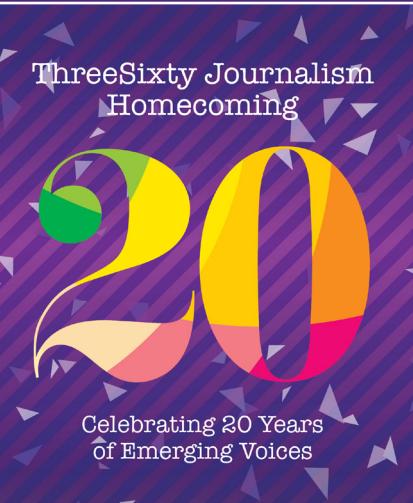


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ThreeSixty

Minnesota Teens Report Stories & Issues That Matter

Celebrating 20 Years of #360EmergingVoices



Inside: Meet DEI changemakers, student op-ed showcase
and a summer 2022 preview!

Photo Credits: Aaliyah Demry, Jaida Grey Eagle, Dedeepya Guthikonda, Emil Liden and Jacqueline Martinez.

ThreeSixty Journalism

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Email ThreeSixty@StThomas.edu with comments, letters and questions about participating in ThreeSixty Journalism.

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Donations from individuals like you provide a significant amount of ThreeSixty's operating budget.
To learn more, visit threesixty.stthomas.edu.

ON THE COVER

ThreeSixty digs into its archives to showcase 20 years of programming at St. Thomas, and before as the Urban Journalism Workshop, which started 50 years ago.



Winter News Team students learned from guest speakers from around the Twin Cities, including KARE-11 Reporter Sharon Yoo (center in black boots).

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Meet St. Thomas **changemakers** who are involved with diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives at the university in Winter News Team profiles. *Pages 10 - 15, 18 - 19*

For **20 years** ThreeSixty has been training young journalists at the University of St. Thomas. Take a look at our yearbook of photo memories. *Pages 16 - 17*

Inspired by the **#360YouthVoiceChallenge**, ThreeSixty reporters share their thoughts on issues important to them in Fall News Team op-eds. *Pages 20 - 26*

College Essays include stories of young women who discover how to advocate for themselves. *Pages 27 - 29*

Summer Camps are around the corner! Scan the QR code to apply. *Pages 30 - 32*



Contributors



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Yasmin Abdurahman
Rosemount Senior High School



Amira Ahmed
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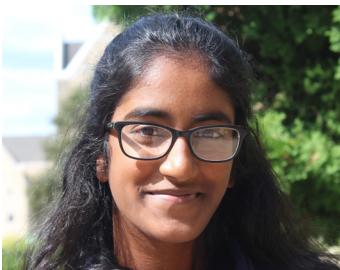
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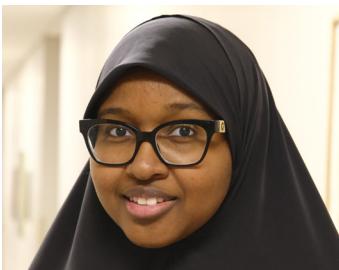
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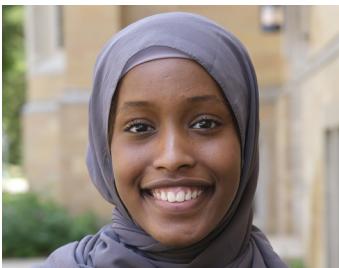
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Michael Rosas Ceronio
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Nickel Tom
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Tartan High School



Nalani Vang
Math and Science Academy



Sophia Yoerks
Eden Prairie High School

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 **St.Thomas**

Program Update

WE ACCOMPLISHED A LOT during the Fall and Winter news teams during the 2021-22 school year. At Fall News Team, we had amazing volunteers who came to the University of St. Thomas and taught our high school students how to write an op-ed. Ruben Rosario, a former city editor and metro columnist for the Pioneer Press, walked students through his process of writing an op-ed. We were also joined by Myron Medcalf, the Star Tribune columnist, who shared an op-ed he wrote describing how he felt after hearing about what happened to George Floyd in Minneapolis. In this issue, you will find students' op-ed stories, written about topics important to them and inspired by the #360YouthVoiceChallenge.

At Winter News Team, we teamed up with the university's Marketing, Insights and Communication team and asked students to write about professors or college students focusing on life-changing experiences relating to equity and inclusion initiatives at St. Thomas.

I am so proud of our students who were willing to come over to St. Thomas every Saturday, especially during the Minnesota winter, to learn how to become a better writer.

I want to thank all the guest speakers who volunteered. John Lauritsen, from WCCO-TV, talked



Dymanh Chhoun
Program Manager and
ThreeSixty Alum

to the students about how to be an awesome interviewer. Frederick Melo, from the Pioneer Press, led a session on how to write a profile story. Star Tribune photo editor Christine T. Nguyen demonstrated how to take profile photos. Sharon Yoo, from KARE-11, talked about her reporting job, and what it's like to be a reporter before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

On the last day of Winter News Team, we had a sports reporting Learning Lab with WCCO's Mike Max. The students were put into teams and pitched a cover story relating to the Winter Olympics. Max pretended to be a news director, giving feedback to the teams. Students pretended to work in a newsroom to experience what a manager expects.

I am now looking forward to our summer program in June and July, our busiest months. We have College Essay Boot Camp, News Reporter Academy, Radio Camp, TV Camp and Emerging Media camps. If you know anybody in high school who wants to learn about journalism, please encourage them to apply online at <https://threesixty.stthomas.edu>.



ThreeSixty reporters Helen Mohamed (left) and Gloria Ngwa (right) finished their op-ed stories with the help of Writing Coach Susan-Elizabeth Littlefield, WCCO anchor and reporter at Fall News Team.



ThreeSixty's Winter News Team Sourcing Day was powered by alums, including (left to right) Aaron Young, Aaliyah Demry, Dymanh Chhoun, Danielle Wong, Safiya Mohamed and Zekriah Chaudhry.



Dedeepya Guthikonda worked with Mark Holland, longtime volunteer and Star Tribune editor, to perfect her op-ed story.

5 MNA Awards for 360

THREESIXTY JOURNALISM won five awards in the Minnesota Newspaper Association College Better Newspaper Contest for the 2020-21 school year, including a general excellence award. Four ThreeSixty reporters won awards for stories they produced in high school, although they competed at the college level.

"We are so proud of our students who won these awards, especially because their stories were produced at the onset of a pandemic," said Associate Director Theresa Malloy Lemickson. "We noticed a lack of diverse perspectives, especially from local teens about COVID-19

and how it changed their lives. These winning multimedia stories represent a powerful time capsule and amplify important voices."

ThreeSixty again won second place in the General Excellence Category for its ThreeSixty magazine.

The judge wrote, "Once again, ThreeSixty Journalism pushes the envelope of what's possible when highly dedicated young journalists collaborate to deliver a compendium that's captivating. Features are thoroughly researched and meticulously detailed. Opinion pieces are fair and balanced. Each article is substantive; words do the talking with photos that support the

narrative without telling the story themselves. Kudos to the staff of this outstanding publication!"

Emil Liden, Minnetonka High School alum and current Dartmouth College student, won first place for his photo story titled, "Serving Elders," which was produced at ThreeSixty's 2020 Digital Media Arts Camp, held in partnership with the Center for Prevention at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota. The judge said of Liden's work, "Brilliant use of photography to tell a story. Use of detail and motion for context really help tell the story and are engaging to the reader. Well done!"

Dedeepya Guthikonda, a senior

at Edina High School, won third place for her podcast, "This is America. Speak English," in the Best Use of Multimedia category. It was produced during a special Virtual News Team to cover the pandemic. The judge called it a "beautifully told story. Extremely informative with great examples and a very knowledgeable interview subject."

The podcast also was a runner-up in The New York Times Podcast Contest.

Jacqueline Martinez, a Harding High School graduate and current University of Minnesota student, won third place in the Use of Information, Graphics and Graphic Illustration for her artwork about

COVID-19. The illustration is titled "Behind the Curtain."

The judge said, "This is a really interesting piece on self-reflection during that time. The duality is striking and pulls in way more emotions than one would immediately think they would feel. Great job!"

Evan Odegard, a senior at Nova Classical Academy, received third place for his editorial titled "Xenophobia Isn't New." The story was published in the Star Tribune as well. Odegard was also recognized nationally as a winner of The New York Times Student Editorial Contest for a separate editorial about the term Latinx.



Emil Liden won first place for his photo story about Native elders serving their community during the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We are so proud of our students who won these awards, especially because their stories were produced at the onset of a pandemic," said Associate Director Theresa Malloy Lemickson.



ThreeSixty reporter Jacqueline Martinez illustrates "Behind the Curtain" during Minnesota's stay-at-home order amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.



Dedeepya Guthikonda and her family are the subject of her award-winning podcast.

ThreeSixty Scholar Updates

Each year, high school students who are graduates of ThreeSixty programming compete for the ThreeSixty Scholarship — a full-tuition, four-year scholarship to study Emerging Media at the University of St. Thomas. Currently, there are four ThreeSixty Scholars attending St. Thomas.



**ZEKRIAH
Chaudhry
2018**

ThreeSixty Scholar

Zekriah Chaudhry is the 2018 ThreeSixty Scholar. He's a journalism and political science double major at St. Thomas and continues his engagement with ThreeSixty as a volunteer writing coach and editor. Chaudhry has held reporting jobs with Tommie Media, the Pioneer Press and the Minneapolis/St. Paul Business Journal. During his sophomore year at St. Thomas, Chaudhry studied abroad in Rome, Italy. Chaudhry was a reporting intern for the Star Tribune last summer. He is applying to attend law school after graduation.



**KAI
Sanchez Avila
2019**

ThreeSixty Scholar

Kai Sanchez Avila is the 2019 ThreeSixty Scholar and a journalism major at St. Thomas. She was a reporting intern at the Pioneer Press during the summer of 2021. This summer she will be focusing on kick-starting a YouTube channel to document her life through video blogs and videos in relation to her journalism education.



**JOS
Morss
2020**

ThreeSixty Scholar

Jos Morss is a sophomore at the University of St. Thomas. They are studying journalism and theology, and thinking about possibly double minoring in creative writing. They currently juggle two jobs: working as a peer research assistant at the O'Shaughnessy-Frey Library and as a Tommie tour guide.



**FRANCE
Aravena
2021**

ThreeSixty Scholar

France Aravena is the 2021 ThreeSixty Scholar and is majoring in strategic communication at St. Thomas. During the fall semester of the 2021 school year, Aravena worked as a reporter and photographer for TommieMedia, St. Thomas' student-led news website. Aravena said, "Being an alumni to ThreeSixty has connected me with some of the most inspiring people I have ever met and is giving me opportunities I could never even dream of."



ThreeSixty's Fall News Team worked with professional journalists and communicators to write strong op-ed stories about issues they're passionate about.

News Team Creates Digital Essays

THE THREESIXTY 2021 Fall News Team connected to the #360YouthVoiceChallenge. Students wrote op-eds on self-care, community, identity and more.

The students who attended our program at the University of St. Thomas College of Arts and Sciences in St. Paul had a hands-on experience and learned how to write an op-ed story, then turned those stories into digital stories. They



Safya Mohamed
ThreeSixty
Alum and
Dease Scholar

recorded an audio track of their stories and learned how to make them into digital essays.

Kennedy Rance, who is a junior at Patrick Henry High School, said,

"I enjoyed researching and writing my editorial."

"We want the students to be excited not just about writing the story, but also use their (creative) side of finding the photos or video relating to their story," Program Manager Dymanh Chhoun said. "We had great guest speaker ... Myron Medcalf from the Star Tribune talking about what it's like to be a columnist."

Students were taught by veteran reporters Ruben Rosario and Terry Wolkerstorfer, who coached students how to write an op-ed and make their story stronger.

"Talking to new people and playing games with them and the editing is my favorite part," said Jaydin Fairbanks, a junior at 279Online Osseo Area Schools.

The students' favorite part was getting to use the podcast studio,

which was led by St. Thomas Emerging Media professor John Keston. He taught the students how to record their voices and how to edit audio using Audacity.

The students had five Saturdays to learn the process of writing, recording and editing their stories. Final audio slideshows are available to view at <https://threesixty.stthomas.edu/student-video-radio/digital-essays/>.

Family Scholarship Day a Success

THREESIXTY JOURNALISM hosted its first Family Scholarship Day on Oct. 16, 2021, at the University of St. Thomas St. Paul campus.

The event, sponsored by the university's Admissions team, included a presentation from ThreeSixty Associate Director Theresa Malloy Lemickson

regarding the ThreeSixty Scholarship and a question-and-answer session with St. Thomas Admissions Counselor Demi Adediran. It was followed by a campus tour and lunch in The View with ThreeSixty program alumni studying at St. Thomas.

The ThreeSixty Scholarship

is one of many Emerging Media scholarships at St. Thomas and is a four-year, full-tuition award given annually to an eligible ThreeSixty student to study Emerging Media at St. Thomas. Other scholarships and programs, such as the Dease and Wallin programs, were introduced to

students and families at the Family Scholarship Day.

"ThreeSixty and the university are working closely to get more of our students to attend St. Thomas. We recognize our students are leaders, changemakers and truth-tellers who have a lot to offer this community," Malloy Lemickson

said. "It's a privilege to welcome families and be a resource as seniors are thinking about what's next and working on applications."

ThreeSixty supports its students' futures and plans to continue to connect families to resources as students apply for admission.

Winter News Team Masters Profiles

SEVENTEEN HIGH SCHOOL students from around the Twin Cities attended the Winter News Team at the University St. Thomas College of Arts and Sciences for five Saturdays in early 2022. Students had the task of working on profile stories that were inspired by the university's Humans of St. Thomas series.

The profile stories center on an individual's experience and were produced in partnership with the university's Marketing, Insights and Communications team. Students were assigned to feature either professors or college students on campus. They conducted interviews centered around a life-changing experience tying to diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives at St. Thomas.

"(I enjoyed) working on a profile story and meeting with new people. I also loved listening to all the



Asa Williams
ThreeSixty
Alum

speakers and working with my editors," said student Amira Ahmed.

Students were able to grow as journalists by engaging with writing coaches, editors and guest speakers.

"I loved working with my Writing Coach. They were very helpful and brought new things to light," one student wrote in the end of program survey.

Students also connected with journalists with respected credentials. These journalists included John Lauritsen, from WCCO; Frederick Melo, from the Pioneer Press; Christine Nguyen, from the Star Tribune; Sharon Yoo, from KARE-11;

and Mike Max, from WCCO.

When it came to editing their profile stories, students were given feedback from virtual editors.

Not only did many students find satisfaction in finishing their stories, some also noted how their relationships with their peers strengthened in the process.

When asked what he liked most about the camp, Evan Odegard said making new friends was his favorite part.

The close friendships, access to professionals in the journalism industry and learning ways to improve their writing skills are privileges that come with being a student at ThreeSixty Journalism.

This program marks the end of ThreeSixty's school-year sessions, and the team is now looking ahead to summer camps.



Star Tribune Photo Editor Christine Nguyen shows students how to take good pictures for their profile stories at Winter News Team.



Reporters Allison Brodin (right) and Fatima Abdurahman (left) collaborate on their shared profile story at Winter News Team.

Alumni Profile: From Fiction to Nonfiction

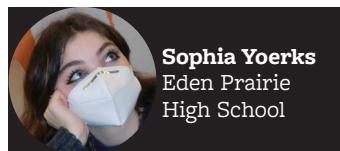
France Aravena shares how their journalism career came to be.



France Aravena

WHILE PAGING THROUGH "Percy Jackson and the Lighting Thief," by Rick Riordan, France Aravena, like many other young teens, fell in love with the Percy Jackson series. It wasn't just the fantastical plot that grabbed Aravena, but the hook Riordan used to entrance readers: the iconic disclaimer that Percy makes to the reader, warning them that if they continue to read this book, they will be in mortal danger.

Because of their interest in the series, their enthusiasm for reading only grew. They hungered for similar adventures and thrills. This



Sophia Yoerks
Eden Prairie
High School

propelled their writing career, but unlike other journalists, Aravena first started out with creative writing. "I come from a background of creative writing, so I knew that I wanted to get into a field where I could use my writing for something," Aravena said.

It's said that fantasy brings imagination along with it, and imagination was as easy as breathing for Aravena.

They soon found immense comfort in writing. Creating magical escapes quickly became second nature. They described their writing process: "I would consume as much information as I could about the topic and then I would create characters and then make them go through all these fun adventures."

During their sophomore year at Wayzata High School, Aravena stumbled across ThreeSixty Journalism.

Aravena participated in different academies, camps and teams under the "ThreeSixty umbrella," which helped them discover their future.

They explained, "I started ThreeSixty not really knowing if I was going to college, how I was going to afford college or what I was going to do. ThreeSixty really gave me the opportunity to focus on a field that I liked and it gave me the opportunity to have those resources to become a part of that field and actually be a part of a really good school."

From reading and writing magical fantasy stories to reporting and sharing information, Aravena has always found comfort in writing. However, after discovering the world of journalism, they knew that this is what they wanted to do. Before that, they didn't think writing was a possible career. Aravena is now enrolled at St. Thomas after receiving a four-year, full-tuition ThreeSixty scholarship. They say that being a student at St. Thomas' College of Arts and Sciences has transformed their writing style.



France Aravena (right) poses with fellow ThreeSixty alum Safiya Mohamed, as they volunteer at Winter News Team.

"I was always going online and always seeing the media around me. I saw that there was a lack of representation for minorities and diversity. I really want to use my voice to be able to amplify other people's voices and try and get those stories heard."

From where they are now, they urge other high schoolers interested in writing to keep going no matter how foggy the path seems. They said that in doing so, "You will find people, you will find things, you'll find opportunities and they'll help out in the end."

Professor Proves Words Speak Louder than Actions

Professor recounts his experience of telling the stories of marginalized communities.

LOUIS PORTER II, a University of St. Thomas English professor in Dougherty Family College, wants to help tell the stories you don't otherwise hear. It's a passion that started earlier in his career at the St. Paul Pioneer Press reporting on the working poor.

"These are people who were working every day but still had to struggle," Porter II says. "The myth is that the harder you work the more successful you will be. And for others that may be true, but for these people it wasn't."

That reporting assignment was the start of a long career focused on telling the stories of those unheard voices. As a reporter, he interviewed people who experienced situations, in addition to leaders of organizations.

For example, later in his career he covered areas relating to social



Amira Ahmed
Wayzata
High School



Yasmin Abdurahman
Rosemount
Senior
High School

services and education services.

"I really wanted to get the voices and feelings and emotions of the people who use social services," Porter II said. "I was able to do that, which was very satisfying."

Porter II's love for words first started in junior high.

During his time at Boston University, Porter II credits a man named Jeremiah Murphy for supporting him and taking him to his

first journalism course. He was a "seasoned reporter," according to Porter II, who came into his classroom to teach, which in Porter II's opinion made him a great teacher.

His teacher encouraged him to further his education, and Porter II ultimately received a bachelor's degree from Boston University, a master's from Hamline University and a doctorate in education from the University of St. Thomas.

People like Murphy who helped Porter II when he was younger made him want to go out of his way to teach others.

"They've been so different, and they've been a different challenge and different job," he says. "I would have to say teaching is my passion."

Now at the University of St. Thomas, he is helping others tell their stories.

He teaches English at Dougherty

Family College at St. Thomas. Porter II teaches memoir writing on the side through arts organizations like COMPAS, an arts organization that hosts classes in libraries, senior centers and K-12 schools. Porter II tells his students that memoir writing has to contain your truth.

"(Memoir writing) can also help you sort out and understand what you've been through and to look back on what you can learn," he said. "That is one of the most powerful things to do, is to tell your own story."

Porter II came to St. Thomas to make a difference in the lives of his students who come from different backgrounds, such as first generation and immigrant college students or students who are working multiple jobs to support their families.

Porter II tries to meet with his students face to face once a month



Louis Porter II

and provides his phone number in case his students require any assistance. With COVID-19, he meets with his students on the phone or over Zoom to connect and find out

PORTER II continued on page 15

(THREESIXTY JOURNALISM/AALIYAH DEMRY)

Community Through Youth Empowerment

Legacy Family Center expands literacy access in Brooklyn Park.

GETTING CHILDREN TO start reading can be a challenge. At the Legacy Family Center, a Brooklyn Park-based nonprofit founded in 2013, organizers are working to equip families to cultivate literacy at home.

Victoria Karpeh, a St. Thomas alum, founded the Legacy Family Center in 2013 to promote access to education and social services in underserved communities. Through her work with the organization, she has discovered the importance of starting literacy initiatives early.

"You want to start really, really early," Karpeh said. "I think being proactive is more important than just waiting for things to happen."

Karpeh's work is informed by her experience. She remembers spending hours reading at the library with her son, now 16 years old. Learning to read with a family member, she says, helped her son develop his



Evan Odegard
Nova Classic
Academy

literacy skills and strengthened the bond her family shares.

"It wasn't just the reading time," Karpeh said. "When things were going on with him, he was able to talk to me because he felt comfortable."

Today, Karpeh strives to open up this transformative experience for others. She observes that many families face obstacles to finding educational resources and hopes to overcome those barriers to reach families across her community.

"We bring the resources to the families instead of the families going to go find the resources," Karpeh said. "The goal was always to make

sure obstacles were not in the way."

Over the past four months, Legacy Family Center has offered a literacy program that awards older kids a stipend for reading with younger children at home. This program is unique because it gives young children a comfortable and immersive environment to pick up literacy skills. Not only does the program help children develop their reading ability, but it also provides older siblings a productive source of work.

The hard work and motivation of Karpeh and her fellow organizers have made Legacy Family Center a well-known part of the Brooklyn Park community. The organization continues to bring families together in pursuit of shared values and goals.

"We see ourselves as being part of an ecosystem so we're not separate from the community," Karpeh said.

Karpeh credits her education from the University of St. Thomas' masters program for giving her the skills to engage with her community. She is grateful for the intellectual and personal foundation St. Thomas provided, which she says enabled her to create meaningful change.

"St. Thomas really prepared me when I did my masters program to think (not only) on the global level, but to think down to the community level," Karpeh said.

As her organization grows, Karpeh hopes to build a community center in Brooklyn Park to house early childhood education, programming and family networking services. She envisions a much wider reach for her organization. Besides students and their older siblings, Karpeh aims to bring in adults from the broader community to mentor and support youth.



Victoria Karpeh

Going forward, Karpeh hopes to continue expanding Legacy Family Center and reaching more families in need. Through youth programs, she is committed to bringing her community together by investing in its future.

(THREESIXTY JOURNALISM/AALIYAH DEMRY)

Professor Builds More Inclusive World

By educating students and fellow staff members on equity, Rama Hart does more than make change — she spreads it.

In 1969, six Indian families lived in Mississippi. Rama Kaye Hart's family, who immigrated to the United States when Hart was 2, was one of them. Facing discrimination against her race and culture, Hart grew up silent about her opinions or feelings of injustice.

Now an advocate for equity and inclusion at the University of St. Thomas, Hart is no longer keeping quiet.

Throughout her career, she has trained many business leaders, students, faith leaders and educators across the country on how to make equitable change in their organizations. Currently, Hart teaches Organization Development and Managing and Leading Change, and inclusive leadership at the Opus College of Business at the



Maneeya Leung
Eden Prairie High School

University of St. Thomas. She is one of the core facilitators of the Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity cohort on campus.

"The wider you can spread understanding and awareness, the more likely you are to make change," Hart said.

Hart started her career in marketing at AT&T before earning her MBA in management. After a few years of successful projects, Hart was asked to create a sweepstakes program targeting Chinese American consumers during her marketing career. While researching

the demographic, she learned about concerns of gambling addictions within the community. She realized her promotion could elevate the problem and cause harm.

She went to her director to advise them about the concerns she had with this program. Despite her concerns, AT&T went ahead with the sweepstakes program. Hart had already received another role by the time the program aired.

"I realized I would rather be studying and learning about people in organizations, rather than selling and marketing the products," she said.

To take a stand, "it felt good in my heart, and it felt scary," Hart said. She left AT&T to pursue a doctoral program in organizational behavior.

She got her official start in the diversity, equity and inclusion sector when the Unitarian Universalist Church she attended in Maryland asked her to be a part of an antiracism transformation team. She facilitated workshops, and conducted church diversity audits and assessments. It became a passion; Hart began to integrate her work into her teaching.

She taught at small liberal arts colleges in New York and Maryland before joining St. Thomas. In her job interview, Hart shared her interest in DEI work. On campus, Hart said, "I made sure that I committed myself to as much as I could."

She teaches inclusive organization development classes and joined an antiracism coalition, connecting



(THREESIXTY JOURNALISM/AALIYAH DEMRY)

Rama Kaye Hart

with more people interested in DEI work each year.

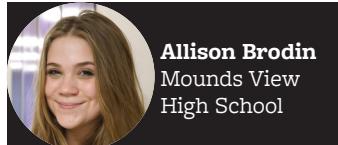
HART continued on page 15

Comics Are More Than Just Stories to St. Thomas Senior Verdis Webb IV's passion for comics drives his writing.

VERDIS WEBB IV was a soon-to-be first-year student at Doughtery Family College when he started his first day of orientation in 2018. His excitement soon turned to dread as he began to feel like he was back in elementary school, eating lunch alone and not fitting in. He channeled those emotions into his favorite outlet, comic strip writing, and created "The Loner." Webb is now a senior English major at the University of St. Thomas. He published his first story, "The Loner," in November.

What brought you to DFC?

VERDIS WEBB IV: "When I was a senior back in high school, we had a couple people from the DFC come in and talk to us. I still remember that day because they were talking about how easy it is to apply. After the presentation I ran out the room, grabbed a laptop from a different room and ran all the way back. I logged in and submitted my application then and there."



Allison Brodin
Mounds View High School



Fatima Abdurahman
Rosemount High School

Why do you want to tell stories?

VERDIS WEBB IV: "It's always been a way to not only express myself, but to inspire other people."

When did your passion for writing first start?

VERDIS WEBB IV: "In my last year of middle school, I participated in a writing competition and I won. I took my story that I wrote and went to the Minnesota State Capitol and read it out loud. From that moment on, I knew that I liked writing and storytelling. I just didn't know what stories I wanted to write."



(THREESIXTY JOURNALISM/AALIYAH DEMRY)

Verdis Webb IV

Once I was in high school, I had an English teacher give me motivation and push me to go into comics. At the same time, I had a different English teacher, Ms. Erikson, push me toward writing because she saw how creative I was. Those experiences led me to say to myself, 'Why not just combine both?'

What sparked your interest in comics?

VERDIS WEBB IV: "Growing up, I loved Spider-Man. He's my favorite fictional comic book character. I was first exposed to Spider-Man when I was 7. After that, I would go to the

library in my elementary school and read Spider-Man comics. I would bring a notebook with me and write down other characters who showed up that I didn't know, so that I could go read their comics next."

The No. 1 thing about fiction that I love is that writers had to sit down and come up with these out-of-the-box ideas."

Tell us about your writing style.

VERDIS WEBB IV: "When I'm writing, I like to bring in more aspects. If I am writing a superhero comic, I might go watch a reality TV show and a rom-com so that I can bring all of those aspects into the comic."

At DFC I met all different types of people. I may want to use a guy I met in physics class's personality as for this type of character or a professor who talks mean would be a good villain. I am taking in the experiences I see around me to take pieces of, 'OK, that could work here, that can work there' and try to figure it out like a puzzle."

Could you tell us about "The Loner"?

VERDIS WEBB IV: "During orientation at DFC, I felt lonely. I was feeling in a mood and I started writing my comic strip, 'The Loner.' For me, comic books and writing are my way of expressing myself. The message of the whole story is that everyone has their own way of expressing themselves."

What made you decide to continue at St. Thomas after your two years of DFC?

VERDIS WEBB IV: "After I went to DFC, I wanted to continue at St. Thomas and I am currently a senior majoring in English but specifically creative writing."

What do you hope to accomplish in the future?

VERDIS WEBB IV: "I just hope that I'm working somewhere that I'm able to tell stories and inspire people. I hope that one day my stories inspire someone else to do something that they may not have been able to do or accomplish otherwise."

Tommie Award Nominee Takes on Challenges

How Pam Savira found her footing, continuing her path to success.

WHEN PAM SAVIRA found out about her Tommie Award nomination — an award that recognizes students in their senior year for leadership, academics and campus involvement — she immediately thought about using that recognition to help others.

"I think just reading their kind words really touched me," Savira said, referring to the comments from her friends and the supervisor who nominated her. "And (it) makes me want to forward their kindness."

Savira was born in Indonesia, and ever since coming to the United States in August 2016, she's been making an impact. Savira's energy is bubbly and high-spirited, and that liveliness, she said, embodies the people and culture in Indonesia. Her goal of coming to the United States started in high school. She began



Gloria Ngwa
Washington
Technology
Magnet

working to improve her English, then she became an exchange student in 2016-17. Her American family, who resides in Roseville, helped her attain her student visa to come and study in the United States.

She applied to 13 colleges across the United States and was accepted to two: the University of Oregon and the University of St. Thomas. Although Oregon offered her great scholarships, her Indonesian family preferred her to stay in Minnesota, close to her American family.

Savira chose computer science as her major at St. Thomas because

of her love of problem-solving. Challenges and puzzles are things that she's really good at, which has paved the way for her to excel in her computer science classes.

And she feels she can make an impact in that field as a woman of color. "I was very intimidated because there are not a lot of females (in computer science)," she said. But she added that her classmates are very supportive.

Aside from school, she's present in her community, and is passionate about spreading diversity and change. She is part of the Diversity Activities Board, which has taught her even more about diversity. In April 2020, she started blogging videos to spread the word about international scholarships to bring about more diversity at the

college level. One video targeted to Indonesian students accumulated over 31,000 views.

"I did it once, then I thought I was helping people so I continued to do it," she said.

How she gets active on campus stems from international students, which drives her passion for diversity. "I started with international student(s) because I think the Office of International Students and Scholars is very inclusive and supportive."

Savira is also laser-focused on giving back. She has taught coding to middle and high schoolers through a web-based application project called Jupyter Notebook. Additionally, she helped scientists with stimulation on research as part of the same program.

In addition to her Tommie nomination, she is also a member of the Aquinas Scholars Honors Program, an honors program at St. Thomas to enrich the

SAVIRA *continued on page 15*



(THREESIXTY JOURNALISM/AALIFAH DEMRY)

Pam Savira

Tommie Award Nominee: Mia Laube, Class of 2022

Mia Laube talks about her love for journalism and time at St. Thomas.

TOMMIE AWARD nominee Mia Laube, of the class of 2022, grew up in Marion, Iowa, where she developed her love for basketball and journalism. Her love for both led her to St. Thomas, where she played basketball during her first two years and learned from an established journalism program.

Laube became student director of TommieMedia her junior year and recently published a poetry book called "The Sea, the Stars and the Colors on the Floor." While she hung up her cap as director of TommieMedia, she continues to tell stories and will graduate this year with a major in journalism.

How do you feel about being nominated for a Tommie Award?

MIA LAUBE: "It was a very big honor. I was nominated by the professor who toured me around the journalism department. He's been a huge advocate for me, professor Michael O'Donnell. He actually made an



Mariam Jabri
Eden Prairie
High School

effort to connect with every single one of his students. And he was an editor, and I think that is what got me into loving editing. I've always loved writing, but because of him, I really found a passion for editing; so I was very honored to be nominated by him."

How did your passion for journalism start?

MIA LAUBE: "I was a very introverted kid. I was always looking for little projects. So when I was (in) elementary school, I started this neighborhood newspaper where I would just write the forecast and everybody's birthdays and fun facts. And then I would walk around and stuff it in everyone's mailbox. And I think I just loved that aspect of

making something that would help other people.

I got into high school and as soon as I could I applied to be the executive editor of my high school newspaper. Somehow I got the job, and I got to learn everything really quick. So I did that. And then my newspaper ended up winning state. So that was super cool. I really love putting together a newspaper and writing these pieces for people that hopefully have an impact on people. Then I went into college looking for a good journalism program and really found a home (at St. Thomas)."

How has St. Thomas helped you pursue your passion for journalism?

MIA LAUBE: "During my time at TommieMedia, I wrote a lot of stories that I wanted to uplift the human person and give people a voice. One of those groups I'm very passionate about is the LGBTQ community. I'm part of it myself. So I've always been very passionate

about rights for queer people, and I wrote a big piece asking the University of St. Thomas to do more for its queer students and community members.

Sometimes the person with the loudest voice in the room often is the one who gets heard. And unfortunately, a lot of people don't have the means to have their voice heard all the time. So I think it's super important when you have the platform as a writer. To do that, you should uplift those voices."

Can you tell me more about your time at TommieMedia?

MIA LAUBE: "The best decision I made in my college career is joining TommieMedia. I got challenged in so many ways. I hosted and then produced a podcast. I had to do some technical work with the studio shows for TommieMedia, which was way out of my comfort zone, because I'm not usually a video production kind of person. And

I had to write challenging stories. I'm just really grateful for the journalism program here."

Do you have any advice that you think other people should know?

MIA LAUBE: "I got a piece of advice from one of the professors here that said things usually work out better than your mind tells you they're going to be, and I think that pretty much rings true."



(THREESIXTY JOURNALISM/AALIFAH DEMRY)

Mia Laube

Their Mission: Telling Untold Stories

New initiative highlights immigrant stories.

St. THOMAS PROFESSORS

Kari Zimmerman and Paola Ehrmantraut created Walking Together, a digital research hub studying immigration, migration and displacement in Minnesota.

Zimmerman, an associate history professor, and Ehrmantraut, a language professor, started the website, which is currently focused on telling Latino stories. The research project is funded by a grant through the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of St. Thomas.

Student researcher Freddy Flores-Deominquez, a sophomore at the Dougherty Family College, designed and now produces stories for the website, which launched in August 2021.

The leaders of Walking Together know the importance of having tough conversations and the significance of sharing the untold stories of immigrants with the public. The website consists of Latinx news that



Caroline Siebels-Lindquist
Great River Montessori School



Nalani Vang
Math and Science Academy

brings attention to displacement issues faced by underrepresented communities.

They talked more about their research in the interview below.

How does the history department at St. Thomas bring diversity and culture?

ZIMMERMAN: "One of the main goals of historians is to think about how the past informs the present. ... History provides that foundation

and then our research as scholars — they're often in dialogue with issues of diversity and inclusion and global concerns."

How does Walking Together bring diversity and culture on campus?

FLORES-DEOMINQUEZ: "The university is starting to fund these initiatives. I think our research project is sort of in that same direction where we're trying to disrupt and make people more aware and humanizing immigrant stories and immigrant people. One of the main things that keeps me on this team is continuing to humanize my people and the people I grew up around."

ZIMMERMAN: "Especially in the past few years, given the circumstances of the Twin Cities, (we) have really started to learn about antiracism efforts and ways that our privilege might be perpetuating systems without our knowledge. And I think



Paola Ehrmantraut, Freddy Flores-Deominquez and Kari Zimmerman

(THEFIFTY JOURNALISM/AALIYAH DEMRY)

all of us are very eager to work on dismantling those systems, but at the same time, that's hard."

What has been your biggest accomplishment with Walking Together and what are you most looking forward to?

EHRMANTRAUT: "I know we're doing a lot of content right now. So I'm excited to see what's gonna happen next. You know, it's built in a way that things can move around and change and evolve and grow so well. It's organic, so we don't have a set, exact plan of how this is going to go. Because of that we give room for things to move freely and it works."

What is currently being done and what more can be done to improve diversity and culture on campus?

EHRMANTRAUT: "I think we have a lot of good initiatives that have started and maybe just strengthening the continuity of some of those ideas, I think that would make us stronger in that area. I see a lot of good initiatives that tend to be like one-off conversations or one workshop, but I would like to see more continuity. We're just scratching the surface, kind of getting started and figuring this out. I would like to see a deeper commitment to those initiatives. I think that would be great. I think we are somewhat on the right track."

'Lift As You Climb'

Starr Sage looks to support next generation of students.

STARR SAGE has many passions in life, but all of them are about leaving the world a better place. From education to public health, diversity and inclusion work, she believes in lifting up the next generation with thoughtfulness and gratitude.

Professionally, Sage studies the ways women of color face unique barriers in receiving cancer-related care. An associate professor in public health at the University of St. Thomas, Sage understands that Black women face barriers in accessing cancer resources. She is trying to understand if some of those barriers are unique to Minnesota and find ways to eliminate them. She also serves as a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion faculty fellow, working to help support those who are interested in



Gwynnnevere Vang
Tartan High School

developing their intercultural skills.

Aside from teaching, Sage loves to travel with her family because traveling at a young age shaped her view of the world. Before she was 15, she had already been to Europe through a school exchange program. International traveling experiences like that fundamentally changed her worldview, she said, building her interest in educating others in public health.

Being a parent of two has shaped her approach to education. "When becoming a parent, it shifts your center because you have these young people who you're fully

responsible for, and they look to you for everything," she said.

Her children inspire her to leave the world a better place. She sees diversity and inclusion as critical to that work.

Sage said she brings a diversity, inclusion and equity lens into all of her work. She believes that in order to be effective, we need to know how to bridge cultural differences. She works to help people push themselves into uncomfortable areas, since she knows that creating inclusive spaces is better for everyone.

"I recognize that there are other ways to see the world, and I'm constantly trying to understand why others might see the world in a different way than I do," she said.

Sage is a member of the Association of Black Women in

Higher Education and is currently working to revive the organization's scholarship program for young Black women. The goal of this project is to financially support women who are working to finish their degrees at universities or colleges in the Twin Cities.

Sage finds teaching young people to see the world through a public health and equity lens to be a privilege, and she often looks for ways to motivate students. She knows it can be difficult to earn a degree in higher education due to cost, family pressure and other factors. But she urges students to stay on the course, because she believes a degree is worth it in the end.

"It's the only investment that can never be taken away from you," she said.

The work of supporting the next

generation of students takes time, but Sage believes that it's critical to help others achieve success.

"Lift as you climb," she said. "As you're making your way up and achieving your goals, be sure to turn around and help others who are coming along behind you."



Starr Sage

(THEFIFTY JOURNALISM/AALIYAH DEMRY)

Communication Through a Different Lens Leads to Answers

Xiaowen Guan teaches that communication isn't just about talking — it's a culture.

XIAOWEN GUAN is nothing less than an eclectic individual. From China to the United States, interpreter to parent, she works at the University of St. Thomas as a professor in the Department of Emerging Media teaching intercultural communications.

The Department of Emerging Media Department offers three programs: journalism, digital media arts and strategic communication. Guan not only teaches in the department, but she's also the Strategic Communication program director.

After earning her undergraduate degree in English at the Beijing Foreign Studies University, Guan worked for two multinational companies, Bayer and McKinsey, where she witnessed conflicts between the expatriate management and Chinese locals. She second-guessed the nature of the conflict. "Why (is) there so much discord? It's not language, because we all can speak English," she thought.

The conflicts sparked her interest



Michael Rosas Ceronio
Lakeville South
High School

in interpersonal communications. "Communication was not a discipline that originated in China," Guan said. She realized that a country and its culture can influence people's behaviors and expectations.

As Guan furthered her education in her field of study, earning a master's degree at Portland State University and a Ph.D. at Michigan State University, she landed her job at St. Thomas in 2008.

To get her message across to students sometimes means taking a hard look at the reality of what's in front of them. For Guan, one of those harsh realities worth discussing in class is white privilege and its effect at St. Thomas.

"This is a very hot topic, seeing that St. Thomas is predominantly white."

Guan recognizes the turmoil of the situation. "Teaching to a predominantly majority of white students, privileged, from middle and upper middle class, and a lot of them (for) the first time encounter this idea of a white privilege, or they have heard of it, but not really examined it, and now it's up to their faces. Those perceptions (become) clearly biased in a negative way."

Guan highlights a study conducted five or six years ago by the university that compared the faculty's teaching scores between white and nonwhite faculty. The study concluded there's a significant difference in white and nonwhite scores. According to Guan, the reason for the nonwhite faculty having lower scores is the students' evaluations. The students may give nonwhite faculty a lower score due to them feeling attacked or may judge the faculty for not being white.

"That is systemic racism because you continue to evaluate one group of people lower without taking into consideration the context," Guan said.

According to Guan, the low scores for nonwhite faculty leads them to believe they aren't as good as the white faculty because they didn't grow up in the area and can't connect to the students because of their appearance.

Guan knows changing this may not be easy.

"We may not always know the answer. We may not always get it right the first time, but you have to be motivated and be dedicated to it."

As the students approach the topic of white privilege, she asks them their feelings on the subject. "A lot fall into fear and guilt; and then the third one that comes in: 'I don't know much.'"

Guan believes the students' guilt leads to shying away from the problem. She knows the natural instinct for students is to hide, but then nothing would get solved. Her solution to the problem resides in her job. "The students have to overcome this emotion, and what I can help with is supplying you with knowledge."

Guan's work in intercultural communications encourages resolution at St. Thomas, challenging preconceptions in the college itself and taking a look at how we communicate in the outside world. Even if this is only a small glimpse into Guan and her life, it's one of significance and importance.

"If we don't understand cultural-level dynamics, we may easily misattribute and misexplain what the reason is, whereas the real reason is simple: it's a culture."



Xiaowen Guan

(THREESIXTY JOURNALISM/AALIYAH DEMIR)

Leading DEI Reform at St. Thomas

Professor focused on creating systemic change and increasing DEI efforts by 2025.

FOLLOWING NUMEROUS incidents of racism over the past few years at the University of St. Thomas, Kevin Henderson has seen an opportunity to do more through his leadership role as a professor in the Opus College of Business.

"The culture needs to change. I'm trying to help make that change happen to eliminate all the 'isms' that exist out there, so we can make sure everyone can bring their full selves to their classroom, to their work," Henderson said.

Alongside other leaders at St. Thomas, including President Julie Sullivan, Henderson is influencing diversity, equity and inclusion at his workplace and the campus that he cares so much about.



Abdihalim Mohamed
Blaine
High School

Improving these issues is part of the St. Thomas strategic plan.

Some recent on-campus examples of racial justice advancement include recognizing Juneteenth and Indigenous Peoples' Day as official university holidays, the launch of the law school's Initiative on Restorative Justice and Healing and the creation of the Racial Justice Initiative.

Henderson's efforts are part of a much bigger picture at St. Thomas. Through his role as a DEI faculty fellow, he is working on changing

the faculty handbook and institutional systems to better reflect the goals of the Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. One way Henderson is seeking that change is by having staff include their DEI efforts in their annual reports.

Henderson's academia career started years ago, and he joined St. Thomas in 2009 because of the diversity of ideas and the opportunity to discuss bigger-picture philosophies. He has seen a significant shift in students' DEI commitment in recent years, a departure from when he first arrived over a decade ago. Henderson recalled a racist incident that happened on a Monday and a rally that was organized by Tuesday.

"I definitely see a culture change, but we still have room to grow," he said. "There are still some people that aren't engaging in it. They might think it's a fad, or it's just, 'Oh, it's just in reaction and eventually we're going to move on to something else.' But I've seen a very firm commitment from our leaders."

Henderson has focused by making DEI progress in his day-to-day teaching.

"When the Derek Chauvin trial started, I talked to my students: 'How are you feeling? This is tough. This is anxious. This is stressful.' Let's address the elephant in the room, if you will, and have a conversation about it."

Henderson also shared the idea that efforts should extend beyond students to everyone who sets foot on campus. Henderson wants to present change by pushing issues,

HENDERSON continued on page 15



Kevin Henderson

(THREESIXTY JOURNALISM/AALIYAH DEMIR)

St. Thomas to Rome: 5,000 Miles to Find Yourself

RHYNN PAULSEN returned from a study-abroad trip to Rome, which she called a transformative experience, in mid-December.

Originally, Paulsen chose to be a biology major, but after spending time in Rome she wonders if it was the right decision. When reflecting a month later, she said, "What I really love is English, and writing and humanities in general. So I am just trying to figure out how to be able to do my passion." This dilemma poses the question of: What is the "smart" choice and what is the "heart" choice?

First, the Rome trip. She heard about the trip when a professor visited the chemistry class she took last year. Going to Rome was not the original plan, despite choosing St. Thomas for its various study-abroad programs. She chose the program particularly because it was



Kendall Shostak
Mounds Park Academy

one of the only trips for sophomores and an easy trip to balance with a STEM workload.

Prior to the trip, she heard advice that studying abroad should allow you to let go of everything: normal foods, routines, comfort clothes and, at some level, friends.

In Rome, she took general classes she'd enjoyed in the United States. A few classmates opted to take an organic chemistry class. However, she passed up chemistry and took theology, art history, environmental journalism and a basic Italian class. Paulsen, not taking chemistry, began her transition

from a "smart" major to a major she's passionate about.

There were a couple of aspects of Rome that helped her begin the process of branching out from biology.

The first was getting the opportunity to listen to various speakers who visited her and the other students to share their work in Vatican City.

The second occurred when she went on walks throughout the city and spoke with local vendors at the market who would allow her to practice her Italian.

She also went to the gym to train for cross-country (as she participates in the sport in the United States) and wasn't viewed as a foreigner.

These experiences allowed her to enrich herself and wash away the mindset of doing "what she has to do."

The classes she took in Rome pulled her away from mandatory biology requirements to classes she had chosen for fun. This reveals how quickly she got excited about non-biology classes. It reminded her of interests she had previously enjoyed, such as environmental studies. She's already theorized plans on how to best spread climate awareness. One: talk about it to instill urgency in other people. Two: push for political change through legislation policies. One of the environmentalists she is inspired by is her hero Greta Thunberg.

Her interest in this subject, and also writing, pulled her away from biology to explore different fields, like environmental journalism.

Finally, a piece of advice, directly from Paulsen when asked if you should follow your heart: "Yes, you

can." However, she added, "but for the most part, I would say you won't make it far if you're not doing something that you have an interest in." Thanks to the trip to Rome, Paulsen has learned to compromise between what she wants and what she knows is smart.



Rhynn Paulsen

PORTER II from page 10

how they are doing in class. He encourages his students to connect to specific professors if they are struggling in a class.

Doing a lot of outreach and mentoring for his students requires Porter II to be available during the day. This is because he understands that his students have obligations other than school, such as work and family.

"Access has been something that's important to me, whether it's working with students to get them access to education or at the council."

HART from page 11

In 2018, Hart had the opportunity to become a facilitator for the first SEED cohort at St. Thomas. In her role, she helps students and staff grow their understanding of identity and learn to make equitable changes. Participants come out more equipped to advocate for others, Hart said.

Currently Hart is working on piloting a SEED 2.0 program called Appleseed. In Appleseed, the alumni of previous SEED programs are welcomed back to take their learning to the next level.

"The reason we call it Appleseed is because it's about planting change in their organizations in the areas they can influence," Hart said.

Her classes expanded as well. After George Floyd's death prompted national protests and scrutiny of business practices toward BIPOC communities, Hart's inclusive leadership and diverse organizations courses in the MBA program started to gain more interest.

"It was nice to see white professionals committing to make a change in organization," said Hart.

"Being inclusive is critical for our growth and sustainability in the community," Hart said. Demographics are changing, Hart said. She uses her voice to prepare future leaders for a world that welcomes people of all backgrounds.

SAVIRA from page 12

educational experiences of academically driven students with a minimum ACT score of 28; a recipient of the Kennedy-Lugar Youth Exchange Scholarship, which is what brought her to the United States; and an International Student Leadership Award nominee. She's also the president of the Globally Minded Student Association.

Savira plans on going to school for her master's or doctorate, but she says she can only plan and see where life goes. When it comes to giving advice to other students, Savira emphasizes the importance of connections.

"Keep maintaining and building personal relationships with people. It's really important and I think it helps me." She also advises students to ask for help when it's needed. "Definitely go through your journey, and then do a lot of reflection."

HENDERSON from page 14

making them relevant and sharing communal events in the classroom.

Henderson also challenges his peers to initiate change and promote inclusivity in everything they do.

"What did you change in your course to make it more diverse? What are you doing in this area to become more inclusive?" So, workshops and development, changing your syllabus, adding new activities, all of those would fall into that category," he said.

Henderson hopes his and his colleagues' efforts, combined with the university's broader initiatives, advance the university's DEI and racial justice ambitions and goals by 2025.

ThreeSixty Celebrates Milestone Anniversary



Asa Williams
ThreeSixty
Alum

AS THREE SIXTY JOURNALISM prepares to celebrate its 20th anniversary at the University of St. Thomas, we sat down with Executive Director Chad Caruthers to reflect on the milestone.

What does the 20th anniversary mean for ThreeSixty Journalism?

Chad Caruthers: "The 20th anniversary means this is a program that still matters, continues to grow and contributes to St. Thomas' mission and our community. This program is a valuable contributor to students' lives, our community and to the journalism industry."

The program actually started 50 years ago as the Urban Journalism Workshop. How did the program arrive at St. Thomas?

Caruthers: "The program started in 1971 as a chapter of the Urban Journalism Workshop, which was a national initiative to diversify newsrooms. In 2001, it came to St. Thomas. The university was able to invest more resources in it. Several years after it moved to this university, the program got its first full-time employee, and it's continued to evolve from there. Now, on average, we serve about 125 to

150 participants per year. We have programming year-round. It's come a long way."

What are the biggest contributions ThreeSixty has made to the community?

Caruthers: "A source of pride for me personally is that any and every student who comes to ThreeSixty Journalism walks away with skills they can use the rest of their life, and that is whether they end up being in the news business or in some sort of communication business or anything else. There are things students can take away from this program they can apply to their high school education to their college education to their professional lives. We're offering students opportunities they may not have otherwise to continue their own personal, academic and professional growth.

Bigger picture, we offer the community an opportunity for students to feel their voices matter — that they have a story, they have a platform to share that story, and that people want to hear and care about their story. We empower youth, and that's a valuable asset for our community.

We're helping to diversify newsrooms, and that's our mission here. Just in the last six months, we placed program alumni into full-time opportunities at Minnesota Public Radio, FOX-9

and a local PR agency as well. We have interns at the Star Tribune and Pioneer Press. We are helping our students connect with opportunities and helping to diversify those various industries."

What are your hopes for the next 20 years?

Caruthers: "That this program continues to have a deeper impact on our local newsrooms. And by that, I mean more of our students from a wider cross section of communities end up as employees and leaders of local newsrooms. I hope individuals who do end up in our local newsrooms stay in this market and become leaders. I see it, my staff see it, and volunteers see it: We have some of the brightest, most forward-thinking individuals I've come across in 15 years of working with young people.

I really hope our current leaders in this community, business and otherwise, recognize the power of having people from all walks of life as employees, as newsroom staff, because it makes for a richer environment, workplace and community. This is about equity. This is about everybody having equal opportunity to learn and participate to thrive. This community sorely needs that. We are a piece of that. And my hope is that we continue to become stronger part of this community's evolution for the next 20 years and beyond."

"We're helping to diversify newsrooms, and that's our mission here."



Urban Journalism Workshop



2006 Group Photo



2018 at KARE-11

20TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION



Alumni at Woulfe



2011 Class Portrait



Summer 2017 Students



2018 TV Camp



2019 in the MPR Newsroom



2010 Group Photo

Study Abroad Adventures

St. Thomas' study abroad programs have helped one student see the world in a new way and apply the experience to her major.



Anna Puhek

JUNIOR ANNA PUHEK is studying actuarial science and economics, but at many universities around the world. Puhek currently studies at St. Thomas' home campus in St. Paul. She has studied abroad at the St. Thomas campus in Rome, named Bernardi in the fall semester of 2021, and studied abroad in London in January 2020.

Puhek possesses sincere



Aisha Hersi
East Ridge
High School

gratitude for the countless triumphs she has made by utilizing the opportunities provided by the Office of Study Abroad. Puhek demonstrates this by sharing her open-minded perspective as a result of countless exposures to different cultures.

"I actually got to study abroad in January of 2020 in London, so I kind of have the interesting experience of seeing how the world changed pre- and post-COVID," Puhek said. "I liked actuarial science because it's the science of risk in doing a lot of math. And so I thought that (actuarial science) would be a good way to bring some current events into it because that's what brings risk and

that's what changes in the world."

The countless semesters Puhek spent abroad have facilitated her understanding of cultures beyond the Midwest regions she's lived in her entire life.

"There's so many cultural norms that you just take for granted. Living in Minnesota my whole life, but getting to go to England, getting to go to Italy and travel around there, it really shows you different ways of life and how things that you like aren't always the same everywhere else," Puhek said.

The perspective Puhek gained from a "culture weekend" provided by the University of St. Thomas while in Rome assisted Puhek and students in making further connections with the Italian culture of the people around her.

"St. Thomas brought us on a cultural weekend. On one of our group

trips we went to Sorrento, which is nearby the Amalfi Coast. A group of 10 of us, we rented out a boat for a day and got to see the sights and on the Mediterranean Sea," Puhek said. "We got to see little traditions that make Italy special. We got to meet some really amazing people with some interesting stories. I think how that ... culture weekend was different is that we really got to make some real connections and meet some local people beyond just tour guides."

While she continued to expand her cultural horizons in Rome, she sought to overcome a language barrier in that particular city.

"Of course, when I studied abroad in London, they spoke English, right? So I didn't have to learn anything there. But it was a little more difficult, trying to speak Italian," Puhek said. "One thing that kind of makes you think a little bit, at least for

me, is when we were in Italy, they often couldn't speak some English. Whereas a lot of Americans don't have a second language, at least I took Spanish in high school, but I can't speak it very well, so thinking about that American mindset."

For students eager to experience a culture outside of their neighborhoods, Puhek urges them to get in contact with the Office of Study Abroad and enjoy a semester in which you gain more than you anticipate.

"I would say do it. And I would say, reach out to the Office of Study Abroad. Think about what interests you, what part of the world you would like to see," Puhek said. "Frankly, I'd like to go everywhere. I don't think studying abroad is something you'll ever regret because it expands and enriches your college experience much more than staying in one campus."

Ben Thomas, a St. Thomas freshman, didn't let COVID-19 get in the way of his travel and chemistry goals.



Ben Thomas

GRADUATING HIGH SCHOOL and going off to college in the middle of a pandemic is scary enough for most students, but Ben Thomas has a particularly adventurous spirit.



Amina Jama
Columbia Heights
High School

Not only did he navigate going to school in a different state—he moved to Minnesota from Illinois to attend the University of St. Thomas—but he also took things a step further, deciding to study abroad during his sophomore year. He spent his fall semester in Rome, Italy, entering a whole new country with different protocols, language and culture. Beyond that, there was all the stress of COVID-19, including having to get a negative test before being able to come home. The experience brought him

closer to the classmates who traveled with him abroad. Last month, he shared some of his experiences with ThreeSixty.

What influenced you to study abroad?

BEN THOMAS: "When I visited the school (University of St. Thomas), I talked to a chemistry professor for an hour about his own study abroad experience. He just kept on talking about it and raving about it, and it just sounded really interesting."

Would you encourage someone else to study abroad?

BEN THOMAS: "Yeah, for sure. It's really nice. One of the coolest things that happened was when we traveled to a small region in Italy

called Molise. We met this 93-year-old man — I think his name was Enrico — and he was the former governor of the whole region. He was so nice. He showed us around, and we would joke around. He had told me that I looked like his nephew because I supposedly looked a bit Italian. He currently has my phone number and he called me when I got back to make sure I was safe."

What are some qualities that you have retained and what have you gained throughout your study abroad?

BEN THOMAS: "I feel like I'm slightly more comfortable in social situations because you are forced to go up to people and try and speak a different

language, ask for directions and random things like that. I think that was really cool. Outside of that, I am going to be doing research with my chemistry professor (who taught in Rome) this summer here at the St. Paul campus."

What made you want to get into chemistry?

BEN THOMAS: "I had a really good high school chemistry professor. So coming in, I knew I wanted to try it out and see if that was something I liked. But I came in undecided. And then I did well in that (first chemistry course at St. Thomas) and I did really well in my chemistry class over in Rome, and I liked it a lot."

Engineering ‘Good’

WHAT QUALIFIES as good? Daghmawe Mamo, a mechanical engineer who graduated from the University of St. Thomas, believes “good” comes from being holistic. As an example, he helped design a hydroponic system for a nonprofit that grows a variety of foods right in your own home.

Senior clinical design is a two-semester class that all engineering students must complete. The class pairs students with a professor as a mentor, and the class is set up to teach students about the design process.

“Even with a given project it has us working interdisciplinary. ... Even with mechanics and electricals working together, they are working on the same project. A big part is working as a team, and staying consistent and showing up every day,” Mamo said.

Seeds Feeds is a nonprofit that focuses on giving food back to the community specifically through growing plants. Its website states the organization is “dedicated to growing food to nourish people, community and the earth.”

For senior design for the capstone project, Mamo and his team partnered up with Seeds Feeds.

Mamo’s team consisted of three mechanical engineers and one electrical engineer.

“They (Seeds Feeds) came to us to discuss a system that would notify about plant growth.” Mamo’s team had a smart hydroponic system that would notify the user whenever the system was showing



Nickel Tom
White Bear
Lake ALC

signs outside of perimeters, such as pH levels and nutrient levels, and whenever there was a leak.

“They were happy with the results. The plant growth was very noticeable, and everyone was in disbelief, (wondering) if we had cheated,” Mamo laughed. “It was fun and was a very successful project.”

Mamo reflects on change throughout the course of the project and emphasizes that communication is key. “There is just so many factors with people working together. Having us work together for six months, there were a lot of positive affirmations.”

Mamo emphasized that through this project he learned the importance of people skills, which isn’t often thought of as a skill needed in that field.

By helping a nonprofit, not only did Mamo improve his engineering skills, he also became a better version of himself.

“If you are your best self and achieve everything you want, it will be the best for everyone. This approach is best for building a community.”

“Engineering is very hard but rewarding. It is a very human skill and trait where ... problem-solving is engineering. You are not only learning technical skills, but [using] problem-solving skills that are

applicable in everyday life.”

Hydroponic systems only use water, sunlight and nutrients.

“Think of this as a professional athlete getting everything they need to be the best — from food to great work out to perfect recovery. That’s similar to what we’re doing to the plants. The water and the cycle are perfectly at an angle where it is absorbed.”

Mamo’s team was tasked with designing a hydroponic system that could be used by someone who was unfamiliar with it. The final design was able to detect when there was a leak, monitor multiple systems at once and provide the plants with only the wavelengths of light they need. The team accomplished their goal and handed off the final design.

Any engineer will tell you everything being used on a daily basis is designed with intent behind every screw, shingle or touch screen; but intention alone is not sufficient in many cases.

Going into higher education with the intent of earning an engineering degree, Mamo was faced with what *kind* of engineering he wanted to do. He explored a few different fields, but was limited in career options. And finally, after a friend mentioned mechanical engineering, Mamo had decided. He was going to pursue a degree in mechanical engineering.

The intent of becoming an engineer was there, but earning the certification is just the beginning. Knowing how those intentions will



Daghmawe Mamo

piece together is what makes or breaks a design.

By choosing a broader major, Mamo is now able to pursue different projects, such as the hydroponics system, and broaden the scope of what virtual reality can create.

A holistic approach is never without intent. Trying to separate intent from holism only results in meaningless distinctions.

Everything’s intentional and your reasoning is good. And you have a more holistic view of it, not just you’re given the small part in doing that, but you have an understanding of the whole product.

You can approach it by focusing on your little piece of the pie or you can see the whole bakery, like Mamo has.

Asa Williams contributed to this report.

“A big part is working as a team, and staying consistent and showing up every day,” Mamo said.

#360YouthVoiceChallenge

**High school students,
amplify your voices and
showcase your creativity!**

<https://link.stthomas.edu/youthvoice>

ThreeSixty Journalism
College of Arts and Sciences



ThreeSixty Fall News Team students wrote op-ed stories, then turned them into digital essays, inspired by the #360YouthVoiceChallenge, which is inspired by youth. The 2021-22 school-year topic was: As we return to school and the pandemic continues, more people are practicing activism and asking tough questions. We're asking high-schoolers to reflect on what's next and weigh in on issues important to them.

- Self-care: How has this last year changed how you engage with people?
- Community-building: What does effective activism mean to you?
- Reflection: Describe a meaningful moment you had in the last year. What did you learn?
- Identity: What is your favorite way to express your authentic self?

The Golden Rule

As I type these words, tears fill my eyes because the past year has been a struggle for me. In fact, it has been the greatest struggle I've ever known in my 15 years of living.

I can vividly remember who I was before I was forced to quarantine. I was in the eighth grade and my interactions with other people were not really the best. As I gained a higher social profile, I wasn't treating others the way I would like to be treated. That's a motto I try to live by — the Golden Rule. The way I was thinking was so negative that it spewed into my actions with classmates and especially with teachers.



Gloria Ngwa
Washington
Technology
Magnet

My conversations with them were filled with nothing but churlishness and sarcasm.

Before I knew it, I, like everyone else, was forced to stay at home in March 2020, the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Usually, I have pretty good mental health, but April 2020 to February 2021 almost got me. Distance learning was hard for me. But, while my

teachers were trying to help me through my schoolwork, I started to realize how much they cared about me. When I finally broke down and apologized to them for my disrespectful attitude, I felt this weight lifted off my shoulders. It took me being locked in my house to finally say I'm sorry.

This past year was not that different. With more online schooling, it was once again emotionally draining. I could actually feel my sanity slipping. But good was happening inside my heart, too.

I learned how to go out of my comfort zone and ask for help. I learned that I actually

am a supportive and thoughtful person. I learned I'm adaptable, and I'm also thinking about my future more. I started having very engaging conversations with my teachers through Google Meet. As for friends, I realized that even though we weren't seeing each other as much, our bond was still strong. And as for the person I was able to see *more*, my older sister, we became closer than ever. Those bonds were all strengthened because of the pandemic.

So how has last year changed how I engage with people? A year later, back in school, I have a more

positive outlook about people. Empathy is something I now carry with me. I understand everyone went through challenges last year. I'm more expressive and smarter, and I've attracted a lot of people into my social life because of that. After all the extra screen time, I'm more aware of what's going on in my society and I'm more passionate about social issues.

Even though I absolutely despised the corona-infested 2020 and 2021, I now realize the tears in my eyes made things blurry, but the experience is actually allowing me to see more clearly.

My Hijab, My Pride

DING! DING! DING! I woke up after hearing my phone buzz. I opened my eyes and picked up my phone to see headlines that surprised and disgusted me. An article stated that in France girls 18 and under can no longer wear the hijab publicly. As a 16-year-old Muslim I was frightened, wondering if something like this would happen to me.

At that time I chose not to wear a hijab. Now at 17, I wear my hijab proudly because others can't. I feel as though I had a privilege to make a choice that was taken away from women in France.

In 2004, France banned religious head coverings in school and government buildings. Seven years later France issued a ban on full face coverings in public areas. Later, in 2021, the news I woke up to, France

passed a constitutional amendment targeting mothers accompanying their children on school trips and Islamic swimwear. They also banned girls 18 years old and younger from wearing religious head coverings in public. French lawmakers are doing this because they believe they are protecting Muslim women.

France is trying to liberate something that is already liberated.

The hijab is an expression of who I am today. If someone came up to me and said I can't wear it, I would feel like my heart would be ripped out of my chest. I would feel as if I was naked on the street. It isn't just a piece of cloth. Just as the Holy Trinity is taught to Christian children, the importance of the hijab is taught to Muslim children. You know the feeling in



Amina Jama
Columbia
Heights High
School

your stomach when you do something bad? That's what I feel when I do not have my hijab.

Advocates in France say they do this to protect women from being oppressed, yet I am not oppressed and never was oppressed because of my hijab. I am more oppressed when I am told that I can't dress the way I want to. It's my choice if I decide to wear the hijab.

The ban disrespects what women wear, it disrespects how they choose to express themselves and it disrespects their religion. I don't need protection.



Amina Jama proudly wears her hijab.

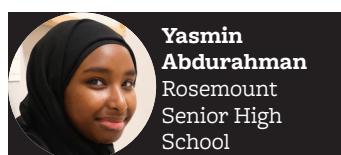
Learning to Love My Hue



Yasmin Abdurahman shares how she learned to love her skin color.

EVER SINCE my youngest sister was born, I never thought my skin was the one thing I would hate. In my family of dark skins, my younger sister was born a lot lighter. Many family members commented on her beauty and fairness. While that

never bugged me, it hurt when my skin color was brought to the table, especially during the pandemic. I was belittled over my darker skin and hyperpigmentation by my extended family members, making me hate how I looked.



**Yasmin
Abdurahman**
Rosemount
Senior High
School

I began to search for "remedies" to fix my skin, hoping it would make me feel more loved by my extended family. My failed attempts at "fixing" my skin left nothing but burns and resentment for my family. Thoughts like, "Why am I like this?" and "I wish I was lighter" crept in my head for months. Being in quarantine didn't make it any better, especially when other family members were staying with us.

I remember one morning I was playing UNO with a family member and my sisters. Out of nowhere, my family member blurted out that my younger sister will grow up to be so beautiful while me and my other sister will remain "ugly."

Taken aback, I couldn't find the

words to express my astonishment at how someone can openly make horrible remarks about things I can't control. Their words embarrassed me and basically destroyed the little self-worth I had left. Thinking of their words, I stopped looking at myself completely. I stopped taking pictures, and I stopped looking at myself in the mirror.

That's when I realized the depthness and reality of colorism, which is prejudice or discrimination against individuals with dark skin tone, typically among the same ethnic or racial group. According to Social Psychology Quarterly, darker skinned women are less likely to get married compared to lighter skinned women, are likely to have longer prison sentences, and are three times more likely to get suspended from school. Not only that, an ABC News report found lighter skinned Black and Hispanic women look "smart" to white people.

After months of being self-conscious of my skin color, I grew tired of the constant overthinking and hating the way I looked. The hatred over my skin color grew and grew to the point where it became tiring to hate my skin. I wanted to be energized by my skin color and what it means to me. My hatred for my skin lost its flair, and I was able to finally look in the mirror again. Once again, I became comfortable in my skin. I cut off communication with those family members. It made things so much easier for me in loving who I am and all aspects of myself.

Celebrate you and remain kind to others around you, including yourself. This is so important during the pandemic, where isolation has us all examining our insecurities. So do yourself a favor and be kind to you.

Sex Ed: A Logical Solution

AS DEBATE RAGES over the constitutionality — and the effectiveness — of Texas' strict new anti-abortion law, perhaps we're losing sight of a fundamental reality: The best way to limit the number of abortions is to prevent unwanted pregnancies.

That means comprehensive sex education programs for young people and the widespread availability of contraceptives.

As we all know, people have been having sex since, well, forever. And people have been trying to end unwanted pregnancies for almost as long. Plato even wrote about abortion nearly 2,500 years ago.

Historically, efforts to legislate morality have been a failure. Take for example Prohibition in the 1920s or President Ronald Reagan's war on drugs in the 1980s. The Texas law, known as SB 8, will likely end in similar failure, sending women into dangerous situations in search of an abortion, and turning



Caroline Siebels-Lindquist
Great River
Montessori
School

ordinary citizens into vigilantes and bounty hunters.

Those who remain opposed to comprehensive sex education and the availability of contraceptives do so on two grounds: No. 1, if we don't talk about sex, young people won't have it. No. 2, any form of artificial contraception is morally wrong.

As to the first, history shows us that people are going to have sex whether we talk about it or not. And as to the second, I would argue that the morality of artificial contraception is open to interpretation depending on your religious views and affiliation.

Arguing against sex education and contraception not only ignores the social and economic costs of

abortion, but also the individual costs as well.

The average cost of medication to induce a miscarriage in Minnesota is between \$300 and \$650. Depending on the stage of the pregnancy, the cost could rise to thousands of dollars for a surgical procedure. Compare that to the average cost of a single male condom — less than a dollar, and they're available at most pharmacies. And the widely used hormonal birth control pills could cost \$50 or less per month depending on the insurance provider, and they can be prescribed by any medical professional.

Even more widely available contraception, however, won't be effective without the necessary educational structure and properly trained educators to instruct curious young minds. To teach young people that abstinence is the only acceptable method of birth control is both naive and unfair. Young



people deserve access to whatever birth control methods are right for them and the correct instruction on how to use and find them.

In the end, reproductive rights advocates and abortion opponents all want the same thing: fewer

abortions. Not one person *wants* to have an abortion.

Let's come together to minimize unintended pregnancies by supporting necessary efforts for mandatory, comprehensive sex education and widely available contraception.

Who Gets to Be in College Readiness Programs?

AFTER A YEAR of distance learning, I returned to Patrick Henry High School this fall as a junior, delighted to be learning in person.

Junior year of high school is all about preparing for college. Between studying for an adequate ACT score, applying for scholarships and joining enough extracurriculars to confuse the masses, junior year is by far the most demanding year of high school.

During my first-day orientation, my school held an 11th-grade assembly about college resumes, ACT registration and college readiness programs.

There, I was introduced to College Possible, an organization dedicated to "mak(ing) college possible for students from low-income backgrounds through an



Kennedy Rance
Patrick Henry
High School

intensive curriculum of coaching and support."

College Possible has four eligibility requirements: a 2.0 GPA, an aspiration to attend a four-year institution, an intention to attend all sessions and collaborate with coaches and a low-income qualification.

According to the National Center for Children in Poverty, low income is a title given to families with an "(average) income of about twice the federal poverty threshold to meet their most basic needs." To be eligible for College Possible, a family of four would have to make

less than \$53,000 annually.

That doesn't include me or many of my classmates: 25 percent of students attending Patrick Henry High School don't qualify as low income, according to data from the state on free and reduced-priced lunch.

College readiness programs aren't just exclusive to low-income students; the same applies to the middle class. The need for College Possible is immensely wanted. However, there is an extensively large gap between low income and the independently wealthy, excluding students in the middle class.

According to Shawn Crenshaw, an academic counselor at Patrick Henry High School, low-income requirements have become yet another obstacle for students of

color. "Income requirements just need to go," says Crenshaw. "Look at what groups are underrepresented instead of looking at income."

2020 Patrick Henry High School graduates Tomi Ijiodé and Ayo Olagbaju both applied for College Possible but had different experiences.

Ijiodé applied for College Possible in 2018, but wasn't accepted due to income requirements. "Just because your parents make a little more doesn't take away from the fact that you still need that support. We're all trying to get into college; it's a difficult process and I feel like people need help."

Olagbaju, a former College Possible student, found College Possible to be very beneficial.

"I know there are a lot of families who are sort of in between and would benefit from the low-income programs, but they also can't afford to just pay out of pocket," says Olagbaju.

Olagbaju and Ijiodé are both sophomores at Howard University.

It's clear that College Possible and other college readiness programs are deeply needed by many students — not just low-income students.

Right now, there are empty seats at College Possible awaiting students who desire a higher education. These seats can be filled and students are prepared to succeed, but these programs are not designed for them. All because they aren't low income, all because they didn't make the cut.

Bridging the Gap

WE LIVED IN the same apartment building, rode the same bus to school. English was not our parents' first language. We learned and played, progressing through our elementary school years easily, oblivious to how our paths were beginning to split from our surrounding classmates. Despite the parallels in our lives, the barriers separating us from our white classmates began to grow more distinct. Many of my BIPOC classmates were placed in English as a Second Language classes, were falling behind grade-level standards in core subjects and were not provided with the opportunities to participate in clubs or sports.

My classmates, and countless others, are affected by the achievement gap: the persistent disparity in academic achievement between BIPOC or disadvantaged students and their white counterparts. It is better defined as the opportunity gap.

Although I was not placed in ESL or support classes, I began to believe that this separation at school was the norm. My peers were conditioned to believe they were not capable of higher achievement.



**Dedeepya
Guthikonda**
Edina High
School

And I began to believe the same about myself.

Data shows that the first three years of a child's life are critical to their language development. According to the 30 Million Word Gap study, this impacts students whose parents are at a literacy disadvantage because they aren't getting the same exposure to basic learning as some of their peers are at a young age.

Without a supportive, diverse community at school, cultural differences can lead to students feeling isolated. Their schools may not be environments that encourage their growth and push them out of their comfort zones. This can present itself through unconscious bias of teachers in classrooms — things like pronouncing a student's name wrong or believing they are less capable of challenging work or leadership roles.

During my time volunteering at an affordable living community where

many students' parents immigrated to the United States and speak the same language, I've seen the community that's been fostered and how important that is for students. It's a community that many of them don't have at school. Families receive support for their students in this community that their schools don't provide, and students learn better in this environment.

So, how do we narrow — and hopefully someday eliminate — this opportunity gap?

Schools must think about resources and access. They need to ask students of color what they would like to see and what is important to them — communicating not only directly with them, but their communities.

BIPOC communities need to be included in the dialogue for change. Efforts should be made to include families in the process, be it parent-teacher conferences or engagement in the PTO. They should be encouraged to run for school board or community positions, bringing their diverse perspectives into the conversation. What's most important in creating this change is to meet people where they are. If families

are not able to provide transportation for their students to attend tutoring sessions at school, bring it to them. If immigrant parents aren't informed about their students' school curriculum, provide them the resources to understand it. Bring in BIPOC staff but also provide culture and bias training to white staff.

Closing the opportunity gap is not a one-size-fits-all narrative — students and communities have individual needs, and it's up to schools to work with BIPOC communities not only to meet these needs, but empower students to reach their full potential.



(COURTESY DEEDEPYA GUTHIKONDA)

Dedeepya Guthikonda and her family.

Carrying the Legacy of My Family

I'VE ALWAYS WONDERED how a murderer becomes a murderer. Murder is part of my family's story.

Let's back up. Mass killings in Ethiopia began in 1976 and continue to this day. The civil war, which began with a dispute between Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed's central government and authorities in the northern Tigray region, is a battle between ethnic groups over power. This battle turned into a gruesome civil war.

My mom was born and raised in Ethiopia during the civil war. She tells me countless stories about what happened. She said houses were crammed with frightened



Helen Mohamed
Cristo Rey Jesuit
High School

people. According to my mother, unlike in America, houses are only filled when something terrible is about to occur.

My mom said to me, "I could hear steps getting closer and closer." She heard 23 shots fired as military troops surrounded the house. She remembers when her own mother said, "These men aren't normal; those are the eyes of a killer. These are the ones who don't want people

to be educated, these are the folks who kill for pleasure." My mom could sense footsteps outside the door and knew that catastrophe was about to occur.

I didn't want her to continue the story, but she did, and what she told me was devastating.

She said two of my uncles were buried alive, and one was shot for simply protesting for educational freedom. That should be a human right. This story leaves me with so many questions. I wonder why the killers choose them and not others. I wonder why there was a division among a group that should never be divided.

I'm sure you're wondering how this affected me as a now 17-year-old high school senior living in Minnesota. It affected me but didn't have nearly the same impact on me as it did my Ethiopian family. But this story is my identity, and I need to write about those uncles I never met: Hamza Umar, Mohamed Umar and Yusuf Umar. I wouldn't be the person I am today if it weren't for them.

I have so much gratitude for living a safe and healthy life that it is impossible to express in words. My uncles fought and died for their education, for my homeland and my family. So, for me to have

a platform to learn and grow feels like a tribute to them.

I still try to honor them today. I write and recite poetry about them. Despite pushback, I also made a stand of my own: I started the first chapter of the Black Student Union at my school. Being a young Black Muslim woman is hard in America, but it's in my blood to stand up and speak out, and I plan to do just that.

Even though murder will always be a part of my family story, those deaths birthed a new generation of activism, and I am honored to carry on their legacy.

Understanding Other Cultures

THIS PAST YEAR, political crises and violence rocked several countries, from Haiti and Belarus to Myanmar and Afghanistan. Chances are most American students could not point out these countries on a map.

International affairs have a tangible effect on life in the United States, especially for young people. With a globalizing economy and a culturally diverse media and entertainment landscape, it is crucial for American students to understand what is happening in the world around us.

However, Americans' knowledge of global affairs is strikingly subpar. A 2019 study commissioned from Gallup by the Council on Foreign Relations and the National Geographic Society found notable gaps in Americans' knowledge of geography, foreign policy and demographics. Only 6 percent of respondents were able to answer 80 percent or more of the questions correctly.



Evan Odegard
NOVA Classical Academy

This is a concerning number, but not an entirely unexpected one. As the United States becomes increasingly driven by technology, global affairs have slowly lost a prominent place in our classrooms to other subjects and materials deemed more relevant.

But, if anything, the rise of technology makes understanding other countries and cultures more relevant. The internet is making cross-cultural engagement easier for students, while opening up new opportunities for learning about and understanding the world.

Young people need to be taking advantage of these opportunities.

Cultural exchange opens up access, allowing students to learn about and empathize with people



from vastly different backgrounds and perspectives.

Last summer, I became good friends with Hln, a 17-year-old from Iraq who I met through a virtual exchange program. Hln was shocked that I, an American, was listening to her stories and learning about her culture and religion; she

explained that most people in her city thought that Americans hated them.

"I'm so happy there are Americans like you," she said.

I thought I was doing the bare minimum. Hln, on the other hand, saw me as an exception to the stereotypes of hate and ignorance

that she associated with the United States.

I didn't know how to respond when she thanked me for being different.

At the end of the day, with conversations about foreign aid and immigration taking hold of national politics, American students can't afford to be ignorant on international issues. We cannot make informed decisions going forward without grasping the realities of the places where these issues originate. It's irresponsible to act without first understanding.

Through a globally minded education and cultural exchange, American students can gain an informed perspective and crucial cross-cultural skills. People like Hln should not have to be proud of Americans for doing the bare minimum; our generation has the opportunity to eliminate these stereotypes and take small steps to connect the world.

Isaac's Blessing Bags



Isaac-Santino Garcia
Cretin-Derham Hall

WE WENT TO DELIVER food to homeless people on a dingy street corner in St. Paul. The sounds of sirens and the smell of beer lingered in the air. There was a gated off section with two picnic tables and multiple tents. We had brought some food to hand out and immediately people were starting to fight over it. I spotted a man in an old wheelchair pushed by his friends. He was one of the first people I ever got to help, and he was shocked that someone my age was willing to help him. He told me what it was like having to rely on others to take care of him. He said it was already hard enough for his friends to take care of themselves, but they continued to care for him. He didn't necessarily understand why. "God bless you," he said. That will always stick with me and has helped push me forward to do what I do.

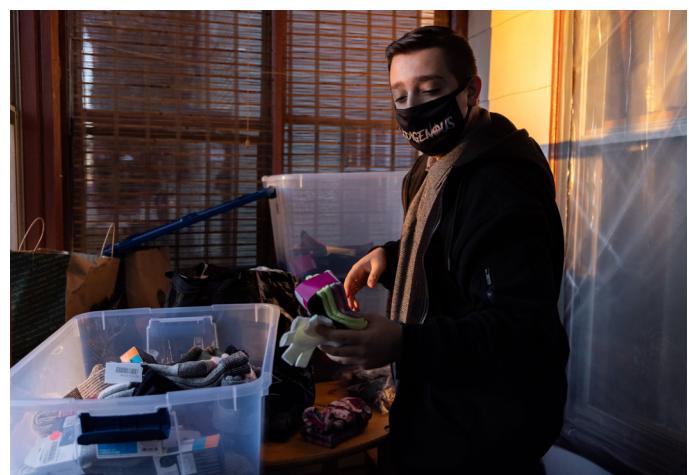
In 2016 I moved to a new house in St. Paul. I was worried when I started to see more homeless people on my way to school. I didn't understand why no one was helping them, especially during the wintertime. I asked my parents what we could do to help. I decided to make a change, which led to the creation of Isaac's Blessing Bags.

I am now 15 years old and have been able to turn Isaac's Blessing Bags into a nonprofit. We have also been able to raise thousands of dollars, including a \$10,000 grant from the state of Minnesota. Due to the pandemic, I feel there is no

better time to be helping. With the money I have raised, I have been able to buy our supplies: granola bars, juice boxes, water and hygiene supplies. We also try to buy clothes. We accept used clothes or any donations people make. With these, we try as often as we can to hand things out. We also have been working at First Lutheran Church every Christmas to help bring food and clothing to 200 homeless people. I am also now trying to work with my school, Cretin-Derham Hall. They have been helping the homeless for about 20 years now, going to the Dorothy Day Center to help hand out food. Not only do I help people who are homeless, but I continue to help anyone in need, whether it be families who couldn't pay for Christmas presents or someone who just needed a bus pass to get

to work. I know I won't be able to end poverty by myself, but for now I am doing my best to help whoever I can. I feel what I do isn't just

helpful to others, but a blessing to myself — the feeling you get knowing that you can change someone's life.



Isaac-Santino Garcia packs Blessing Bags to distribute to people in need in his community.

(COURTESY JADE GREY EAGLE)

Asian-American Representation Matters

"ONCE YOU OVERCOME the 1-inch-tall barrier of subtitles, you will be introduced to so many more amazing films," said Bong Joon-Ho during his acceptance speech at the Golden Globes. "Parasite" was a record-breaking South Korean film released in 2019 that won multiple awards, including four Oscars. For the first time in Oscar history, a foreign film won best picture. The award caused so much controversy that even the 45th U.S. president, Donald Trump, had something to say about it.

"What the hell was that all about? We've got enough problems with South Korea with trade, on top of it they give them the best movie of the year?"

Despite the negative feedback the film received from conservative viewers, the film's win accounts for a cinematic milestone. Its success



**Michael
Rosas Ceronio**
Lakeville South
High School

has been recognized by Hollywood, leading to a series adaptation from HBO written by Adam McKay.

In 2021, "Shang-Chi and the Legend of the Ten Rings" is dominating the box office, earning \$178 million domestically. The Marvel film features its first Chinese superhero and its cast includes Asian and Asian American actors. The film tells the origins of Shang-Chi while also telling a complex narrative of Asian American identity.

From the looks of it, both films are smash hits among American audiences. With one in the works being adapted and the other dominating the box office, it's clear Asian

and Asian American films are changing the mainstream.

The success of "Shang-Chi" puts Marvel in a position where it can continue to tell stories of racial and cultural identity. "Parasite" introduced Westerners to a new terrain of cinema and redefined what a great film is.

My experience watching "Parasite" was a doozy. I had to sneak past the ticketer because they wouldn't let me watch the film due to it being rated R. The music provided a classical feeling, and the filmmaking was sharp and cut. The story left me in a confusing yet fulfilled state.

Despite the large voices "Parasite" and "Shang-Chi" share, they aren't the only Asian and Asian American films that have created a lot of buzz. "Minari," "The Farewell" and "Crazy Rich



Asians" have received praise from critics and viewers alike. They've won multiple awards and added to the narrative of changing cinema.

These movies have made their mark on an industry that is now a pioneer for voices of the Asian

and Asian American community. I hope to see the success of Asian filmmakers like Boon-Joon Ho continue and will celebrate in fashion when they receive an Oscar for best picture.

"Thank you. I will drink until next morning, thank you."

Podcasts: A New Pastime

DURING THE PANDEMIC we had to adjust to changes and try new things. One of the things I tried was listening to podcasts. Before the pandemic I didn't find a reason to listen to podcasts, because I didn't want to hear people having a conversation. I thought it would be boring, so I didn't listen to it. When COVID-19 hit, I suddenly had a lot of time on my hands. I played video games. I was so bored I actually started reading a book. It was a light novel, I liked it, but then I finished it. I was bored again. It would be months before the next volume came out. So, I decided to finally give podcasts a chance.



**Jaydin
Fairbanks**
279Online Osseo
Area Schools

I picked a podcast of topics I liked and just started to listen. They were enjoyable topics, at least I think so. The first one I listened to I connected with. It was different, in a good way. At first, I started to listen, then I got into it and laughed at times, and before I knew it, it was already two hours. It was great. I actually like listening to people talk, just talk.

Then, I started going deeper and deeper. Then I discovered more

interesting podcasts. And I didn't stop there. I started surfing the web while listening to a podcast. I learned I could multitask. With this knowledge I started to play video games and listen to podcasts at the same time.

Here's what I learned: I'm glad I tried it. Podcasts can teach you a lot of things. You can learn, laugh and connect. So, my recommendation is — go listen to a podcast! Pick a topic you enjoy — video games, Dungeons and Dragons, photography, screenwriting — whatever you like, there's a podcast for it. Even one for golf or politics, if you don't find it too boring. Just sit down, look for it and discover. When you press play, the pandemic will feel far away.



Growing During Quarantine

FOR MANY OF US, 2020 has been an unusual year, from good to bad. As my life in 2020 goes, I like that some things are easier, but I don't think I was ready for the challenges. This past year has given me so many good values about being a good person.

This past year, most of the things I did were inside. For example, I enjoy spending time with my family and my two dogs, Henry and Hattie. Even before the pandemic, I had little interest in being outdoors. If I go out, I become more aware of my surroundings, wear a mask and keep a distance. I feel protected and also feel good about it. Many people have different views on whether or not the COVID guidelines should be followed. I learned to understand other people's situations and their opinions.

I was in seventh grade when my school transitioned to distance learning. Although distance learning is not my preferred learning style, I got used to it quickly. I feel more



Benjamin O'Leary
Highland Park Senior High School

flexible since I can move anywhere I want without interrupting the teacher. When I started distance learning, my teacher set up their office hours for support. I attended their office hours frequently, to get engaged with the teacher's support and to get to know them better. My teacher likes to see me in the office hours because distance learning can be challenging and they don't like not being able to see their students. This situation wasn't perfect, but it worked reasonably well.

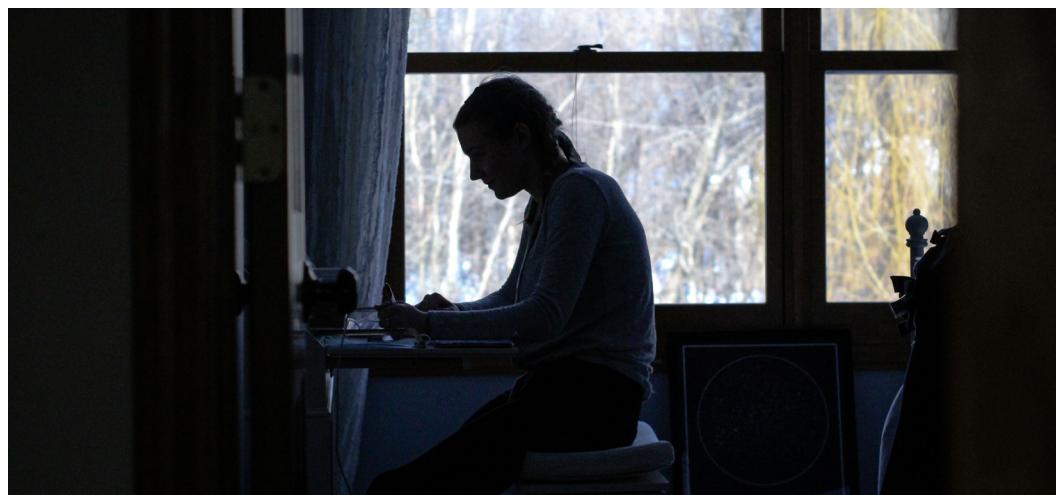
Last year, I began watching more news. I got to watch content that I didn't know about previously. For example, after George Floyd's death, seeing people protesting and dealing with this hard time makes me care more about others' opinions. When my teachers discuss

these topics that I am familiar with, I feel more connected and engaged. When I was in a gender-sexuality alliance during distance learning, it was fun to see my teachers teaching us about the LGBTQ community and seeing LGBTQ people taking action. I think it is very good that different people with different

backgrounds are taking action because they are one of the first and they are inspiring others, especially young people like me.

I feel more connected to my immediate family now that everyone is working and learning from home. I like that I'm able to talk about homework with my parents

since distance learning can be complicated. It's been harder to get together with my other relatives. It is crucial to know that we are having an unusual time, especially when I don't get to see my grandparents often. We text each other a lot, but it is not the same as having a real interactive conversation.



(THREESIXTY JOURNALISM/EMLI LIDEN)

Virtual school has been challenging for high school students.

Overcoming the Challenges of Online School

AS AN EIGHTH-GRADER I was looking forward to high school. Usually eighth-grade discussions are around what we expect high school to be. But instead, we were talking about how COVID had been spreading across the globe.

Nobody thought too much of it at the time. When the final bell rang on March 13, 2020, I headed home, not knowing it would be a year and a half before I would return to school in person.

In middle school I was a straight-A student. In the middle of my freshman year, which was all online, five of my mid-term grades were Fs. However, this wasn't a



Marcos Odegaard
Nova Classical Academy

problem specific to me: Reuters reported that in Clark County, Nevada, one of the nation's largest school districts, 13 percent of grades were Fs in 2020, compared to just 6 percent the year before.

I couldn't imagine what the impact would be for smaller, or rural, districts across the country. Some people did not have access to computers or to the internet. Teachers couldn't find them, I

couldn't find them — it felt as if they had dropped off the face of the earth. This highlights the divide between the lower and middle/upper class. Some simply lacked the resources not only to succeed, but to participate in online school.

This online model of learning just wasn't working. Teachers were trying their best, reaching out to help and offering office hours, but no matter what, I couldn't find the motivation to get my work done. Part of that was the lack of social interaction.

For example, a huge place for social interaction at school was

lunch. Not only was it a time for me to have fun with my friends, but some students were getting their only meal of the day. With online school, I wondered how they were getting fed.

There was so much I was missing out on. When everything is typed, it's difficult to convey emotions. Interactions with your classmates, if any, feel forced. The closest I got to talking with my peers was a half-silent Zoom breakout room with everybody's cameras turned off. Nothing compares to face-to-face conversation. As an extroverted person, this was difficult for me. I'd never expected to go for more than

a week without leaving my house or seeing my friends. Now with school back in person, I have discovered a new appreciation for school as I get to see my friends, interact in class and learn new material.

With the pandemic ongoing, I understand that offering online school is a necessity. However, nothing can truly replicate in-person learning. Moving forward, I hope that nobody has to go through the ups and downs of online school again. Although it is out of our control, I hope that schools can continue to stay in person and keep allowing students to make the most of their education.

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College Essay: Learning About My Brain

I STARED AT the white wall in front of me, my blood boiling and my brows knit in anger. I felt tears of frustration pricking my eyes. I heard the loud chatter of the office behind me. Of all the voices, there was one that especially made my skin crawl: the principal's.

Last Friday during my school's sermon, I sat next to my best friend. We sat with our backs against the wall, our knees pulled up, our arms crossed and our heads ducked under, so nobody could see our faces as we whispered and giggled.

"What are you two doing?" A voice bellowed above us.

I looked up to see the principal standing before me, her face twisted in admonishment. She scolded us



Ariana Yasmin
Spring Lake Park
High School

and told us to sit in the straight rows with everyone else, and that was that. Or so I thought.

During first period the following Monday, I talk and laugh with my friends as I do any morning before class. However, the principal storms into our classroom. Everyone goes silent.

"Ariana, you will be coming to my office for a month," she announces harshly. She turns to my homeroom teacher. "During Jumu'ah, doing this," she folds her arms out in

front of her and lays her head on them, turning her head from side to side in a mocking manner, "talking and laughing ... this is not appropriate behavior."

My mouth hangs open in a mix of shock and embarrassment. The next few sentences she says are a blur, and then she leaves as quickly as she entered. I scan the class in self-consciousness, praying no one will make eye contact with me. The chatter in the classroom starts up again slowly, and my homeroom teacher doesn't mention what happened.

I was utterly confused and hurt. I didn't think I did anything wrong. Nevertheless, I did what she asked; I went to her office every day instead of going to recess during the first exciting month of snow. I was in fourth grade.

The next year, my mother, who was a doctor, jokingly said I had ADHD. I didn't think much of it

then; in fact, it was something I'd go around telling all my friends: "Hey, guess what? I have ADHD." Years have gone by and, though I'm still undiagnosed, it's now evident to me the reason I couldn't sit still during that one sermon, which led to me wasting away a month of my life in my principal's office, was because I have ADHD.

This self-realization was a breaking point in my life. It emotionally damaged me to know all the hurtful words my loved ones said to me about how I'm talkative, impulsive, forgetful and distracted were about behaviors that are not my fault. But it was also a step forward to learning and loving myself. I'm understanding that I was different from the people around me, and as a result, I'm resorting to other methods to reach the same goals as them.

For example, when I'm listening

to repetitive lectures, my mind starts to wander, so I turn to note-taking to help me stay engaged. I contain my excessive energy by taking extra educational classes to keep me occupied, and use makeup and art as a creative outlet. I also get excessively irritable when trying to figure out a difficult problem on my own, so I look to more knowledgeable people for help.

Now that I know this about myself, I intend on using this former shortcoming to fulfill my ambitions. While behavioral issues have been the principle struggle of my entire life, they have also sparked interest in me to major in psychology because I personally relate to people who struggle with disorders.

The more I learned how to channel my flaws into beneficial abilities, the more I was able to turn my weakest link into my strongest power.

College Essay: Discovering Myself

I'VE ALWAYS CARED a little too much about things. To be able to make people smile, to make them laugh has always seemed like the right thing for me to do. As someone who has always wanted to do good in the world, I've struggled with the choice between taking care of myself and worrying about other people. I've come a long way, both regressing and progressing at different points, but throughout it all I've learned so many different lessons. At least in my story, I can candidly say that my experience and other people's experiences are the best teachers of self-exploration.



**Claire
Van De Weghe**
South High
School

In the third grade, my troubles with caring got big. Before, I was happy with the way I was, despite the occasional bout of loneliness. My sister was by my side, and with the friends I had made, it seemed almost impossible for the social self-consciousness to linger longer than a day or two. Day care was a little different. I loved the sweet snacks they served, most of which I had never tried before. I found

myself a little more comfortable in the company of the Spanish teacher, who was always excited to talk to students, or in the pottery class that happened in the evenings. Even so, I found myself on the outside. The few friends I had attended only part time, leaving me alone on the schooldays between Monday and Friday. Without my sister, everything was overwhelming. Unlike the daycare I had gone to before I moved, I had no real group of friends. Eventually, I decided I wouldn't go.

My parents didn't like that, of course. I remember them asking me so many times to "just give it a chance" or "remember that one girl you like there?" I refused to listen. I've always thought that my willfulness comes from the determination of both my parents, but whatever

its source, it was strong enough even then to allow me to win that argument. The path it set me on, however, was one that I couldn't go back from as soon as I started to learn its rules.

I was never bullied in school, despite all the doubts I've had about myself. The experiences that I went through were a bit more quiet. Because of my desperate want to be liked, I flitted between social groups, changing myself a little for each one. The more I did it, the easier it seemed to go deeper and deeper behind the facades. By sixth grade I had built up a nearly impenetrable floodgate to keep back everything that I was sure people would find strange or unappealing; the shallow person that I showed was free of everything the status quo would reject.

As much as I've tried to break down those walls, it's still one of the most difficult tasks I'm facing in my life.

Over the past years, I've tried to unearth who I really am. Between helping people, taking care of myself and finding joy in my life, the dust of my own doubts has obscured my vision. Thankfully, quarantine has given me more time to discover that. I've realized that more than anything, I want the strength to stand on my own, as an individual. Even when I'm faced with pressure or judgement, I want to be able to be myself authentically. Though I'm just starting now, I've had a lot of time to understand my own needs. If I'm able to show that to the world, I believe that I'll truly find myself in the place I want to be.

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College Essay: Succeeding with Special Ed

SPECIAL ED. Those are scary words. I thought people viewed me as an idiotic outcast who wasn't as rational or smart as the other students in my classroom. But I was just struggling with English — a completely new language for me.

"Time to head to the special ed classroom," said my teacher. I ignored her. My classmates knew that she was talking about me, but I acted as if I didn't hear her. Embarrassment, guilt and anger filled me. At first, I didn't want to go, but in the end I decided it was best to follow her.



Deysi Sanisaca
Cristo Rey Jesuit
High School

I kept reminding myself, "I need to do this, for me and for my mom."

...

As a poor girl in Ecuador, my mother had to drop out of school at age 10. She had to help her family by working and taking care of her siblings.

After coming to the United States, she was torn between

working to earn money we desperately needed (including a job at Taco Bell), caring for me and household duties. She did her best by raising me with food, clothes and love.

My elementary school lacked support for struggling students. My homework would be late, the answers wrong and my grades below average. These issues concerned my mother so much that she decided to transfer me to a bilingual charter school.

As a new student at Aurora Charter School, I had to adjust to a

completely different way of doing things. A year later in sixth grade, I was told to participate in special education classes.

I didn't really know what special education was, because they didn't have such a thing at my previous school. Many times I refused to attend special ed classes until the teacher came to get me. Finally, I had to remind myself that it was for my own good. If I wanted to earn better grades, then I needed to go to special ed and improve my English. So I did.

In seventh grade one of my hardest subjects was science, where I struggled with understanding the terms. Fortunately, the science teacher was very patient. He encouraged me to study hard and

take notes. My test and quiz scores slowly improved. One day, I was stunned to discover I got a perfect score. My hard work had actually paid off, and my teacher was proud of my results. So was I.

Throughout my middle school years, I continued working hard and doing my best. I faced challenges and overcame them. As a high school student, I still face struggles, but I'm focused on studies that will allow me to continue on to college. I've made the dean's list, so I think I'm making progress.

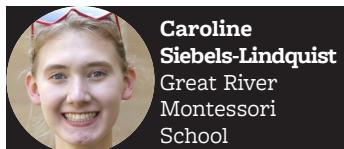
So special ed turned out to be a blessing. And I'm looking ahead to college, not only in hopes of a better life for myself, but for the honor of bringing my mother's family name to college with me.

College Essay: A Woman Named Rose

IN THE SUMMER 2020, my pastor asked if I wanted to participate in a theology camp. I wasn't originally interested, but when I heard writing would be involved, my ears immediately perked up.

I've always loved writing. As soon as I learned to form words, I would try to place them into an appealing order. Talking did not come easily to me, and I remained frustrated from all of the words I was missing out on until the age of 3.

Since then, poetry, short stories and long chapters have appeared in my journals on a consistent schedule. My writing was and still is deeply personal. I don't go sharing my work with just anyone I meet. For me, vulnerability is a difficult matter, one that I'm not well versed in. My experiences with so-called friends have left me unwilling to show my writing to prying eyes, and



Caroline Siebels-Lindquist
Great River Montessori
School

I've learned I would rather keep my thoughts private than shout them from the rooftops.

At the theology camp, I wrote a deeply sensitive article about sex education, a topic that is significant to me, and its importance for young people. Not only was the article personal, it's an extremely delicate and oftentimes provocative topic in church discussion. I turned it in without fully realizing others would be reading my work and didn't think about it for many months after. Instead, with the few weeks of summer I had left, I spent my time watching "The Bachelor" with my sister and walking around

my house in a pandemic daze.

By January the now-published article was a distant memory when Rose, a member of my congregation, called and left a voicemail. I didn't call her back. She had found out about my article through gossip circulating through the pews of worship and had called to congratulate me on my courageous writing. She informed me of her plans to write to me.

A few days later, I discovered a handwritten letter waiting for me on my kitchen table. In cursive that I did not recognize, a woman explained she was a friend of Rose's. My eyes cut across the greetings to find the words, "Rose died on Tuesday."

Tightly clutching the thin letter, I sat down and cried, lost in shock and taken by surprise. Her friend shared that Rose had loved my article and was proud of my bravery

to voice such a controversial topic.

Rose wanted to share this but never had a chance. I was the recipient of kind words and hope, yet I couldn't stop the tears from streaming in painful and salty waves. I felt horrible. Here I was, so wrapped up in my own life I didn't even think to check my voicemail. And now, I'd never be able to thank her for her kind words.

Rose didn't have to call me. She didn't have to read my article. And suddenly she was gone. She had taken time out of her day to recognize my ability as a writer, adding value to my strengths and encouraging my dreams. I guard that knowledge close to my heart every time I start to write.

Rose's simple act of kindness made me understand, for the first time, the impact of my writing. She showed how it touches people's hearts and minds, where the act of kindness can be revived and awakened. I may still be a private person, but I know now that writing is meant to be shared —

shown to the world and made to inspire others.

I have a greater respect now for words and the effect they can have. I plan to continue to use my ability as a writer to make meaningful and lasting change in the future, and I will strive to create an impact with my carefully woven words every time I write.

Rose's friend explained that Rose was always a big supporter of young people. She believed wholeheartedly that youth have a purpose: to make the world a better place. She understood the value of speaking up, the danger of staying silent.

Her Facebook page quoted Elie Wiesel: "Neutrality helps the oppressor, never the victim. Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented."

I now feel a deeper awareness of the world and the people inside of it. A woman named Rose inspired me in ways I could not have imagined. She reminded me of the power that writing can hold to inspire and influence people together endlessly.

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College Essay: I Am Muslim, I Am Black

I AM YASMIN Mohamed Sheikh Abdurahman Noor Sheikh Mohamed Hussein. I am Somali. I am American. I am Muslim. I am a Black woman. I used to believe that being all of these things at once was nearly impossible.

Walking into my first class at my first public school after moving from a charter school was quite literally the most nerve-wracking thing I ever did because of the dreaded roll call. In my eighth-grade English class after the bell rang on the first day, a teacher read names off of the roster. When it came to me, I wished I could melt into my chair. My teacher paused at



**Yasmin
Abdurahman**
Rosemount
Senior High
School

my name, looked up and found me, the dark-skinned hijabi, then asked students to raise their hands if their last name started with “Abd.” When I hesitantly raised my hand, wishing that this moment could end, my teacher asked, “What a unique name. Where is it from?”

To many of the white 13-year-olds in my class, the Black students who they were acquainted with were the “cool Black kids” who

wore expensive sneakers, went to church on Wednesdays and got their hair done every weekend. I didn’t want to stand out. I shoved myself into a box where I only allowed my Blackness to seep through. My Muslim and Somali identity was never allowed to gasp for air. But I still wasn’t protected from the woes of an “African village girl” that somehow always found a way into a conversation.

By the end of eighth grade, I had somewhat completed my social transition from African to African-American. As long as I didn’t do anything too wild, like dress in the traditional baati or bring Somali

food for lunch, I wasn’t African; I was just another “normal Black Muslim girl.” At that time, that was all I thought I could be.

High school brought on a massive shift in my perspective, not only on my culture but also my religion. Nearly every Black kid at the school was first-generation American, with mostly Somali, Nigerian, Kenyan and Ethiopian roots; many of them were Muslim. For the first time in a long time, I wasn’t the one who stuck out like a sore thumb.

Not only that, but everyone was so proud of their home countries. They brought their native foods to lunch and shared it with one another. We hyped up our friends who would wear their native clothing; we didn’t need to be “the cool Black kids” anymore. I tried to connect to my culture and language

more, but it never crossed my mind that I would now envy the people who spoke their language fluently and are able to converse with family overseas. I found myself slowly reaching out to family and friends to help me learn my language.

I was finally reacquainting myself with my Somali side and falling in love with it as I did. I rediscovered the rich qualities of Somali culture, from the brightness of its clothing to the poetry that diversified Somalia and nuances of its sweet music that made everyday life beautiful.

Up until now, I believed that it was impossible to be so many things at once. I am Somali. I am American. I am a Black woman. I am Yasmin Mohamed Sheikh Abdurahman Noor Mohamed Sheikh Hussein, and I am proud.

College Essay: Conquering Fear with Poetry

FEAR IS THE mind killer, I repeated to myself. Even through relentless self-encouragement, my voice still cracked and shook with every syllable I spoke. I could hear my voice; it sounded like I was about to cry. After I finished reciting my poem, the tears that were being held back multiplied and overflowed. As I tried to push back tears, the poet who inspired my poem told me, “If I could be a spark for a poem like that, I’m forever grateful.”

Prior to junior year, I never had interest in joining any clubs. And it was because I was afraid of being alone. I was so used to doing things with other people, it was frightening and difficult to think of moving on from that habit. I always believed I was stronger with others. But,



Zaira Reyes
Cristo Rey Jesuit
High School

during quarantine, a teacher reached out to me to invite me to join the school’s poetry club. And although I still felt afraid at the thought of joining, deep down I knew this was a good first step to push myself.

On March 26, 2021, I participated in an event where I recited my original poem. It was inspired by Father Joseph Brown. Here is a portion of it:

*ii.
I woke up to your dead body
next to mine
And looked at you for three long minutes*

*Without having a look of disgust
reciprocated.
I left,
And silently wept
Because you never said sorry
Only through
Small kisses when you were drunk,
And a dependence that grew
with your fragility
Did I feel loved?
Despite having a husband
who could not love
I managed to
Hold on
To your drawing breaths
And gawking moments when
you stared at nothing
Then I looked back at ME and smiled.

The hollowed room
Spoke of centuries of women*

*Who cared and endured the
Backhand of husbands
With their wife-beater tanks
and chains of gold.
I was simply another one of them:
A woman who had to endure.*

After reading my poem, Father Brown said, “Own that one; you gave it to the world. And the truth that you put in this poem is worth this entire evening. Thank you.”

Being in a poetry club pushes me to share, which is something that I tend to shy away from. After hours of classes, I am able to go into a meeting where I feel my shoulders and back lose their tension. I can bask in a personal boat where my weekly fishing has brought forth a jumble of carefully caught words. I pushed myself into this event, knowing my voice would crack and tears would spill. I feel invigorated when my poetry is read aloud. I now know that my words are worthy of

an audience, big or small.

My teacher’s words boomed: “I know your witness to the world is going to be a force.”

I’m privileged to be able to celebrate others, as well. Seeing everyone together, writing poetry and reading aloud always makes me proud. At every stanza and every line, I increasingly want to immerse myself in the school community. I always give money for fundraisers, go to Zoom meetings, and celebrate college acceptances. I hope to continue this practice, whether it be at college, work or at clubs.

Through the conquering of my fear, I was able to find the dormant talent in the crevices of my mind and heart. Whenever I am afraid, I remember the famous Lorenzo Anello, who said, “Remember, the saddest thing in the world is wasted talent. You could have all the talent in the world, but if you don’t do the right thing, then nothing happens.”



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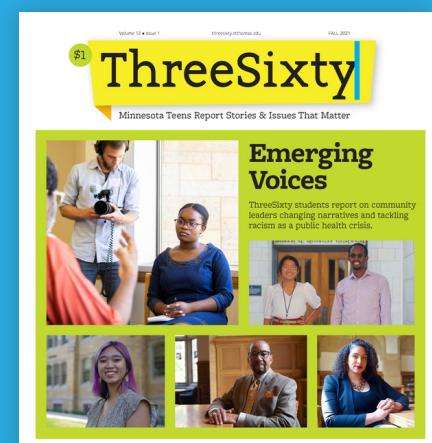


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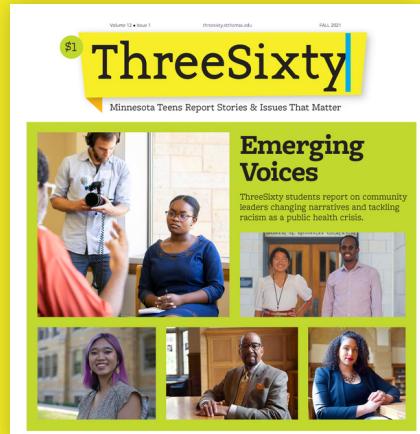
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