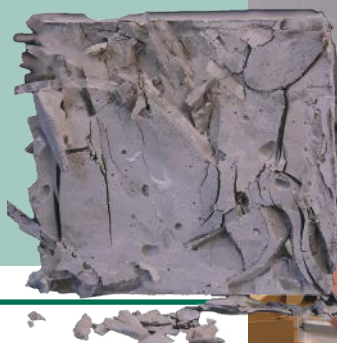
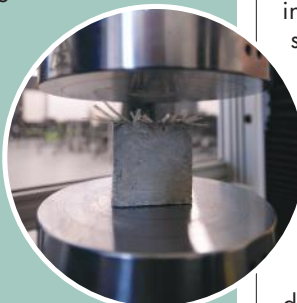
Tandukar and Amber Maurer, a senior civil engineering major from Cowansville, are research assistants under the advisement of Robabeh Jazaei, associate professor of engineering. They tested three types of four-inch cube samples by curing them in water, drying them and compressing them in a testing machine. The amount of stress applied averaged 25 megapascals, which is about 3,600 pounds of force per square inch, before they start breaking.

"Having more resistant composites that last longer will decrease the materials that people need for infrastructure," Maurer said. "We wouldn't have to rebuild a sidewalk every 20 years and that will reduce the carbon footprint."

Maurer and Tandukar have presented research at global research conferences, including the International Mechanical Engineering Congress and Exposition.

"It's really good to have hands-on experience because that's what employers are looking for," Maurer said. "They want to see people who've been going out of their way to experiment with the materials that they're going to encounter in the field. That is beneficial for students here at SRU."

Above, Amber Maurer tests the amount stress that different cement-based composites (right) can withstand by using an Instron Universal Testing Machine in a lab at SRU.



3

3D Ingenuity

SRU students are also creating new things from scratch. In the Advanced Manufacturing Lab, where students have access to more than two dozen 3D printers, you might see coffee grounds and wrenches. That's not because researchers need caffeine to tighten screws.

Students like Janey Parks, a sophomore mechanical engineering major from New Brighton, has been involved with a research project in which she is exploring the potential use of biodegradable materials, such as used coffee grounds, as filament for the 3D printers. By testing various parameters such as temperature, flow rate and nozzle diameter, Parks is finding more sustainable techniques that could be used in the additive manufacturing industry.

Some students get to compete with one another. In a Manufacturing Processes class taught by Jheng-Wun Su, assistant professor of engineering, students were tasked with designing a wrench with a 3D printer. The lightest and strongest wrench that could output the most torque on a 19-millimeter hex nut would win. The first-, second- and third-place winners were mechanical engineering majors Jennifer Cichra, a junior from Renfrew; Michael Rozic, a junior from Cranberry Township; and Alexander Vollmer, a junior from Saint Marys.

The wrenches were created using standard polylactic acid filament instead of the biodegradable materials, but they still involve a high degree of ingenuity. The students used modeling software to test the different stress points on their wrench and imported the data into a different software to conduct a stress analysis.

"I learned a lot because I had to figure out the different stress points and what I needed to fix on my project to make it the best that it could be," Rozic said. "We have great professors here and it is always a combination of in-class and out-of-class work. We had introductory level teaching that Dr. Su showed us, but then we worked through hours of different designs and figuring out how we can optimize it."

Also working outside the classroom, Cichra was able to develop a separate project on her own using a 3D printer to create a spike plate that straps to people's shoes that can assist with fall prevention in slippery conditions. Her design was the runner up in the Society of Manufacturing Engineers Digital Manufacturing Challenge, competing against teams from the top universities around the nation.

From left, Alexander Vollmer, Michael Rozic and Jennifer Cichra created the lightest and strongest wrenches in their Manufacturing Processes class using 3D printers.



4

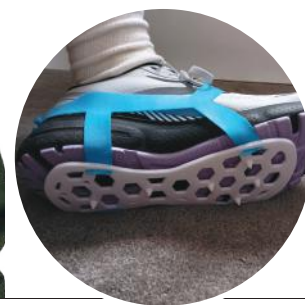


Foreground, Emilee Fields and Janey Parks mix xanthan gum with used coffee grounds to create a filament for 3D printers, under the direction of assistant professor Jheng-Wun Su (background).

5

See how Jennifer Cichra created an award-winning traction spike plate for shoes using 3D printers in SRU's Vincent Science Center. Scan the QR code with your smartphone to view the video.

Scan here
for Video!



Warming Up to Ideas

6

Not all students come to SRU ready to get their hands dirty or even to think like an engineer. Nicco Mickens started studying exercise science, but something

changed after he took a physics class.

"That changed the trajectory of my entire life," said Mickens, a junior mechanical engineering major from Masontown. "I love the problem-solving aspects of physics. I love learning the material within itself. I love watching how it is applied within the labs."

"I even started to catch myself looking at different wooden structures and trying to think about what calculations were made to build the truss and the internal or external stresses."

Mickens began warming up to the idea of mechanical engineering, so it was fitting that he was interested when a friend and classmate introduced him to a project involving an experimental air heater.

Working in the Mechanics and Robotics Lab over the course of eight months, Mickens constructed a wooden box and



Nico Mickens works on the circuit board and electronic components of an air heater he built in the SRU lab.

soldered on electronic components and metal piping to come up with an experimental heater. The apparatus simulates what would happen in a gas turbine engine with all the rotating components that need internal cooling passages.

Under the advisement of Louis Christensen, assistant professor of engineering, Mickens is learning the optimal ways to transfer heat, which, from a physics perspective, is the same as cooling a system down.



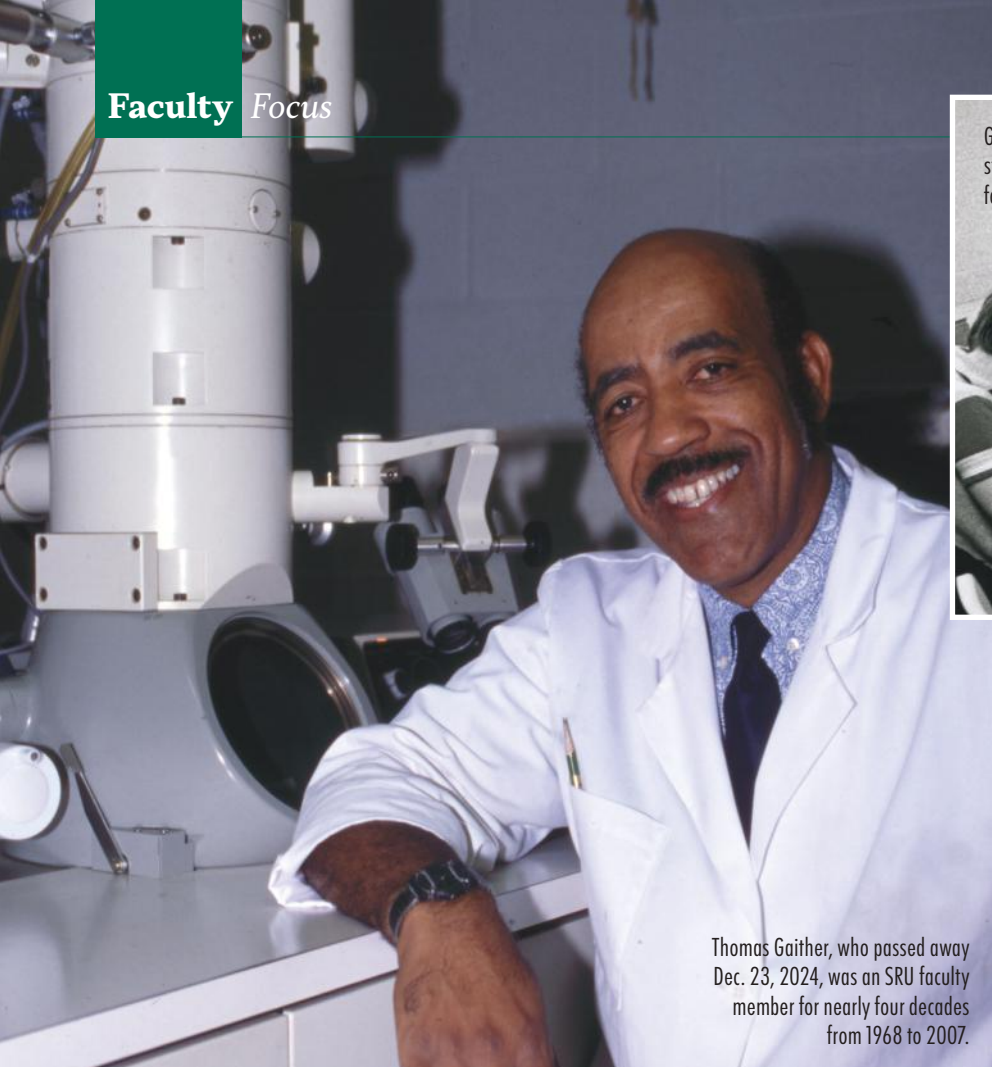
"It's just easier to watch things heat up because it's easier to put a lot of hot air through something than put really, really, cold air through something," Christensen said.

It's also easier for students to learn through experiences in the lab than theories shared in the classroom.

"Hands-on learning is the best way to learn," Mickens said. "I love seeing what works and what doesn't and just having complete control over everything."

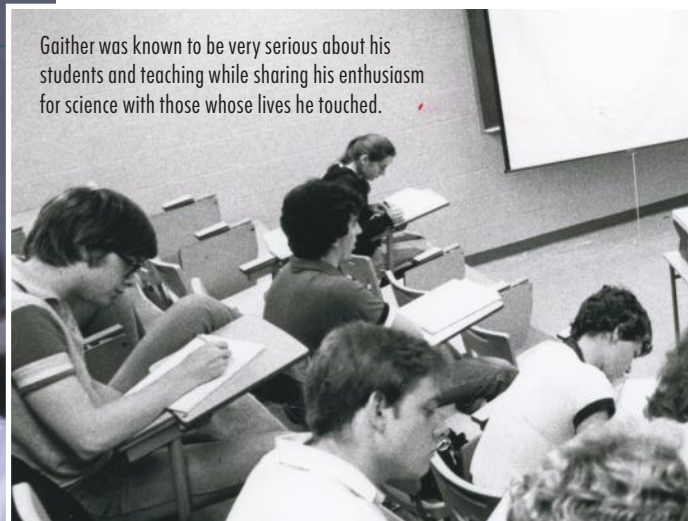
Whenever I'm experiencing it all and applying the same principles from the class here in the lab, that's a truly beneficial way to learn. I'll know how to apply it later down the road."

Future engineers will be tasked to solve the problems of tomorrow, whether that's sustainably extracting rare earth minerals, building durable infrastructures or innovating manufacturing. That's all down the road, but to get there, their paths start at SRU. ■



Thomas Gaither, who passed away Dec. 23, 2024, was an SRU faculty member for nearly four decades from 1968 to 2007.

Gaither was known to be very serious about his students and teaching while sharing his enthusiasm for science with those whose lives he touched.



go from growing up in the segregated south and being heavily involved in the Civil Rights movement to becoming a biology professor in western Pennsylvania."

Civil Rights and Justice

Born in Great Falls, S.C., Gaither attended Claflin College, an all-Black school in Orangeburg, S.C., where he led peaceful protests and was president of the youth chapter of the NAACP. "People needed to be aware of the unjust treatment that a segment of our country was facing," he said in an interview for The ROCK magazine in 2018.

After he graduated in 1960, the 22-year-old Gaither was working as a field secretary for the Congress of Racial Equality. He recruited eight college students from Friendship Junior College in Rock Hill to order a hamburger, sit down and eat in the diner at the local McCrory's five and dime store, which at the time was illegal for Black people. The nine men were handcuffed by police and thrown in jail, but rather than pay the \$100 fine, the group chose hard labor on a chain gang, emphasizing the "jail, no bail" movement of the time that opposed giving money to governments that supported Jim Crow laws.

Gaither went on to earn a master's degree from Clark Atlanta University and a doctoral degree from the University of Iowa, taking up a teaching career that led him to SRU where he started what he called his "first and only job." He later referred to his work as a civil rights activist as simply "doing the right thing."



Gaither was among the famous 'Friendship Nine' who protested South Carolina segregation laws with lunch counter sit-ins.

Dichotomy of a Legacy

The two-phased life of the late SRU biology professor Thomas Gaither was rooted in civil rights activism before growing into educating students

Few biology professors are interviewed by the likes of media luminaries Oprah Winfrey and Mike Wallace, let alone for something outside of their academic discipline. But Thomas Gaither was a sought-after speaker for his influence outside of the classroom, where he spent his entire career teaching biology at Slippery Rock University before retiring in 2007.

Prior to arriving at SRU in 1968, Gaither was one of the "Friendship Nine" civil rights activists who in 1961 conducted a lunch counter sit-in to protest South Carolina segregation laws. A member of the National Civil Rights Hall of Fame, Gaither received national recognition for his

leadership, sharing stories from the civil rights movement and messages of nonviolence and hope. His speeches, letters and oral history are chronicled in the Library of Congress and the Smithsonian.

Gaither, 86, passed away Dec. 23, 2024, at his home in Prospect, not far from SRU's campus where he impacted the lives of students who knew him almost entirely as an educator, rather than an activist.

"He led a remarkable life because it was in two phases," said Kenn Gaither, one of Gaither's two sons. "The Civil Rights Era was integral to who he was, but what's amazing about him is so many of his students never knew of his background. It's a fascinating story to



“He believed so strongly in education; that was one of his deepest commitments and values.”

Students and Science

His second phase was doing right for his students. When asked how Gaither should be remembered by the SRU community, the first thing his son said was that Gaither was “very serious about his students and teaching.”

“He held high standards, and he pushed students, and sometimes they would push back,” said Kenn Gaither, who is now dean and professor of strategic communications at Elon University. “But many of those students who I’ve met years later would comment on how effective he was as a teacher, how much he cared about what he taught, and how enthusiastic he was about science. But as much as he was serious in the classroom, what made him a great father, he could be a lot of fun outside of the classroom.”

Family Fun and Flowers

When Kenn was in high school he sat in on one of his father’s classes at SRU and took copious notes that he would recite to his father on occasion over the years, describing monocots and dicots of plant structures, without him knowing it was from his own class lecture.

“It became a running family joke, because he would furrow his brow and say that I knew what I was talking about,” Kenn said. “I finally told him, as

he was close to dying, that I had been doing that from those notes.”

Kenn shared many other stories, including the time the family had a belly dancer enter his classroom to surprise him on his birthday, which would be completely unthinkable or acceptable to happen to a professor today, but Gaither, true to his form, continued teaching like nothing was different.

Later in his life, Gaither and his wife of 52 years, Diane, who died in 2021, were known for their flower gardens. Kenn marveled how his father would always refer to the flowers by their scientific names instead of roses or pansies.

SRU and Sports

Gaither also followed SRU sports teams closely, attending football and basketball games, or in the last few years, watching games online. Even in his final days, as The Rock football team advanced to the national semifinals, sports were a topic of conversation for Gaither and his sons.

“That’s something that bonded our family, because we still watch every Slippery Rock game,” Kenn Gaither said. “It actually gave me a great deal of comfort in his last few weeks when he would still get worked up over a missed tackle, because I saw a glimpse of my father as he was. He cheered on The Rock to the end.”

Continuing the Legacy

Gaither’s affinity for SRU and legacy as an advocate and educator will continue to live through scholarships named in his honor. Two scholarships

supported by Gaither and several alumni donors are awarded at SRU: The Dr. Thomas Gaither Award for Excellence, established in 2018 that awards \$500 annually for students who are ambassadors in the University’s Frederick Douglass Institute; and the Thomas W. Gaither Scholarship, which began in 2004 thanks to an initial gift by Susan Tritt, ’72, provides \$1,000 annually for biology students who demonstrate financial need.

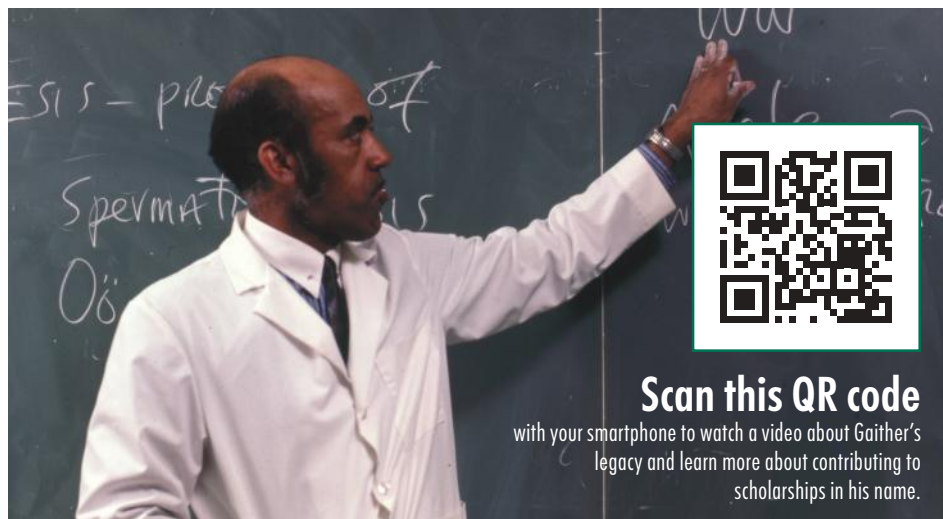
Elizabeth Brison, a freshman biology major from Washington, is the recipient of the latter. An advocate for people with disabilities, Brison comes from a low-income family and uses a service dog. She has an anxiety/depressive disorder, as well as psychologically induced cardiac disorder.

“I wouldn’t be here at Slippery Rock if not for this scholarship,” Brison said. “It’s paying for me to be a part of the University, so I’m very appreciative of that scholarship.”

Upon hearing this, Kenn smiled and his face welled up with pride.

“I know how much that would have meant to my father because he believed so strongly in education; that was one of his deepest commitments and values,” Kenn Gaither said. “He loved working with students, and he believed that education never betrays you. It always carries you further than you thought you could go or might go, and that’s what he saw in his students at Slippery Rock.” ■

For more information about supporting the Gaither scholarship, including a video with an interview with Gaither, visit www.srufoundation.org/gaither.



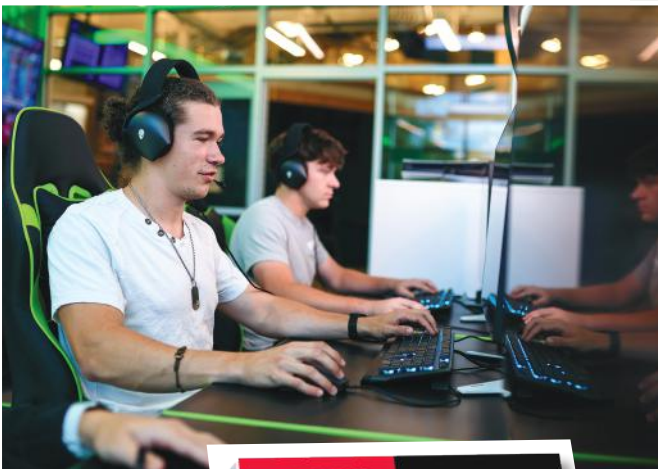
Scan this QR code

with your smartphone to watch a video about Gaither’s legacy and learn more about contributing to scholarships in his name.

Ahead of the Game

SRU professor is one of the world's leading esports experts

Members of the Esports Club compete against teams from other colleges in the Esports Hub located in SRU's Aebbersold Recreation Center.



The Routledge Handbook of Esports, edited by Jenny, is the first interdisciplinary textbook about competitive video gaming.



Seth Jenny, an associate professor of exercise science, is one of the nation's leading researchers in the performance and health implications of esports.

Esports isn't all fun and games. It's big business, a source for cultural and educational enrichment, an area of human performance science, and, for a professor at Slippery Rock University, a serious field for scholarly work.

Seth Jenny, an SRU associate professor of exercise science, is one of the leading global experts in esports education and curriculum design. He's the senior editor of the first interdisciplinary textbooks about competitive video gaming, titled "Routledge Handbook of Esports," released in fall of 2024.

The comprehensive 764-page text features 62 chapters and contributions from 93 authors across 27 countries. The book, which explores the rapid growth of esports within the sports and entertainment industries, covers 10 key themes, including esports research, esports business and management and global esports cultures, with Jenny co-authoring 17 chapters, nine as lead author and two as a solo author.

"One of the things that I love about the esports domain is that it's always changing; it's so dynamic," Jenny said. "There's always new things that you're learning, and there are updates and modifications with new game titles and technologies, especially with (artificial intelligence) and virtual reality."

A 2002 SRU graduate and former captain of The Rock cross country and track and field teams, Jenny emerged as an esports researcher, not through computer science, but through health sciences. Since 2017, Jenny has taught in the Public Health and Exercise Science Departments at SRU. After earning his doctoral degree in physical education, sport and exercise science from the University of New Mexico, Jenny taught at UNM and Winthrop University and co-wrote the curriculum for the first undergraduate major in esports sports science at Shenandoah University.

“Esports is being used as a vehicle to help students learn so many different transferable skills.”

Jenny has provided more than 100 professional presentations and published more than 50 peer-reviewed journal articles in his prime areas of research: performance and health implications of esports, motion-based video gaming, instructional technology and distance running. He founded the Esports Research Network and served as the deputy editor of the International Journal of Esports and he is currently the associate editor of the Journal of Electronic Gaming and Esports.

At SRU, Jenny is the faculty adviser to the Esports Club, one of the most active and popular student organizations on campus, and he teaches two required classes within SRU’s esports minor: Introduction to Esports and Current Issues in Esports, Health, and Society.

“What I’m teaching in my classes is performance and health related skills, but really esports is being used as a vehicle to help the students learn so many different transferable skills,” Jenny said. “I just love any type of instructional technology. And, really, I see esports as a way to teach human relations skills as well as hard skills. There’s hospitality and entertainment industries with event promotion, and with communication and media, with the broadcasting and streaming opportunities. It’s a motivational way for the students to continue to learn and for SRU to fulfill its mission.”

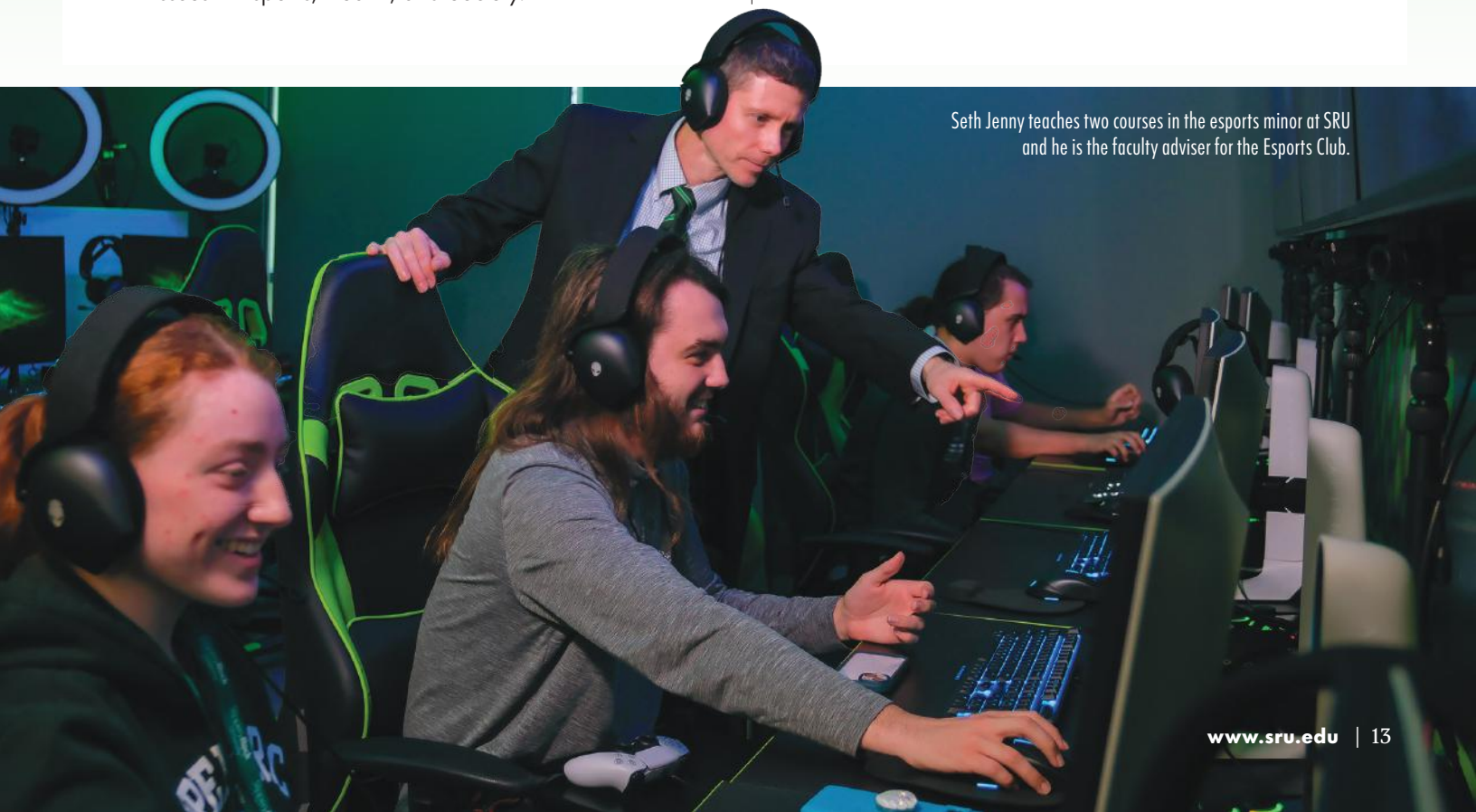
SRU’s esports undergraduate minor, offered within the Hospitality and Tourism Management Department, is one of only 20 such programs in the world. Jenny estimates that there are about 180 overall academic programs in esports, across all types of degrees and certificates.

“Our University does a good job at looking at future trends and being proactive in making decisions to meet future needs in different career fields,” Jenny said. “SRU definitely has a mindset of keeping on top of current issues and trending careers.”

The global esports market size is expected to grow from \$2.06 billion in 2024 to \$9.29 billion by 2032, according to Forbes Business Insights, but other researchers claim that a more accurate estimation of the true market value are as much as \$25 billion, including a study conducted by Jenny.

Jenny will continue to stay on top of the evolving esports industry.

“When I’m referencing and citing researchers in my own research, I know many of them personally,” Jenny said. “It is really fun to be able to cite people that you know in your own research and have other people cite you too. That is one thing that’s unique about esports research.” ■



Seth Jenny teaches two courses in the esports minor at SRU and he is the faculty adviser for the Esports Club.

Behind the Scenes

The work that goes into a theater production at SRU is more than what is performed on stage. There's another artform in the problems solved by the crew and creative team.

It's easy to see and appreciate the performing art of a theater production at Slippery Rock University. All eyes are on the actors at a show. But behind the scenes is another world to experience. Contributors outside of the dozen or so cast members outnumber those on stage by about 2 to 1. And it's not all technical work and following a script — there's what Rebecca Morrice calls "creative problem-solving."

"Whether it's the props, costumes, sound and lighting or the actors, they're all helping tell a story," said Morrice, professor of theatre and department chair. "Every bit of what we do is unique problem-solving. Sometimes it's solving through design, sometimes it's through performance. You can be handed a script, and it can be interpreted in a million different ways, so it all depends on the story that we're trying to tell as a group."

The SRU Theatre Department typically produces about four shows per academic year. In April 2025, SRU presented "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time," which was directed by Burton Tedesco, SRU assistant professor of theatre, and adapted from a popular 2003 mystery novel about a 15-year-old boy who is a brilliant mathematician with behavior difficulties and social challenges.

The story epitomizes how the cast and crew, comprised of students and some faculty and staff, must think like they're solving a math problem but also be creative and unconstrained by the script, guidelines or expectations of the world. Like the boy, they make the story work for them.

Here's a peek behind the curtain at some of the creative problem-solvers involved:



Stage managers Brittany Walsh (above in booth) and Alyssa Starkey (below backstage left) are on headsets during productions communicating with the crew.

Stage Managers

The people calling the shots are the stage managers. For "The Curious Incident," that is Brittany Walsh, a senior theatre major from Waterford, and the assistant stage manager, Alyssa Starkey, a sophomore biology major from Apollo.

Walsh is the main communicator, both in terms of preparing for the show and making sure the director, cast and designers are on the same page. But also during the show she is on the headset in the lighting booth in the back of the theater, calling sound, light and projection cues. Starkey is stage right — for some shows there's another assistant on stage left — and she is also on a headset with the blocking notes, which keeps track of the

movements of cast and ensemble members: when and where they are entering and exiting the stage. She is also in charge of making sure that the props are in place and she directs two stage crew members who run backstage to set up costume changes and set transitions.

Propmaster

Lee Spark, a junior theatre major from Cranberry Township, is the propmaster. She is responsible for acquiring and maintaining more than 100 props per show, some of which are in storage at SRU and others she purchases online or scavenges, like a vintage Nintendo video game controller that she borrowed from her brother. She also prepares the props for the show, which can be a meticulous process with great attention to detail. One example is the stuffed dog that is killed in "The Curious Incident."

Stage crew members follow the script backstage and pull labeled costumes (right) from clothing racks.



Authentic-looking props, including an English police officer uniform and a stuffed dog, require attention to detail.





Conor McAleer plays the lead role in “The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time,” which requires coordination from fellow cast members hoisting him so spotlight operators have the correct placements.

Costume Designers

Theatre Department faculty and staff are part of the creative team, such as Morrice serving as costume designer, but they also mentor students who play integral roles in designing the show. Kadence Storms, a sophomore theatre major from Shohola, is the assistant costume designer who helps Morrice pick the clothing from stock and coordinates the colors, so that they achieve the ideal aesthetic, reflecting the character who is wearing the costume.

The number of costumes varies per show, but each character in “The Curious Incident” had about 20 pieces maintained by Storms. There are 14 base costumes, but an actor might wear a different sweater or appear on stage as a different character, requiring a costume change.

Costumes for these productions are rarely rented or part of a predetermined outfit. Like the props, there’s searching stock, thrift stores and, of course, sewing and creating pieces in the costume shop on campus so that they properly fit each actor.

Lighting Designer

Five months before the show, Isaac Smith is handed a 75-page script for “The Curious Incident.” Smith, a junior theatre major from Edinboro, is the show’s lighting designer. Although he is responsible for programming the show and listing all the spotlight operators’ cues, Smith’s job is not prescribed by the script. He researches film, television and online productions to find inspiration for the colors and light positioning he chooses for the show.

After days with long hours of meetings and rehearsals, Smith winds up with 130 lighting cues. His choices complement the larger story being told by the other contributors. Once the show begins, Smith’s work is done. The two spotlight operators and lighting board operator that he trained take their cues from Walsh, the stage manager in the booth.



Bringing to light a main-stage production takes board operators who solve problems with creative and technical skills

Many Others

A combined 55 people contributed to “The Curious Incident,” from scenic and sound designers to ushers and box office assistants, not to mention carpenters, electricians and other members of the technical team. Many have multiple roles, including the cast.

There are also swings and understudies, who take notes and follow the script the way a backup on a sports team must be ready in case the starter is injured. And that has happened: a cast member lost her voice last fall on the day of the show and an understudy had to step in and perform.

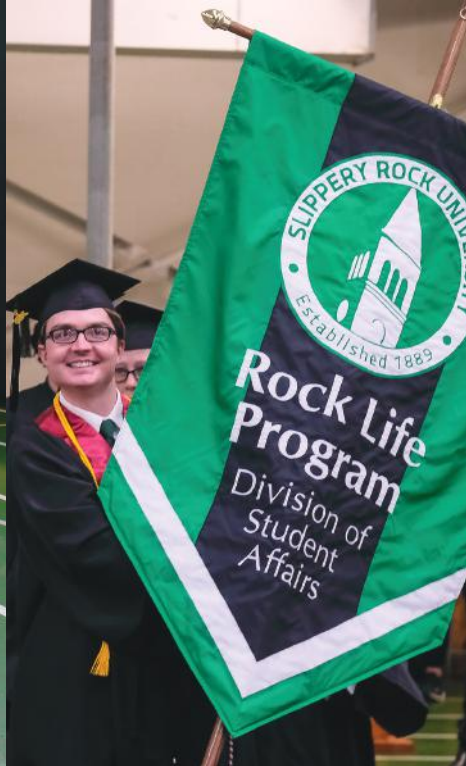
Culminating Effort

A typical theater production at SRU involves five weeks of rehearsal (three nights per week), three straight nights of technical rehearsal and three nights of dress rehearsal, all before the four to six performances. Although approximately half of the students earn academic credit for their work, the total hours are beyond measure but worth the time.

The experience students receive is much like what they would experience in a professional setting — that could mean working for a theater company or any workplace environment where problems are solved.

“Why are we bothering to tell these stories again and again?” Morrice said. “Because it’s how we get there. It’s the human connection that you’re making on the way. You can manufacture an experience in a classroom, but it doesn’t click until you actually get out here and do it. “It’s getting together a unique group of humans and creatively solving problems until we get to a final product.” ■





Memories Made on Graduation Day

More than 1,500 SRU students officially became graduates as the University conducted four commencement ceremonies, May 9-10, at the Morrow Field House. Members of the Class of 2025 joined our proud network of more than 70,000 living Rock alumni.

Get your FREE DECAL!

As a thank you for **"sticking"** with us as a reader of The ROCK magazine — and adapting to our new-look design and digital options — we invite you to show off your SRU pride with a free decal. Choose from one of three SRU-themed vinyl decals that are three inches wide, dishwasher safe and great for displaying on drinkware, laptops, car windows or wherever you want to represent The Rock.

Simply complete the form on the envelope attached to this page, drop it in the mail and you will receive your SRU decal in the mail.



While you are at it, update your preference for receiving the magazine: print, digital or both.

**Show your Rock pride...
and stay connected with SRU.**

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with Amanda Shotts-Habursky

Slippery Rock University exists to enable student success, a commitment shared with their parents and family.

Amanda Shotts-Habursky's daughter **Mikayla** is a 2025 graduate with a degree in political science. Her other daughter, Mariska, is joining the SRU community as a first-year student in fall 2025 majoring in exercise science.

Amanda is the focus of the first Parent's Perspective column that looks at what it's like raising children to take their steps into adulthood at The Rock.

First off, describe your daughter's experience at SRU and what it's been like for you?

"She's flourished. She has thrived since she's been at Slippery Rock. She got involved early with her sorority (Alpha Omicron Pi) and Panhellenic council, becoming president by her junior year. She did two internships with the Jefferson Educational Society and as an assistant for State Rep. Robert Merski. She's been on Dean's List every semester and she's truly come into her own and it's been amazing to watch her grow."

What role did you play in your daughter's decision to choose SRU?

"She always wanted to go away to college, and we live in Erie with a lot of colleges nearby, so I let her guide me on what that means. It was her decision with our guidance. I said, 'It's your responsibility and you need to take control to find the answers.' But as a parent, I'm a backup. While she was doing her research, I was doing mine as well. When it finally came time to look at different colleges, Slippery Rock was very familiar to her. I attended SRU and many of my friends went there. She liked the campus and the programs and when we considered Slippery Rock's affordability, it became an easy choice."



Michael and Amanda Habursky with their daughter Mikayla before SRU's commencement ceremony.

What do you appreciate about SRU as a parent that maybe a student doesn't as much?

"There are so many things: the distance from home where she can gain her independence, the safety of campus, and the small, 'family' feel. When I'm doing my research as a parent, people are available if I need someone to contact with a question, like the parents' group on Facebook."

What do you want other parents to know that you wish you knew four years ago?

"Slippery Rock has the students' best interest in mind. They truly want your student to be successful and not just to get your student to come here. And to be successful, your student must become as independent as possible and figure things out on their own. They are going to do that with the help and support of the faculty and staff. But it can be hard at times for a parent to see your child struggle to figure it out, but that struggle will produce growth. Sometimes it's best to sit on the sidelines and cheer them on." ■

The Long Game

SRU senior quarterback **Brayden Long** was celebrated as the top football student-athlete in NCAA Division II and was recognized for excellence on the field and in the classroom at a pair of black-tie events following the 2024 season. Long was the only football player from Division II to be named as a member of the 2024 National Scholar-Athlete Class by the National Football Foundation and College Hall of Fame. As one of the 16 national finalists for the William Campbell Trophy, he was recognized in December at the NFF Annual Awards Banquet and Hall of Fame induction ceremony at the Bellagio in Las Vegas.

The Hanover native was also named the 2024 NCAA Division II Academic All-America Team Member of the Year by the College Sports Communicators, where he joined the other divisional winners in being recognized at the Maxwell Football Club Gala hosted by the College Football Hall of Fame in Atlanta in March. Long shared the stage with NCAA Division I Academic All-America Team

Member of the Year Travis Hunter, the Heisman Trophy winner from the University of Colorado.

Long established numerous passing records for his performance on the field and led SRU to the NCAA quarterfinals in 2023 and the national semifinals in 2024. Off the field, he graduated with a degree in sport management with a perfect 4.0 GPA. He has already begun a career in coaching and is currently working with quarterbacks as an offensive analyst at Division I Towson University. ■



Brayden Long was the only player from Division II to be recognized at the College Football Hall of Fame in Atlanta as a National Scholar-Athlete.



New Coaches

SRU introduced two new head coaches for women's sports in 2025, one of which is a familiar face to The Rock community.

Noreen Herlihy is returning to coach the SRU women's soccer team after leading the program from 1995-2014 and amassing a 250-113-30 record for the most coaching wins in team history. Herlihy left SRU to become the head coach at Division-I University of Akron, where she stayed for seven seasons before leading Indiana University of Pennsylvania the last three years. A native of Ireland, Herlihy was inducted into the SRU Athletics Hall of Fame in 2017.



Dylan Lasher is taking the helm of The Rock volleyball program after coaching both the men's and women's teams at Thiel College. A native of Ford City and 2015 Thiel alumnus, Lasher coached the Thiel men the last five seasons and he took over the women's program in 2024, leading the Tomcats to a 14-win improvement from their previous year. ■



ESPN's DJ

Rock alumnus provides the soundtrack for college football's biggest party

To middle school students at Pittsburgh Classical Academy, he's Mr. Griffin — their music teacher. But after each week in the classroom during the fall, Mr. Griffin gets to preside over some of the most festive and raucous gatherings on college campuses all over the country. He's there to play music and keep the tailgate-party atmosphere going in the background of ESPN's popular football pregame show, College GameDay.

To college football fans, everywhere from Ann Arbor to Tuscaloosa, he's DJ Griff. His real name is Ryan Griffin, a 2010 graduate of Slippery Rock University with a degree in music. And he laid down his first tracks as a music teacher and disc jockey while at SRU.

"I never imagined I'd get to do this in my wildest dreams," Griffin said. "It's hard to put into words the joy and excitement this GameDay gig brings me — traveling to all these states, cities and colleges. I got into DJing because I'm just a huge fan of fun. When I see a group of people dancing outside or at a club or an event, they're having fun, and I really crave to be a part of that."

Griffin's job seems rather simple: show up on Saturday mornings at whichever campus ESPN GameDay is broadcasting from and play music for two hours before the show starts and between the commercial breaks. The live show airs from 9 a.m. to noon, Eastern time, and the fans play just as much of a role as the analysts. But there are nuances, instincts and even a bit of research that goes into it.

"There are students who have been there for 12 hours in the heat or the cold (to get a spot close to the stage to appear on TV) and you need to keep them as excited as they were when they first got there," Griffin said. "It's a big party, and they want to keep everyone as active and hyped up as possible."



Ryan Griffin is a middle school music teacher but on fall Saturdays he plays tunes on set for ESPN's College GameDay.

That might mean playing the perfect song for the moment or knowing which fanbases respond to certain anthems or chants.

"I spend a couple hours each week Googling and watching YouTube videos of in-stadium music to know what the crowd likes," Griffin said. "You have to put yourself in the audience's shoes, and think, 'What would I want to hear right now?'"

It also helps to follow music trends, testing songs, and knowing what's popular on college campuses. Griffin said "FE!N" by Travis Scott was a go-to song last fall.

Griffin's first experiences on college campuses and as a DJ was at SRU more than 15 years ago. To say he was active on SRU's campus is an understatement. He performed in five music ensembles as an instrumentalist and vocalist, including the trumpet in the marching band. He was a member

of Delta Chi and the Mu Phi Epsilon music honorary, he played on the ultimate frisbee club team, he refereed intramural sports, and he was a health center peer educator.

Too much campus involvement and his fandom for fun came at a cost. He overslept, underperformed and had misplaced his priorities. Griffin said his grades were terrible and he was nearly kicked out of the music education program for often not showing up for his field experiences. But through interventions from faculty and administrators like Mechelle and Stephen Hawk, Colleen Gray and even then president, Robert Smith, he was able to stay in the program and secure a student-teaching position.

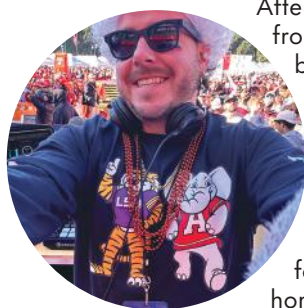
"SRU gave me a second chance when I didn't deserve one," Griffin said. "I'm forever grateful to the school and the music and education departments and so many more. The second chance I got from SRU really taught me to be empathetic and kind — and to work harder."



Fans show up hours before College GameDay airs live on ESPN, sometimes before dawn, and Griffin's job is to get them hyped.

Although his redemption led to him becoming a teacher, Griffin couldn't have realized that an earlier discussion with Matt Kovacik, the owner of Ginger Hill Tavern in Slippery Rock, led to him becoming DJ Griff. Griffin had played music at private parties but after talking with Kovacik he was offered the chance to fill in as a DJ at Ginger Hill for nearly a dozen weekends.

"I tried a lot of things and that got me doing weddings, and I just continued to get more comfortable," Griffin said. "This journey started at Slippery Rock, whether it was the Music Department and the education program, or just wanting to have a good time playing music and making people happy."



After graduating from SRU, Griffin became a teacher in his native Plum neighborhood of Pittsburgh, then four years outside of Philadelphia, before coming back home to work in the Pittsburgh City School District in 2016. He continued to DJ at weddings and other special events before a friend from high school, former NFL player and ESPN on-air personality Pat McAfee asked him to DJ his New Year's Eve party at a concert hall in Indianapolis. The private party attended by more than 2,500 people at the time was easily the largest event he's ever DJed.

"I never imagined I'd get to do this in my wildest dreams ... This journey started at Slippery Rock."

Griffin kept in touch with McAfee, who joined ESPN's College GameDay as a full-time analyst in 2022. McAfee adds flair to the show as a hype-man himself, inciting the crowd with chants, singalongs and other histrionics, not to mention a field-goal

kicking contest for charity. It makes sense for College GameDay to also have someone playing music, which it did until after the first week of the 2023 season when the previous DJ quit. Producers turned to McAfee for help.

"So about midway through the week, they had to find a new DJ," Griffin said. "They were brainstorming and Pat's like, 'I know a guy. I can try him,' and so he reached out to me. I'm forever indebted to Pat for thinking of me and advocating for me."

Before committing to 14 weekends away from home, Griffin received support from his wife, Paola, who he remains grateful for "holding down the fort," along with his two daughters, Mayia and Bailey, and son, Zak. Griffin accepted the offer and a few days later he was on the College GameDay set in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. He's now been the DJ for two seasons of the show and occasionally makes a cameo appearance on air, along with shoutouts from his high school chum, McAfee.

Griffin has gained notoriety and professional experiences with College GameDay, which has helped in both roles as DJ Griff and Mr. Griffin.

"Since I am a music teacher, I can relate some of the lessons to music production and I've gotten a few extra DJ gigs each year," Griffin said. "My students are really interested; they'll always ask me in class, 'So where are you going this week?'"

Despite visiting all the big-time college campuses, Griffin has not forgotten about The Rock. SRU even comes to him. A group of SRU students from the sport management program work on the College GameDay when they visit Ohio State, Penn State and other nearby campuses. He's occasionally recognized by other SRU alumni, even though he wears apparel representing that week's home team.

"My favorite school is whatever school we're at that Saturday," Griffin said with a sheepish grin. "But people will often ask, 'So where did you go?' and I always proudly say Slippery Rock." ■

Griffin entertains college football fans from across the country, as well as mascots like Dubs, the University of Washington's Husky.



Built on The Rock: Gary Charmel, '86

After a 37-year career in the beverage distribution business, Gary Charmel is raising a glass of his favorite bourbon for a retirement toast. Charmel, a 1986 Slippery Rock University graduate, retired earlier this year as a regional president for Johnson Brothers, a \$3 billion wine, beer, and spirits distributor with more than 4,000 employees.

Spending the last two decades in Las Vegas, Charmel oversaw distribution to restaurants, resorts, casinos and retailers in Johnson Brother's West Region. Prior to that, he worked 15 years as a sales director for Gallo after getting his start in the industry as a sales manager at PepsiCo.

"It's a fun business," Charmel said. "There are more difficult things you can be doing than helping people celebrate life's occasions with wine, spirits or beer. There's the product aspect, the hospitality business, especially when you're dealing with high-end restaurants and resorts in Las Vegas, but what I really enjoyed most is the relationships, mentoring and coaching and a lot that goes back to my sports background at Slippery Rock."

Charmel played four years of football for The Rock under head coach Don Ault as a three-year

all-conference offensive lineman. A native of Toms River, New Jersey, Charmel earned his degree from SRU in communication and entered the advertising business before he was hired by one of his clients, PepsiCo, leading to his career change.

"People gave me the opportunity to grow at Slippery Rock, whether that was the faculty or coaches," Charmel said. "Football taught me that hard work does pay off, and, in the classroom, I learned that the world is your oyster if you're willing to put the effort in and seek help from mentors. Especially in the communication program, I found my voice and I became a proficient writer and confident in public speaking."

Even though he is retired, Charmel will continue to do consulting work and "lean into the coaching and mentoring on the executive level," because that's what he enjoys most.

He also enjoys giving back to SRU as an alumni donor.

"Now that I'm older and wiser, I realize a lot of who I am today is because people believed in me, not just from the things I did," Charmel said. "Slippery Rock shaped me. I was a first-generation college student that came from

a family that was blue collar and money was tight. That's why I give. If you've had any measure of success, you should give because the baton has been passed to us now to be the ones who provide opportunities to younger folks and do the right thing."

Instead of toasting to a successful career with a drink on the rocks, Charmel attributes his success to being at The Rock. ■



From left, Gary Charmel is recognized by Joe Gallo, chairman of Gallo Family Wine & Spirits, for Charmel's 35 years of service in the wine and spirits business.

"Who I am today was because people believed in me, not just from the things I did. Slippery Rock shaped me."

Do You Know These Rock Legends?

Identify the people in these photos from 1971-72 by sending an email to alumni@sru.edu and include the name or names and order from left to right.

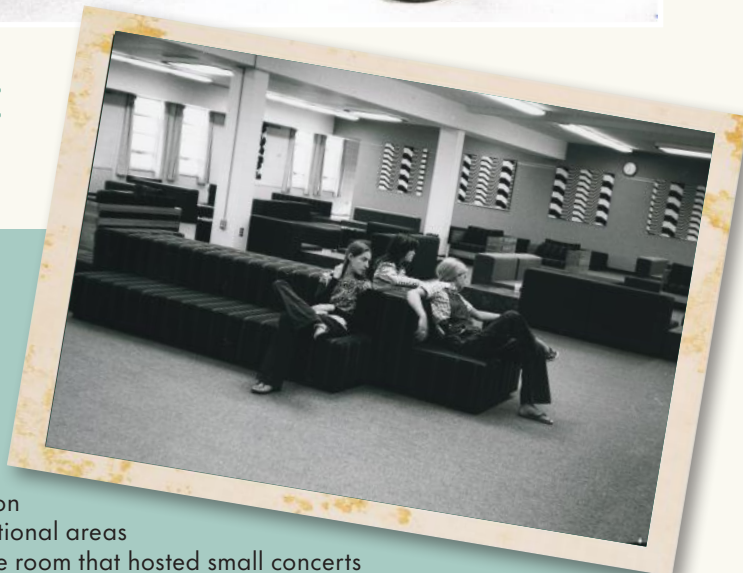


From the Archives: University Union

Now that SRU's new Campus Success Center is open (see page 2), here's a look at what previously occupied the renovated building, located at 103 Central Loop between Bailey Library and the Aebersold Recreation Center.

The University Union

Built in 1970, the University Union was a popular gathering place for SRU students, faculty, staff and the community. Like the existing Campus Success Center, the Union was home to many functional areas including a multipurpose room that hosted small concerts and performances. The University Union underwent two expansions in 1994 and 2001, when the bookstore and Rocky's Grille were added, respectively, but they each relocated in 2012 when the Smith Student Center opened.



1960s

Dick Hudson, '68, was the guest speaker at the sold-out Mercer County Hall of Fame ceremony. Hudson, a 2011 inductee, achieved international acclaim through his work with the Olympic Games. Hudson was inducted into the SRU Sports Hall of Fame in 2006 and received the SRU Distinguished Alumni Award in 2010.



1970s



Kathy Tiernan, '71, hosted the 48th annual Tiernan Family Turkey Bowl flag football game in Galveston, Texas, which featured a special guest, former Pittsburgh Steelers first round draft pick and Super Bowl champion Casey Hampton. Hampton played at Galveston Ball High School and the University of Texas. Tiernan sat next to Hampton on a flight from Houston to Pittsburgh and invited him to the game. Hampton surprised the family by showing up to play with

Tiernan's family members. An avid Steelers fan, Tiernan was born and raised in Oakmont where the Tiernan Turkey Bowl began.

• • •
Robert Buzzinotti, '72, wrote science fiction book titled "A Trip to Innsmouth and Other Places" that was published by Outskirts. Buzzinotti retired in 2008 after teaching for 31 years in the Armstrong School District.

• • •
Anita (Osiecki) LaGrelus, '72, has volunteered at the Warrior Games every year since 2018 including the Invictus Games in February 2025 in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.



• • •
Sophia (Calaboyias) Facaros, '74, was elected mayor of Oakmont, population 7,000, and home of the historic Oakmont Country Club that occasionally hosts the U.S.



Open Golf Championship, including in the 125th annual U.S. Open in 2025. Facaros retired from Pittsburgh Public Schools after 38 years, finishing her career as principal of Schenley High School.

• • •
Gary Neely, '77, was awarded Butler County Veteran of the Year, which has been awarded annually since 1979 and is a collaboration between the Butler County Veterans Committee and the office of Pennsylvania State Rep. Marci Mustello (R-11th). Neely was a machine-gunner for the U.S. Marine Corps in Vietnam, serving two tours in Vietnam from 1967-68, and again from 1971-72 as a crew chief and door gunner. Neely received three Purple Heart medals and seven Air Medals for combat missions.

• • •
Robert Tomko, '78, and Darcy (Gualardo) Tomko, '79, will celebrate their 46th wedding anniversary in August 2025. The couple has two children and six grandchildren. Since retiring to Carolina Shores, North Carolina, they continue to enjoy golfing, the beach, traveling and participating

Janeice (Iole) Calfe, '74, '78M; Kyle (Derstine) Catanzarite, '74; Linda (Rodgers) Watson, '74; Mary Lou (Pracht) Seamon, '74; and Marilyn (Murphy) Cagnoli, '74, celebrated their 50th anniversary as SRU graduates and great friends. They met as freshmen and have remained in touch over the years, meeting annually in various cities and resorts for 3-4 days of reminiscing and lots of laughter.

in SRU's Rockin' Carolinas Alumni events.



1980s

Eileen (Flinn) Dusch, '83, and Lynn (Hadvab) Ferguson, '85, former Tri Sigma sorority sisters, hiked the Camino de Santiago in Spain from Sarria to Santiago, concluding at the Praza da Quintana.



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Jennifer Aubel, '84, was inducted into the Virginia High School Hall of Fame. Aubel was recognized for her outstanding contributions as a gymnastics coach.

• • •
Karen Frazier, '84, and her son, Wally Wolanin, '10, saw a familiar sign at the head waters of the Mississippi River in northern Minnesota.



Tim Allen, '85, recently retired after 35 years of service in law enforcement, including 28 years with the Rhode Island State Police. In his last position, Allen served as a captain and was a command staff member overseeing the Professional Standards Unit. Throughout his career, Allen held various roles within the Detective Division, including assignments in the High-Intensity Drug Trafficking Unit, Violent Fugitive Task Force, Gang Unit, Organized Crime/Intelligence Unit, and Gaming Enforcement Unit. His wife, **Jacquelyn (Quigley) Allen, '85**, is a registered nurse in the Endoscopy Unit at Women & Infants Hospital. They have three adult children: TJ, Brittany, and Jarret.

Mark "Razz" Radziewicz, '85, was honored by The Pennsylvania Association of Broadcasters for his feature, "Toby Keith: A Country Life," receiving the Outstanding Radio Feature Story/Report/ Series award. Radziewicz wrote and narrated the piece taking listeners on an emotional journey through the legendary country artist's life, music and influence on the industry. Radziewicz was also ranked No. 8 as one of Barrett Media's Top 20 Program Directors in Country in 2024.

Lee Whitted, '88, and his wife, Dequita, celebrated 25 years of marriage. Whitted was promoted to director of social work in a Silver Spring, Maryland, nursing facility.

Darin Powell, '89, was presented the Lifesaving & Meritorious Action Award from the Caddo Area Council-Boy Scouts of America in recognition of his courage and heroism. Powell sprang into action during a Texas A&M-Texarkana baseball game when gunfire rang out and a bullet struck an 18-year-old near the bullpen. Powell provided critical care until emergency responders arrived. As a certified athletic trainer and physical therapist assistant, Powell has dedicated his career to the well-being of others. In Scouting, he has been a leader, mentor and role model, serving in Cub Scouts, Troops, Venturing, and as an OA Lodge Adviser. His commitment was recognized in 2021 when he received the Silver Beaver Award, one of Scouting's highest honors.



Medal of Merit:

Has performed an act of service of a rare or exceptional character that reflects an uncommon degree of concern for the well-being of others.



1990s

Anthony Casamo, '96, joined Williamson Health Medical Group in Franklin, Tennessee, as a board-certified physician assistant, specializing in general neurology with Williamson Health Medical Group.

Christy (Brown) Nemeth, '96, and her husband, Neil, celebrated 28 years of marriage.



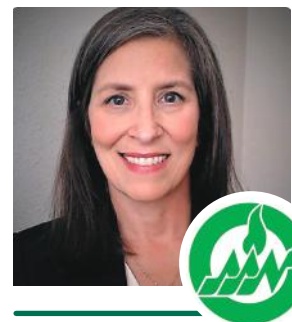
Krista (Zinz) Wolfe, '99,'22 DPT, was elected to serve on the board of directors for the Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy. Wolfe will help guide the Federation's strategic initiatives and ensure that operations align with its mission. Wolfe is Central Penn College's Vice President of Academic Affairs and Provost.



2000s

Marianne Biangone, '01, was inducted as a Fellow in the American Academy of Nursing, as one of 3,400 nurses around the world with this designation. The Academy, which represents accomplished nursing leaders in policy, research, administration, practice and academia, is a policy think tank of nursing experts. Biangone began serving as the associate dean of education programs at the

University of California, San Francisco, in January 2025.



Paul Miller, '03, received his Ph.D. in communications media and instructional technology from Indiana University of Pennsylvania last fall. Miller's dissertation, titled "Cinematic Celebrations: Understanding Family Holiday Practices Through Christmas Movie Consumption," chronicled the traditional use of holiday-themed films by parents and their children. Miller presented his dissertation research at last March's annual Popular Culture Association National Conference in Chicago.

Emily (Fury) Mazzant, '09, '12M, '21D, was appointed as assistant professor of special education at Westminster College's School of Education. She currently teaches courses in behavior management and high- and low-incidence strategies and provides observation and assessment for PreK-12 students. Mazzant also holds a Wilson Dyslexia Practitioner certification from Drexel University.

Courtney Caughey-Stambul, '09, was elected to the board of Animal Charity of Ohio, the only humane society in Mahoning County, Ohio. Caughey-Stambul has been volunteering with the non-profit organization for the last two years and hopes to continue to make a positive difference in the lives of animals.



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Ryan Reagle, '09, was appointed principal of Woodland Elementary School in the Onslow County School district.

Lori Sykes, '05, earned her Ed.D. from Wilmington University in organizational leadership, learning and innovation. Sykes's research focused on the effects of the impostor phenomenon in professional Black women. Sykes is a technical trainer at KTMC, LLP, and an adjunct professor at Eastern University.

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2010s

Matthew Morgan, '14, wrote a book titled "Annie the Anxious Pug" published by IngramSpark and available on Amazon. The book, written from the perspective of Annie the Pug, addresses anxiety as a daily stressor that, when compounded, can be a challenge, and Annie presents ways to recognize and manage those emotions.



Jamaur Law, '13, and Xzavier Moyer, '11, (from left, holding flag) shared their experiences and advice while meeting with 17 SRU business students and professors Sunita Mondal (next to Law) and Benjamas Jirasakuldech (next to Moyer) during the SRU group's visit to Washington, D.C., in April. Law is the executive director of a foundation that provides financial literacy programming and Moyer is a supervisory financial management specialist for the Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation.

Brittany Joy Drew, '15, was named 2025 Nanny of the Year by the International Nanny Association. The INA recognizes an outstanding nanny who exemplifies the very best of the in-home childcare profession.

2020s

Margaret "Maggie" Ellis, '21, joined Leech Tishman Pittsburgh office as an associate in its trust and estates practice group. Ellis will focus her practice on a wide range of trusts and estates matters.



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Send Class Notes or updates to contact information to alumni@sru.edu or by using the online form at rockalumni.com.

In Memory

Edwin B. Cottrell, '43
Shirley R. Marshall (Houze), '52
George T. Saniga, '53
Donna B. Stemper (Weber), '54
Joan Milnes, '55
Mary L. Rogers, '55
Donald S. Kelly, '56, Retired Faculty
Edward P. Smith, '56
Robert F. Weller, '56
Olga L. Kosanovich (Palombo), '57
Edward Mandell, '58
Robert E. Soltis, '58
John W. Buenting, '59
Maynard F. Kemerer, '59
Wilbur L. Mountain, '59
Dorothy Roach (Halttunen), '60
Norbert J. Dennis, '61
Daniel C. Feruck, '61
Lavern F. Hurlburt, '61
Ada M. Matis (Tomasello), '61
Nancy C. Cooper (Albert), '62
Margaret L. Doerfler (Haynos), '62
Michael E. Holmes, '62
Janet E. Karlovich (Wible), '62
Susan N. Daloise (Leopold), '63
Nancy I. Gnade (Prenovitz), '63
Charles L. Thompson, '63
Josephine Hochlinski (Valauri), '64
Geraldine A. Garove (Hood), '65

Yvonne M. Kosker, '65
Arela M. Mascaro (Sember), '66
Patricia J. Starn (Holden), '66
James R. Bergandy, '67
Michael E. Bucci, '67
Carol L. Pattison, '67
Dolores M. Allison, '69
Louis D. Kosanovich, '69
Daniel E. Musko, '69
Dale W. Adams, '70
Evelyn Cypher (Oesterling), '70
Kathleen M. Flynn (Flynn), '70
Karen K. Scott, '70
Sherry A. Anderson, '71
Ronald A. Cirocco, '71
Terry M. Henry, '71
Coleen B. Black (Critchlow), '72
William F. Broman, '72
Dorothy Z. Byers, '72
Terry Fahrney, '72
Marilyn K. King, '72
Janet E. King (Zynosky), '72
Judy McCarthy (Grossman), '72
Mary L. Regina (Sedoris), '72
Nancy R. Shick (Boselovic), '72
Kristine E. Svidro (Miller), '72
Sara Rickenbach (Craig), '73
Norma G. Roukous, '73
Donna Tekavec, '73

Diane G. Burke (Germann), '74
Glenn R. Jones, '74
William C. Long, '74
Elizabeth A. Russell (Nairn), '74
David M. Santory, '74
Phillip R. Durler, '75
Kathleen A. Anysz, '76
William T. Aufman, '76
Joseph C. Prestipino, '76
Marty W. Ruley, '76
William R. West, '76
Michael J. Fox, '77
Beverly J. Markwith (Miller), '77
Kathleen M. Trabucco (Karg), '77
Barry L. Young, '77
Nancy Baker (Baker), '78
Wanda A. Copple (Kopka), '78
Diane J. Kinney (Murphy), '78
David P. Molnar, '78
Dorothy K. Croupe (Klinzing), '79
Bradford S. Flood, '79
James J. Napier, '79
Rose P. Ricci, '81
Timothy C. Aldom, '83
Stephen C. Rullo, '83
Theodore F. DiSalvo, '85
Geoffrey Brown, '86
Lawrence J. Fox, '87
Kimberly Davis (Campbell), '88

Cynthia A. Princeler, '88
Evelyn M. Chembars, '89
Daniel M. Miller, '89
Charese Roberts (Lashinsky), '90
Karen Link (McCann), '91
Thomas D. Lawrence, '92
Vanessa M. Garber (Garber), '93
Brian K. Henckel, '93
Susan M. Reinhart (Campbell), '93
Josephine Freer, '94
Robert A. Boyd, '95
Cynthia A. Dillon, '96, Retired Manager
Alexander W. Dorsch, '96
Jeffrey L. Ward, '96, Retired Staff
Kevin S. Sanders, '00
Danielle N. Sippas, '00
Eric A. Burdett, '11
Jennifer A. Book-Owens (Book), '12
Christopher P. Green, '13
Carolyn M. Roberts, '23
Gerald A. Chesin, Retired Faculty
Linda D. Forrest, Retired Staff
Thomas W. Gaither, Retired Faculty
Nancy T. Harris, Retired Staff
Diana P. Jones, Retired Faculty
Richard V. Maire, Retired Staff
Patsy V. Martino, Retired Staff
Joseph H. Riggs, Retired Faculty

Weddings

Morgan Bonekovic Esquire, '12, and Meghan Reiser, '13, were married Nov. 11, 2023, in Playa del Carmen, Mexico. The couple resides in Pittsburgh.



Nina Bracci, '19, and Austin Robinson, '18, were married Aug. 31, 2024, in Trumansburg, New York. The couple resides in Denver, Colorado.



Taylor Buhler, '17, and Grascen Shidemantle, '18, were married Aug. 31, 2024 in Harrisville at the home of Grascen's father, **Robert Shidemantle, '95**. The officiant of the wedding was Grascen's grandmother, **Joanne Torma, '77, '84M**. The couple resides in Locke, New York.



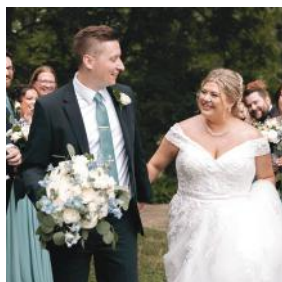
Samual Campbell, '15, and Leah Cozza, '16, were married Sept. 28, 2024, in Beaver.



Chloe Janiro, '21, and Christopher Garcia, '20, were married Oct. 26, 2024, in Champion. The couple resides in Tampa, Florida, where Chloe is an elementary school teacher and Chris is an operations manager for Coastal Waste & Recycling.



Brody McKenna, '20, and Olivia Freed, '20, '22M, were married June 29, 2024, in Zelienople. Their parents, siblings and 85% of their 20-member bridal party went to SRU.



Becky Morgan, '09, and David Gabriel were married June 1, 2024, in Baltimore, Maryland.



Births

Brandon Busch, '16, and his wife, Hope, welcomed their first child, Camdyn Gracyn, Sept. 22, 2024. Cam is the first grandchild of Sandy Busch, retired SRU director of graphic communication.



Kellee (Meder) Gnipp, '11, and her husband, Adam, welcomed their second daughter, Kolbi, Nov. 7, 2024. Kolbi joins big sister Kenni, 2.



Emily (Schneider) McCowin, '14, and her husband, **Nick McCowin, '12**, welcomed a baby boy, Connor, Dec. 7, 2024. Each of their babies has worn the onesie in the photograph.



Andy Rubino, '09, and his wife, Amanda (Frey) Rubino, '10, welcomed their second child, Camilla, May 13, 2024. Camilla joins big sister Alessia.



Gordon Ovenshine, '88, and Kris (Kalberer) Ovenshine, '88, welcomed their grandson, Ian Jeffrey Kurlak, Sept. 11, 2024.



Field of Dreams

A major renovation to SRU's softball facility, Kasnevich Field, has made The Rock an ideal destination for not only student-athletes but also high school and other amateur teams to come to Slippery Rock to play. Now one of the nation's premier softball stadiums, Kasnevich Field was renovated for the start of the spring 2025 season to include an all-turf playing surface and new grandstands, dugouts, bullpens, press box, stadium lights and a concession/restroom building. Named for former SRU softball and field hockey coach Jan Kasnevich, the field provides The Rock softball team a home-field advantage that goes beyond familiar grounds.

"This upgrade raises the profile of our program so that when recruits visit SRU, they immediately know how invested we are in their success," said head coach Stacey Rice, '08. "There are so many benefits, including safety and extending the times when we can play. Showing up each day to one of the finest Division II facilities in the country brings a lot of pride to me as a coach and alumnus and it reminds our student-athletes every day how special it is to play for Slippery Rock."



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