

Metropolitan State University

# buzz

FOR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS    SPRING 2020    VOLUME 12, NO. 2



**Metropolitan  
State University 2019  
Alumnus of the Year  
Larry Collette '99**

Metropolitan  
State University





*A Place of Their Own*  
Brynia Johnson  
watercolor on paper, 2017

# Office Hours



Dear Alumni,

Unprecedented times call for unusual responses. Even as President Arthur immerses herself in an extraordinary effort to safeguard the education of 11,000 Metropolitan State University students and the health and spirits of our faculty and staff, she is also thinking about you, our alumni, and friends. As the Vice President for University Advancement, I have had the opportunity to meet many of you, and you are near to my heart, so the President asked me to take on the privilege of addressing you in this issue of *buzz*.

My first thought is about you and what you might be experiencing right now. How has the uncertainty affected your life and the lives of those you know and love? Are you at an increased risk from this pandemic? Many of you are nurses, first responders, and designated essential workers. You are the social worker, the teacher, the IT professional, the public official, and you are all Metro State graduates! This university was founded to educate those who charted their own course and will thrive because of the same people—our alumni.

When we have come through this hard time, there will be time for reflection and storytelling. We want to hear from you. Please share your stories of struggle, triumph, and everything in between with us. Send them to [alumni.relations@metrostate.edu](mailto:alumni.relations@metrostate.edu)—we will compile and share the ‘COVID-19 tales from Metro State’, so we can share the stories of all our initiatives, how we sustained ourselves, what we sacrificed. The past three years have shown me the tremendous strength and resilience of Metropolitan

State graduates; you are exactly who we need to help our communities recover and renew.

When we return to the sweetness of the ordinary, I look forward to gathering together again. We will still plan to celebrate our 50th anniversary and lay the foundation for the next 50 years for our beloved university. Those of you who protect us by going to work and those who protect us by staying home, we honor all of you ... and we are so proud to call you Metro State's own.

With hope and gratitude,

Rita Dibble  
Vice President of University Advancement,  
Executive Director, Metropolitan State University Foundation

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

News	6
News@Metro	
The Big Picture	10
The Dancing Staff	
Spotlight	12
Audacious Goals: Building the GROW-IT Center	
Metro at 50	16
Planning a Celebration	
Big Questions	17
Father Harry Hartigan '91	
Alumni Spotlight	18
Larry Collette '99: 2019 Alumnus of the Year	
Metro Matters	19
Building Habits	
Student Success	22
Creative Solutions	
President's Outstanding Students	23
Fall 2019	
Out and About	26
News and Notes	29
Faculty	32
Setting the Foundations for Success	
From the Director	34
Calendar	35

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Cover photo by Jeff Achen

An equal opportunity educator

# Alumni Association

When I last wrote to you in the Fall of 2019, I don't think any of us could have envisioned what has transpired so far in 2020. I am writing this in mid-March, and it is difficult to know what the spring will hold, and what the conditions will be when you read this. As the Alumni Board President, I would like to commend the administration, faculty, and staff of the university for working to ensure that students can continue their academic journey. I also congratulate the students on their resilience and perseverance during a difficult time. Although I don't have a crystal ball to show me the future, I am confident that we have all learned lessons that will prove invaluable well into the future.

As alumni board members, selecting one of our fellow graduates to be named "Alum of the Year" is one of our greatest pleasures. This year we had several candidates who stood out as leaders in their profession and proved to be inspirational examples of the transformation that happens through a Metropolitan State University education. Selecting the Alum of the Year is always a difficult choice, but I am pleased to share with you that the 2019 Alum of the Year is Larry Collette '99. As you will read in this issue, Larry has a long history and a strong relationship with the university. There is a chance that you served with Larry on the Alumni Board, connected with him at the annual Breakfast at the Capitol, or taken one of his classes in the College of Management. Through his association with Metro State, Larry has been an ardent supporter of our students and Metro State's mission.

I would like to thank Sen. Sandy Pappas '86 with heartfelt appreciation for hosting a very successful Breakfast at the Capitol. Sen. Pappas has been hosting this gathering for more than ten years, and it is always a highlight of the alumni event calendar. This year we moved the location to the larger Étoile Du Nord room in the Capitol to accommodate the 100 plus Metro State participants. Thank you also to Sen. Greg Clausen and proud Metro State parents Sen. Chuck Wiger and Rep. Connie Bernardy, who shared their legislative priorities and answered questions from a very engaged alumni audience. Partnering with our legislators to fund innovation at Metro State is a long-standing tradition.

I'd like to draw your attention to another innovative partnership that is creating a new range of learning opportunities on our Eastside campus: the GROW-IT Center. This innovative learning facility was brought to life with our senators' and representatives' support and a partnership with Urban Roots, a nonprofit organization that serves young people on the east side of Saint Paul.

I look forward to seeing you soon!

Sincerely,

Carmen Shields '15  
President, Alumni Association Board



## 2019-2020 Alumni Board members

- Sandy Best '88
- Steve Campos '17
- Ron Edlund '04
- Isaac Muhammad '12
- Sam Mwangi '01
- Lyna Nyamwaya '09
- Scott Pilgram '10
- Carmen Shields '15
- Andrea Steen '11
- Nancy Uden '88
- Shanasha Whitson '00

Not pictured: Sandy Best '88, Carmen Shields '15

## The Glaze Craze

By Emily Kelson

Even though Metropolitan State is the most affordable comprehensive university in the Twin Cities, paying for college can be a challenge. For many students, it can be difficult to find a job that pays the bills and allows a schedule where they can focus on school. Never, however, underestimate the creativity of motivated students. Students like Metropolitan State University student Jayson Gonzalez.

Jayson developed an entrepreneurial spirit at a young age. He tried his hand at several different business endeavors, but his Krispy Kreme runs were always the most successful. Jayson drives eight hours round trip to Iowa weekly to bring the glazed goodness of Krispy Kreme to people around the Twin Cities. It's a long drive, but the time he spends on the road is definitely not wasted. When Jayson first posted on Facebook Marketplace that he could bring back the donuts, he received over 300 replies. Now, his Facebook page "The Donut Guy" has nearly 8,000 followers. Clearly, people in the Twin Cities need their Krispy Kreme!

Those followers have proved that they are loyal to Jayson and his business. When Krispy Kreme called Jayson and told him to 'cease and desist', his customers backed him entirely. Many of them commented on his page to tell him how happy his runs to Iowa had made them. Others went to the Krispy Kreme page and shamed the donut giant for putting an end to Jayson's runs. With all the attention around the story, Krispy Kreme had to explain their reasoning for the temporary stoppage.

Krispy Kreme explained that they were concerned about the possibility of their product being negatively affected during the transportation process. They wanted to ensure that people were receiving a product that was up to their standards and that the company's image was being upheld. After some discussion, they were able to come up with a deal that allowed Jayson to continue making his runs, establishing his business as limited liability company and becoming licensed as a retail mobile food distributor.

Before the deal was struck, Jayson had fully accepted that he was going to have to think of another business to help him pay for school. Luckily, he can stick with and grow the one that he knows works. A GoFundMe was set up to help Jayson pay for a larger vehicle. However, three weeks after the fund was created he was invited by FreightWaves to speak in Chicago. FreightWaves got in touch with Freightliner Trucks, who gifted Jayson a brand new 2019 Freightliner Sprinter Van. Freightliner Stoops then wrapped the van with his logos. The GoFundMe money was used to cover taxes, registration, business license and related costs, storage, and insurance. The new van can fit 450 dozen donuts!

*Editor's note: The Donut Guy has temporarily suspended operations. He hopes to resume operations when the COVID-19 outbreak has ended. Follow "The Donut Guy" on Facebook for updates.*

*Emily Kelson is a current student at Metropolitan State majoring in Technical Communications and Professional Writing*





## Gift to Support Dual Degree Students

Josephine Su has given Metropolitan State University Foundation a generous gift of \$150,000 to support the Metropolitan State University and China University of Technology (CUTE) Dual Degree students from Taiwan. These students follow a rigorous program of academic pursuits combined with community service, outreach and document their experiences while earning a dual degree.

## Metro State Counts 2020

By Lucia Rivas

“The census helps change the narrative of who is a college student in Minnesota,” says Adrienne Falcon, Minnesota Higher Education Census 2020 Coordinator and Metropolitan State Associate Professor. Through her work, she challenges the assumption that college students are counted during the census in their dorms. Metro State’s diverse student population is not represented that way; they live and work across the Twin Cities. “Doing this work also recognizes the capacity and the power of Metro State students to make a difference in their communities,” continues Adrienne. She thinks the census is a perfect opportunity for both education and mobilization work, actively engaging the people who will benefit most from an accurate count.

Fifty percent of Metro State students are indigenous, black, and people of color, groups the census historically has undercounted. This underrepresentation is a challenge that Metro State is working to overcome as part of its mission to serve non-traditional students and the Twin Cities community. “Metro State is a ‘state model’ for how an institution of higher education can do census work. It is infused at every level of the university,” says Adrienne. “As a faculty member, that is my public scholarship.”

More than 100 students across six different classes have been working alongside faculty and staff on census preparation at Metro State since October 2019. Their goal is to create and spread knowledge about the census with and



Metro State MAPL (Masters in Advocacy and Political Leadership) student and faculty Census 2020 volunteers

for communities in Minnesota. They share efforts with other organizations, ensuring that university students and the community are counted in the 2020 Census and understand the importance of their inclusion. Adrienne and colleagues from Metro State hosted a two-day Summer Census Planning Institute, designed for staff and faculty from campuses across the state. Metro State’s Institute for Community Engagement and Scholarship also launched the Metro State Counts Campaign, a year-long effort to educate ourselves and others about the significance of the 2020 Census and to encourage a complete count statewide.

If you missed filling out the census on April 1, you can still fill it out online (visit [2020census.gov](https://2020census.gov) for more information).

*Lucia Rivas is a current student at Metro State, majoring in Human Resources and Psychology*

# Martin Luther King Day Celebrations at Metro State

All photos by Andy King

A volunteer service project, dinner celebration, and performance by Penumbra Theatre highlighted the celebration “Building CommUNITY and Building our Future: Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s Legacy.”

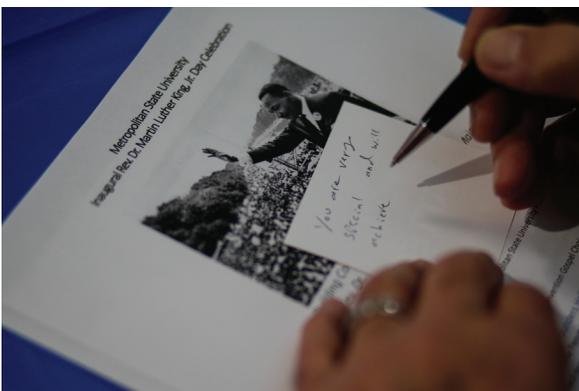
The day kicked off with a community service project to pack grab-and-go snack boxes for students visiting the Food for Thought food pantry on the Saint Paul Campus. The celebration continued in the evening with a soul food dinner in the Great Hall hosted by WCCO reporter Reg Chapman and featured a performance by Minnesota State Baptist Convention Choir. Special Guests Mayor Melvin Carter and State Senator Jeff Hayden delivered remarks to students, alumni, faculty, and guests attending the dinner.

The celebration concluded with a performance by Penumbra Theatre, including a reading of Dr. King’s speeches and a discussion about trauma.

Hosted by Student Affairs; Multicultural, American Indian and Retention Services; and University Advancement, the university looks forward to hosting another celebration in 2021. Save Jan. 21, 2021 on your calendar and watch for details in the Fall 2020 issue of *buzz*.



Volunteers packing MATTER boxes



Writing notes of encouragement to students



Julie Bauch, Hannah Furney, President Ginny Arthur '17



Mayor Melvin Carter addresses dinner guests



Minnesota State Baptist Choir

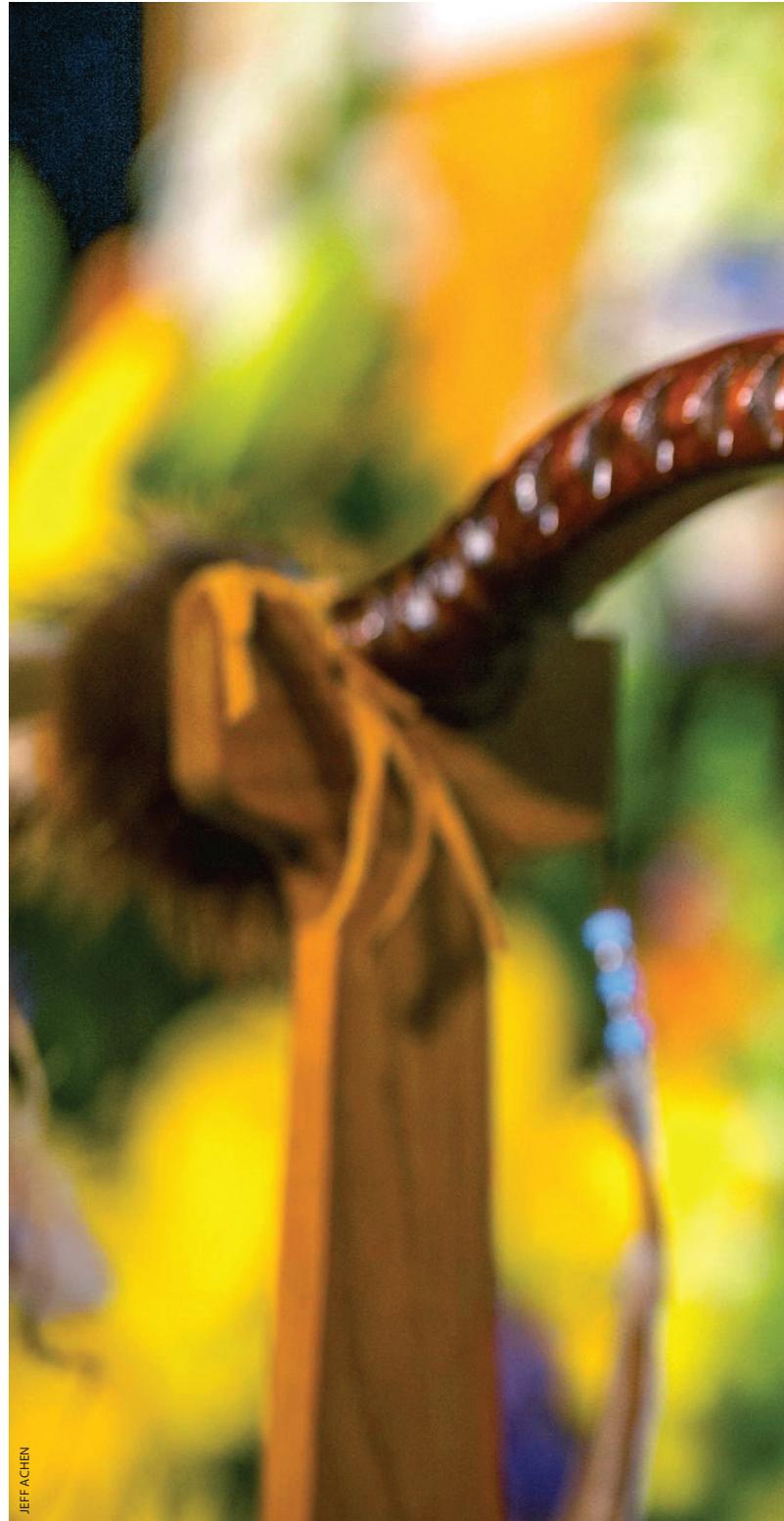
# The Big Picture

## The Dancing Staff

Since 2009, Metropolitan State University presidents have carried a unique dancing staff at commencement ceremonies. Crafted by Wisconsin artist Dick Mindykowski, a member of the Lac Courte Oreilles Tribe, the staff replaces the traditional mace used on ceremonial occasions by other universities.

The dancing staff is made of hand-carved alder wood. Deer leather and antler, beaver and muskrat fur, horse hair, turkey feathers, and French beads are incorporated in the design. The artist selected the materials, which each have special meaning to the Ojibwa people, to reflect Metropolitan State's culture.

Former President Sue K. Hammersmith and her husband, Allyn Uniake, commissioned the staff and gifted it to the university.



JEFF ACHEN



# Spotlight

## Audacious Goals: Building the Grow-It Center

By Jennifer Houston, Emily Kelson, and Jodi Bantley

When the building at 445 Maria Avenue was shuttered in 2008, it became an unwelcome time capsule. Old computers and coffee cups sat where they were left. The former Minnesota Department of Agriculture research facility, used to study pest control, sat vacant for years. However, dedicated individuals from Metropolitan State and the surrounding community saw an opportunity, not an eyesore. Together, they forged a vision to create a space where students and community members could come to learn, teach, and innovate.



Artist rendering of the GROW-IT Center, Phase I

Today, the small site nestled between Metropolitan State's Studio Arts building and the First Lutheran Church has become East Saint Paul's newest treasure. The GROW-IT Center, the Gateway for Research, Outreach, Workforce Development, Innovation, and Teaching, is a year-round greenhouse and educational space designed to generate and share knowledge related to urban food production, healthy food access, and environmental sustainability.

Phase I of the GROW-IT Center project was completed in the fall of 2019, with the grand opening held in early November. This first phase expanded greenhouse space by more than a third, rehabilitated a secure research area, and

equipped the facility with a remote-controlled HVAC system that enables year-round applied research and learning in pest management, soil health, urban tree propagation, and urban food production.

Work to secure the funding for Phase II of the project is underway. The objective in Phase II is to add on to the existing building. The addition will create a versatile space for demonstrations, workshops, and convenings that are critical to maximizing the broad range of teaching, learning, and material exchanges that university and community partners envision.

## Community Connections

Metropolitan State was founded on a commitment to community engagement. Since the university opened in 1971, administrators and faculty have seen the urban location as an asset and community-situated knowledge as a basis for teaching and learning. The school's location creates opportunities for learning outside a traditional classroom. The GROW-IT Center exemplifies what is possible through a community-university partnership.

The benefits of learning, teaching, and research that will happen at the center will have a long-lasting effect. The collaborative nature of this project also ensures those benefits do not go to just one individual; the impact will be felt throughout the community. The GROW-IT Center will help prepare the next generation of scholars and practitioners concerned about achieving food security and a healthy environment.

## Building a Winning Team

In the first five years that the building sat vacant, many ideas surfaced from university faculty and community members about how the building could and should be repurposed. In October 2014, in order to reconcile the competing interests, then Interim University President Devinder Malhotra appointed a team of university representatives to work with community members who wished to begin co-creating the dream that would become the GROW-IT Center. The team, co-chaired by Jodi Bantley, associate director for civic engagement and partnerships at Metropolitan State's Institute for Community Engagement and Scholarship (ICES), and Patsy Noble, executive director of the local nonprofit Urban Roots, included Dr. August Hoffman, professor in the College of Community Studies and Public Affairs; Dr. Mark Asplen, associate professor in the Natural Science Department in the College of Sciences; and, Greg Mellas, director of ICES, alongside several community representatives.

Urban Roots' Executive Director Patsy Noble was a natural and primary ally for this project. Urban Roots is a nonprofit organization that develops leadership, entrepreneurial, and life skills for youth through gardening, cooking, and conservation

programs. The alignment of the Urban Roots curriculum with learning and teaching goals of the Metropolitan State curriculum informed the framework for the mission and the goals of the GROW-IT Center.

Building on a decades-long partnership with the university, Urban Roots' leadership in this effort made perfect sense. Friends of Swede Hollow, a grassroots environmental, community-building group, and the First Lutheran Church, an urban mission-oriented ELCA congregation—also both long-term partners to Metropolitan State's community-engaged learning and outreach activities—joined the coalition of GROW-IT Center partners early in the planning stages as well. Together, Metropolitan State and community partners can achieve the goal of expanding workforce development opportunities in entrepreneurial food production, greenhouse management, community-based gardening, environmental restoration, and, in time, aquaponics.

While shaping the vision, designing the facility, and raising funds to construct it, the project team recognized the importance of identifying the myriad ways that the GROW-IT Center can foster partnerships to enrich student and faculty scholarship, while strengthening the impact of local community organizations. Through direct outreach to prospective community partners, the team learned, for example, of the Hmong American Farmers Association's (HAFA's) interest in sharing their expertise about growing crops and the medicinal use of plants, perhaps in tandem with research by College of Nursing and Health Sciences faculty.

As exploratory conversations took place among prospective partners—within and outside the university—interest in the center as a hub of knowledge exchange became more evident. The center will enrich labs and coursework in multiple university disciplines, propagate edible plants for community-based market gardens, local food pantries, and backyard producers, and contribute native plants for local ecological restoration. The partners envision a broad range of demonstrations, workshops, and continuing education that tap the expertise of scholars and community experts alike, particularly in Phase II of the project.



## **Funding the Dream**

The big goals for the GROW-IT Center are not possible without philanthropic support. Over the five years of planning, this core team, with the help of Metropolitan State's Director of Corporate and Foundation Relations Maureen Acosta, raised the funds that made Phase I of the renovation of the facility a reality.

The City of Saint Paul Neighborhood STAR Program, which supports community-driven capital projects to revitalize city neighborhoods, provided one of the earliest awards for the GROW-IT Center based, at least in part, on the strength of the local coalition. Saint Paul Councilmember Jane Prince (Ward 7) was a strong local advocate for the GROW-IT Center concept.

Foundations rallied around the community development goals of the GROW-IT Center and were interested in how the project team planned to use the space to advance equity goals. Metropolitan State and its partners plan to use the GROW-IT Center to conduct applied research that meets the needs of traditionally underserved partners and local food producers, while contributing to the national discourse on issues related to agriculture, food, and sustainability. This kind of small-scale research does not attract the attention of large research universities, so philanthropy backed Metropolitan State and its community partners as they prepared to fill this gap.

In the 2017 legislative session, Senator Founq Hawj and Representative Sheldon Johnson introduced legislation, co-sponsored by Representative Rod Hamilton, that proposed the state allocate funds to the GROW-IT Center. \$400,000 was appropriated for the project that year through the Minnesota Department of Agriculture (MDA), with the condition that the university renovate the existing structure and complete an addition, which is now known as Phase II of the GROW-IT Center project.

The state allocation is the primary source of funding for Phase II, but only covers about half of the cost of the addition. As the GROW-IT Center partners continue to pursue funds to complete Phase II, they appreciate the support of legislators and MDA officials, notably former Commissioner Dave Frederickson and Assistant Commissioner Whitney Place.

## **Our Past, Present, and Future**

The GROW-IT Center can connect us to our past, present, and future. We make a deeper connection to our cultural history when we learn about farming and crop production. Humans have created and cultivated thousands of different kinds of plants throughout history. These plants continue to make up what we eat today. The connection people have to food varies from culture to culture and person to person.

The GROW-IT Center is a place where students and the community can learn about their own and other cultures' relationship to food and farming.

While land grant universities have partnered with large-scale agricultural producers since the late 1800s, the GROW-IT Center is distinct because it emphasizes a hyper-local set of community-university partnerships across multiple disciplines related to urban food production, healthy food access, and environmental sustainability. Because our Dayton's Bluff neighborhood is so richly diverse, the exchanges that are possible among partners will embody many cultural practices and ways of knowing. Many of those deeply-rooted practices have earned favor as a return to locally sourced and organically produced foods has surged in the US in the last 20 years.

Research shows that when people have access to green space and nature, their mental health improves. One study, led by Stanford researchers, found that access to nature aided in emotion regulation. During that study, one group went for a walk in the woods and another walked along the highway. The researchers found that the part of the brain that focuses on negative emotions was not as active in the participants who were in nature, as it was in the participants who walked along the highway. This finding linked rapid urbanization to increased mental health issues. The GROW-IT Center will help build Saint Paul's Eastside community connection to nature as Friends of Swede Hollow and other partners use the space to cultivate native plants to care for public parks and gardens.

Finally, the GROW-IT Center helps us focus on the future. The world is at a critical moment in efforts to slow or stop climate change. As the world's population continues to grow, sustainable farming practices are an essential part of this effort. Our lives depend on what the earth can provide, and we, therefore, have the responsibility to act sustainably. The GROW-IT Center is a place where researchers, students, and community members can explore the question of how to act more sustainably. These connections to our shared past, present, and future is part of the reason that the community has stuck with this project, even when it seemed like it was not going to happen.

## **Bumps in the Road**

Achieving big goals is rarely smooth sailing. There have been challenges along the path to open the GROW-IT Center. The first challenge was time. For many of the team members, this started as a passion project, something that they worked on in addition to their regular duties. Costs were a second challenge. Original budget estimates for the renovation project were based on prices during and immediately after the Great Recession, a time when construction prices were

low. By the time Metropolitan State was ready to start the renovation, the economy had recovered, and the cost of construction was much higher than originally anticipated. Facing a budget of almost double what had been planned, it was at this juncture that the project team decided to split the GROW-IT Center construction into two phases: Phase I to renovate the greenhouse and research space and Phase II to expand the facility to include a small IT-equipped classroom, demonstration space, and a second accessible restroom (thereby increasing occupancy limits.)

**The Next Goal - Phase II**

After Phase I was completed in the fall of 2019, Metropolitan State and Urban Roots began to plant a variety of native landscape plants, vegetables, and herbs in the newly constructed greenhouse. Faculty, students, and community members are learning how a greenhouse works and from each other—laying the groundwork for more expansive partnerships over time.

Today, the core team of champions and community



Judy Barka, Mark Asplen

partners is working towards their Phase II goal. Never losing sight of the big picture, the university and its partners are still trying to raise approximately \$500,000 to complete the Phase II facility expansion, including identifying opportunities to name parts of the facility after the university’s most generous supporters. This is a critical juncture for the project. The university must raise the remaining funds in the next six to nine months, or jeopardizes the funding appropriated by the State for the GROW-IT Center.

**The Power to Make it Happen**

The chance to turn a forgotten, abandoned facility into a vibrant, productive place for community-university exchange has been a humbling experience for all involved. The team’s passion and perseverance will create an innovative space that will continue to deepen the reciprocity in university-community partnerships, involving a broad, diverse range of organizations and multiple academic disciplines. Instruction and programming in the space will expand workforce and entrepreneurial development in greenhouse management, urban gardening, environmental science, ecological restoration, and research, as well as increase local plant propagation.

The university will use the space to bridge theory and practice for its students, enhancing existing Biology, Geology, Environmental Science, and Psychology courses and aligning them with the work of community partners. The center will be home to a stream of students from K-12 schools, community colleges, and Metropolitan State as they advance their education and careers.

Along the long road to achieve their GROW-IT Center dreams, the team never lost sight of the ultimate impact of their work. The applied research and learning made possible in the GROW-IT Center will help shape our community’s future. The students that learn here—from K-12 youth to university students—will play a role in determining what we eat and how we eat it, as they work in various roles along the food production and consumption process. Other students will become our community’s ecological stewards, restoring habitats and creating new public green spaces that help mitigate climate change.

The GROW-IT Center is a reminder that being forgotten and being lost are not the same thing. This project’s supporters have shown us that, if we truly want better for our community, we have the power to make it happen.

*If you or your organization are interested in supporting the Phase II expansion of the GROW-IT Center, including naming opportunities, please contact the Metropolitan State University Foundation at [foundation@metrostate.edu](mailto:foundation@metrostate.edu) or 651-793-1830.*

***Rebuilding the GROW-IT Center would not have been possible without the philanthropic support of our funders. We would like to express our gratitude to our community partners for helping the vision come to life.***

The Bush Foundation  
 CHS Foundation  
 East Side Funders Group  
 F.R. Bigelow Foundation  
 The Hardenbergh Foundation  
 The Manitou Fund

The McNeely Foundation  
 Minnesota Department of Agriculture  
 Neighborhood STAR Program  
 Nexus Community Partners  
 Saint Paul Foundation

# Metro at 50

## Planning a Celebration

Throughout the school year, President Arthur has been meeting with alumni, students, faculty, staff, and community members to brainstorm ideas about Metro State's 50th Anniversary Celebration. Around the Twin Cities and across the country, we have gathered to share ideas about the celebratory year and activities that will reflect a genuinely Metro State experience. We have gathered hundreds of ideas from more than 300 alumni, students, faculty, staff, and local community leaders, and some themes have emerged repeatedly.

When we asked who to include in the celebrations it has been gratifying to hear:

- Community, resident, and retired faculty;
- The Eastside neighborhood;
- Students and alumni; and
- First-generation college students.

As to how we should celebrate, the top recommendation so far has been "a huge cake!" Other popular ideas include:

- An expanded Fall Fest with food, music, and a community picnic;
- Academic projects, in the form of video, art, literature, or history, celebrating our 50th anniversary;
- Joint events with our community college partners; and
- Fundraising events.

Our stakeholders think we should celebrate these elements of Metropolitan State:

- The diversity of students, alumni, faculty, and staff;
- Our focus on investing in learning;
- Our many locations, past and present (including memories of the upstairs loft at the current Yoerg's Brewing Co., the bank vault at 8th and Hennepin, church basements, and office buildings); and
- Our "adult" (post-traditional) learners.

Alumni still have opportunities to get involved! Plan to join us at one of the remaining 50 Conversation sessions. Our gatherings are on pause for now, but we hope to resume this summer. Follow our Facebook page, Metro at 50: Planning a Celebration, to keep up to date with news and events for the 50th anniversary. If you can't attend an event, we still want to hear from you. Please use the attached postcard to share your ideas for Metro State's biggest celebration yet!



Founding university president David Sweet, Gov. Wendell Anderson



Ann Blonston '75, Ginny McCain (Johnson) '74



Annie Belle Calhoun, Yusef Mgeni '74



Mary Ellen Bennett (Wilson) '86

# Big Questions

## Father Harry Hartigan '91

Interview by Emily Kelson

*When you meet Father Harry Hartigan, you realize why he closes each email with “This isn’t your Grandma’s Catholic Church.” The founder of the Order of Mychal, LGBTQ+ advocate, and prison outreach pastor is a parent, foster-parent, grandparent, volunteer, and the list goes on.*

### **Why did you decide to attend Metropolitan State University?**

My parents instilled compassion for others in their children. My Catholic upbringing nagged at me that my wife and I should be doing something to help kids who were struggling and simply needed to know a secure and loving family. My own kids were spoiled! We became an emergency foster home for teenage males in Dakota County. This was the beginning of my need to return to school. The children who were placed with us were amazing human beings, but they needed someone to understand all that they had experienced in their short lives. We were privileged people and hadn’t experienced what these children had. I returned to school to learn about chemical dependency and counseling for these children.

### **Would you have been as motivated to go back to school if you had not become a foster parent?**

I might not have as my career was good, and education didn’t seem to be an issue at that point in my life. My own struggles made going back to school even more difficult. No one ever realized that I was attention-deficit hyperactive and had great difficulty connecting the dots.

Over five years, we fostered 105 children; most were teenage males. Many of these young men were set on a course they didn’t understand, nor were able to change. I think that my own kids and the foster kids wanted me home more. Working full time and going to school a couple nights a week did make things challenging for everyone. In the ’80s, Metro State didn’t have a campus, and the faculty were people of great vision. The concept of a school for working adults was awesome.

### **You’ve held many titles in your life, when did you decide to change careers?**

In the ’80s, things were different. My job was to be the provider [for my family] which was priority one. School was a luxury. During my time at Metro State, I took a class in human

sexuality with Randi Randolph and that began my coming out process. I had pushed all those feelings in the closet, slammed the door closed, and tossed away the key when I got married. As things turned out, my employer wasn’t very supportive of folks who were LGBTQ. In 1987, they got wind of my journey, and I was streamlined out of my job. A senior VP told me that I should complete my education and move on.

### **That must have been really challenging. Did your Metro State degree help you move forward?**

The value of my Metro State education came into action the years following graduation. Once a person steps into the world with their degree, lifelong learning truly begins. Everything I learned at Metro State blossomed and grew with each new day and adventure.

In my various careers (flight attendant and trainer, paralegal, and insurance sales and administrator), my listening and counseling skills were used daily. In my volunteer work, the creative thinking and collaboration skills I was gifted with at Metro State came into play. The work that I have done in the LGBTQA community demonstrates these skills. The professors at Metro State instill critical thinking skills every step of the way.

I have always been proud of my Metro State education—it wasn’t easy—but truly worth it. Metro State had a major hand in helping me become a proud and productive gay person. So many of the professors at Metro State helped to guide me and encourage me even when I doubted myself. These incredible folks were AWESOME!

### **What advice would you give to current students and your fellow alumni?**

I would tell current students, alumni and my children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren to be passionate about something that will make a difference and to give back to your community a portion of what you have been given. We face so many challenges, but if each of us gave back, we could overcome many of these challenges. Stepping outside of ourselves helps others and helps us be the best we can be.

*“Once a person steps into the world with their degree, lifelong learning truly begins.”*

# Alum of the Year

Larry Collette '99, 2019 Alumnus of the Year

By Matthew Spillum '06

When asked, “What is the biggest idea you associate with Metropolitan State University?”, Larry Collette '99, Metro State's 2019 Alumnus of the Year, doesn't hesitate. “Metro State started as the university without walls and without classrooms, offering students competency-based education. The College of Individualized Studies carries on this value today. Metro, over the last twenty years or so, has seen a tremendous transformation. It has kept the opportunity for students the same, focused on competencies and individualized education, while it has expanded and transformed into a true university: From the great facilities we have to the great breadth of degree programs, to certifications, and offering great diversity, all for the adult learner. It is just a great lifelong learning environment.”



Collette may be as connected to Metropolitan State as anyone could be. As a student, community faculty, mentor, and Alumni Association Board member and past-president, Collette could be said to have done it all. While he himself came to Metro as an adult—after years in the business world—he had been aware of it long before that. “A lot of folks in the business community were looking at Metro State for its flexibility of programming and its competency model. Also, my next oldest brother is a ’79 graduate.” Following some time focusing on his business career, he “decided to look at refreshing myself and so I applied to the MBA program at Metro. It hooked me right from the beginning, with the flexibility, the course offerings, the interaction with other adult learners, and particularly the faculty—both practitioners and resident faculty.” Like many alumni, Collette recognizes that he has a lot to be grateful for. “I want to thank my family and especially my wife Dianne for supporting me in my education journeys. And I thank my MBA mentor, Carol Borman Young and my Department Chair Marcia Hagen for nominating me. I also thank the Alumni Board for their consideration and awarding me this honor.”



Bill Collette '79, Larry Collette '99

Collette was no stranger to college instruction himself. “I’ve been teaching as an adjunct for twenty-some years. I taught human resources at the University of St. Thomas, and then moved over to the University of Minnesota and taught small business and entrepreneurship for almost ten years.” This background did not go unnoticed at his new alma mater. “I was approached by the Provost at the time, Gary Seiler, and asked, as a graduate, why I wasn’t teaching here. One thing led to another and I was hired to teach the capstone course in the College of Management.”

In regard to his work with the Alumni Association Board, Collette “blames” his MBA study group for getting him involved: “One of my study partners, Christine Harrell ’98, got involved in the Alumni Association. She and the previous Alumni Director, Sheila Mohr ’82, encouraged me to get involved. Eventually, I was asked to join the board, after Christine had relocated to another state, and there I was on the board.” Over the course of his six-year tenure on the board, Collette was president for his final two-and-a-half years.

The time on the Alumni Association Board is just one example of the ways Collette has stepped up and stepped into areas needing leadership and guidance. “As a teacher I like to give back by mentoring and coaching and offering my experience to other lifelong learners. I try to contribute to the success of our students and alumni. In addition to getting involved with teaching, I participated in the GEMS (Guiding, Empowering, Mentoring, Success) Mentoring program.”

Collette has stepped up during some of the University Foundation’s biggest initiatives, including the Coleman and Jerry Cotton Golf Tournaments. “In my tenure, we had the Coleman Tournament, which benefitted scholarships for Urban Education, and the Jerry Cotton Tournament for Law Enforcement, which I was very involved with, working with Jerry’s widow, Jan Cotton.” Even though those tournaments have ceased, Collette continues to attend Metro State events regularly: “Even on Friday (Feb. 28, 2020), I’ll be up at Breakfast at the Capitol with Senator Pappas ’86, the administration, and other alumni to tout Metro and our requests to the legislature.”

## Alum of the Year *continued*

One theme that Collette returns to again and again when talking about Metro State is its growth and transformation. “When I last looked at it, in a recent mailing, Metropolitan State has over 49,000 graduates. When I was here in ’98–’99 for my studies, I think it was about 18,000 or 20,000. So, that’s phenomenal growth, especially for potential engagement of our alumni.” He notes that this engagement has improved—by his estimation—in recent years. “The challenge we have been wrestling with is engaging these folks, and I think it has been getting better with President Arthur and (Alumni Relations Director) Kristine Hansen ’07. They are doing a lot more interaction and events with alumni, especially as they plan and prepare and receive input from alumni as to how to celebrate the great achievement of Metro State turning 50 years old. Our alumni have a tremendous amount of talent and skills to tap into, and we have to continue to work on ways to connect

and provide opportunities for alumni to give back, to provide mentorship, participate in some kind of coaching, volunteer activities, internships, and contributions, etc.”

For Collette, those connections are key. “I connect with a fair amount of my former students, as well as my former study group members from my master’s program. I’ve helped some of those students as they move on in their careers, or if they are going on to advanced degrees, I’ve written letters of recommendation.” In particular, he singles out the cohorts of Taiwanese students he works with in the capstone class. “These students are here at Metro for one year of studies from Taiwan, and I am connecting more and more with these young people as they go back to Taiwan and continue their professional journey. That’s all part of what Metro offers, and it’s pretty phenomenal. We need to get people to talk about Metro and support it financially as well as volunteering their time and talents.”

Collette’s passion as an alumnus, advocate, instructor, and, indeed, lifelong learner is as strong as ever. He looks at the Metro State of today as a well of potential. “There was a time when we were the best-kept secret, but I think that President Ginny Arthur, in particular, has done a great job of making sure that we are well known for our educational offerings. Our graduates are in so many businesses and industries in the metropolitan area and throughout the country. We could do so much more with their support. Whether it is through financial contributions, which are always welcomed, or finding ways to give back through time, talent, and resources, we alumni should be giving back.”



Larry Collette '99 and Jean Hart '79

### *Strengthen what you love about Metro State by making a gift.*

- Give online at [www.metrostate.edu/give/give-now](http://www.metrostate.edu/give/give-now)
- Mail your gift to 700 East Seventh Street, FH142, Saint Paul, MN 55106
- Take advantage of your matching gift benefits. Many companies match their employees’ donations. Check with your employer to see if your company will match your support to Metro State.

# Metro Matters

Habits are the patterns that shape our lives and help achieve our big accomplishments, like those you've read about in this issue. What were some of your habits as a student? Setting aside a certain amount of time each week to study? Sitting in the same seat each week in class? Checking in with an advisor, professor, or mentor on a regular basis? Habits like these helped you reach your goal of completing your degree.

Metropolitan State University alumni shape new sets of habits after graduating by starting, stopping, or modifying routines in pursuit of their next big goal. When these habits create some reward, even if small like a positive feeling, they stick with them. I am lucky to work with Metro State alumni, friends, faculty, and staff to develop habits of philanthropy that impact their lives and the Metro State community, especially our current students.

The ancient Greeks viewed philanthropy as “love of humankind,” and there are a lot of ways that love shows up in the Metro State community. To make philanthropy a habit, you can:

- Give! Support the Metro Fund, student scholarships, or university programs by giving at [www.metrostate.edu/give/give-now](http://www.metrostate.edu/give/give-now) or sending your gift to The Metropolitan State University Foundation, 700 East Seventh Street, Saint Paul, MN 55106. Give on the anniversary of your graduation, at the holidays, or you can also easily set up a recurring gift to spread out your giving throughout the year. Studies have found that giving money to others makes us feel happier, improves our health, builds feelings of cooperation and connectedness, and inspires others to give as well. Plus, you'll make a real difference in the lives of students at Metro State.
- Volunteer! Share your experience and knowledge with a class. Host a Metro State intern at your company. Serve on the Alumni Board. Use the consistency of the semester schedule to learn about opportunities to volunteer. Volunteering has been shown to counteract stress, anxiety, and depression; build a sense of purpose; and can support career advancement for you and Metro State students.



- Stay Informed! By keeping up to date on what's happening on campus, you'll find opportunities to provide input and be able to recommend Metro State to others. Use the regularity of the alumni e-newsletter (sign up at [www.metrostate.edu/alumni](http://www.metrostate.edu/alumni)) or the publication of *buzz* to check-in with Metro State.

Building your philanthropic habits will enhance your life and that of Metro State students who are working toward their goal to graduate. Your gift of treasure, talent, or time will ease the burden for our students and let them know our community supports them.

Thanks for sharing your love of humankind with Metropolitan State.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Emily Seddon". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Emily Seddon  
Development Director  
651-793-1807

# Student Success

## Creative Solutions

By Emily Seddon

Adefunke Edon is eager to make a change in the world. Adefunke says, “I know where I am headed; I just don’t know how.” After a short conversation with Adefunke, you will realize she’s an expert in figuring out “the how.” She is also quick to give credit to those who have supported her in figuring it out.

Adefunke moved to Minnesota from Benin to go to college. A native French-speaker, Adefunke had learned basic English in school but did not feel ready for college-level work in English. She took English as a second language classes at Normandale Community College before enrolling at Saint Paul College, where she earned her associate degree in 2016.

Completing her four-year degree had always been the plan, but Adefunke needed a way to pay for it. After meeting with a recruiter at Saint Paul College, she enlisted in the Minnesota National Guard, excited for the tuition benefits and leadership opportunities. Adefunke went to bootcamp in the summer of 2016, right before she started at Metro State.

As a transfer student in the sciences, Adefunke joined the Jason Carter Kickstart Program, which helped her transition from Saint Paul College to Metropolitan State University. The two-week Kickstart Program created a supportive learning cohort for students like Adefunke, who were working hard and wanted to see that work reflected in their grades. The curriculum taught integrated lessons on scientific reading, technical writing, graphical literacy, and logic. Beyond these lessons, the group also discussed time management, stress reduction techniques, and resources for students at the university.

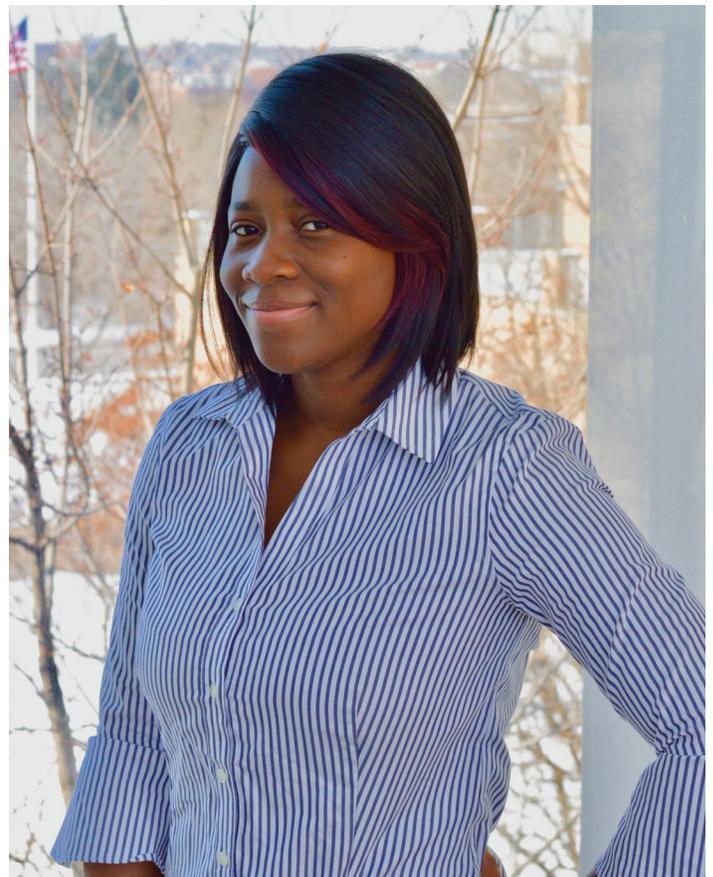
Adefunke was also assigned an advisor, Dr. Cindy Harley, who checked in with her regularly throughout the semester. Adefunke admitted that she had never thought about applying for scholarships because the application essays overwhelmed her. Her advisor encouraged her to apply for all the awards that she was eligible for—and pointed out that some of the Metropolitan State Foundation’s scholarships do not require essays.

This turned out to be good advice. Adefunke received a Reginald and Frances Coakley Ames Scholarship and a Science Education Retention Scholarship during her junior and senior years, respectively, at Metropolitan State. These awards were part of the personal touch that Adefunke says

makes Metropolitan State so unique. “It’s a small school,” she said, “you run into the same people over and over. The teachers know your name, and they actually read your assignments to give you feedback.”

The scholarship awards eased Adefunke’s financial burden, but she still had to work to pay her way through school. On the recommendation of a friend, Adefunke applied and was hired as a pharmacy technician. She was excited to do work that was related to what she wanted to do in the future. She hopes to someday work in healthcare in her home country of Benin.

Adefunke graduated this past April with her bachelor of science in biology, although her graduation ceremony has been postponed until August due to COVID-19. She plans to take a gap year before she pursues a physician’s assistant degree. She says, “There is a difference between ‘book smart’ and ‘world smart.’ You need both, and I want to get more experience now that I have my degree.”



# President's Outstanding Graduates

## Fall 2019 Award Recipients

Each semester, members of the faculty and academic advisors nominate undergraduate and graduate students from their respective colleges to be recognized at the President's Outstanding Student Award Reception. The university celebrated the Fall 2019 graduates on Saturday, Dec. 7, 2019.



**Moustapha Bande** graduated summa cum laude with a bachelor of science in accounting from the College of Management. Bande is studying for his certification in public accountancy and plans to pursue other professional accreditations as a Certified Fraud Examiner and Certified Information Systems Auditor.

Nominator Craig Wilson describes Bande as both a scholar and a leader: "His grade point average is one measurement of great scholastic accomplishment that does not show his leadership. Moustapha was a real leader...always contributing to the class discussion."

**Andre Barnes** graduated with a bachelor of science in social studies teaching from the School of Urban Education. Barnes made the spring 2017 dean's list at Metropolitan State and received both the King Leadership Camp Award and Youth Service Award from the YMCA of the Greater Twin Cities.

"Andre is dependable, capable, and disciplined about his development as an exceptional teacher of urban learners in his community," said Barnes' nominator Nadine Haley. "He understands that cooperative learning is essential to making a difference in the lives of urban learners. Andre demonstrates [a] commitment to teaching as well as to making a difference in the quality of education for his community."



**Guy Bowling** graduated magna cum laude with an undergraduate individualized degree from the College of Individualized Studies. Bowling has been the director of a Responsible Fatherhood Program for 20 years. Active in community service, Bowling is a board member at PICA Head Start, a member of Take Action MN, the founder of the Festival of Fathers, and was the 2014 recipient of the Outstanding Individual of the Year Award at the Minnesota Fathers and Families Network Annual Conference. He plans to pursue a master's in public affairs after graduation.



**Jauston Campbell**, graduated with a master of science in technical communication from the College of Liberal Arts. Committed to community service, Campbell volunteers as an usher at the Ordway Theater, is a media specialist in the Army Reserves, and serves on the board of the CapitolRiver Council.

“Jauston possesses a rare combination of traits,” explained Campbell’s nominator Victoria Sadler. “He comes from a filmmaking background, he serves in the Army Reserve, and he is the first in his family to earn a graduate degree. I’m proud that Metropolitan State is his springboard to higher education.”



**Donte Kendricks** graduated summa cum laude with a bachelor of science in law enforcement from the College of Community Studies and Public Affairs. Employed as a police sergeant for the city of Chula Vista, Calif., he is active in community service being an instructor and an instructor supervisor in the Chula Vista Citizens and Teen Academy, which is an extension of the city’s Community Oriented Policing. He also works as an adjunct professor at Miramar Community College and South Western Community College, where he teaches courses focused on law enforcement topics.

“I worked with Donte in several classes, and I can say he is one of the top students I have had the privilege of working with at Metropolitan State University,” said nominator Susan Hilal. “The quality of his work exceeded expectations and demonstrated depth and breadth. It was clear he was an authority...and knows how to look at a problem from various perspectives.”

**Mai Nyua Lee** graduated magna cum laude with a bachelor of arts in creative writing from the College of Liberal Arts. A first-generation college student who earned an associate’s degree in accounting in 2005 and a graduate of Humboldt High School, Lee also served as editor, business manager, and a contributor for the student publication, *Haute Dish*. She also tutored writing at the Hmong Cultural Center.

“I have had Mai in three writing class[es] over the last two years. I nominated her for various reasons,” said nominator Suzanne Nielsen ’97. “She is a student who is passionate about learning and brings her passion to a classroom environment. Most of all, she has a poet’s soul.”



**Sariah Marth** graduated magna cum laude with a bachelor of science in chemistry from the College of Sciences. She is a recipient of the Jason R. Carter Science Retention Scholarship. She has worked with both Metropolitan State and University of Minnesota professors on organic synthesis-based research and computational chemistry projects in the past. She is considering pursuing advanced degrees in chemistry.

“Sariah has approached her classes with great intellectual curiosity,” said one of Marth’s nominators, Sarah Dimick Gray. “I believe it is appropriate to say she has just inhaled all this knowledge and all the possibilities it brings, and at the same time, exhaled with great intellectual liberation.”



**Merlin Mathew** graduated with a master of science degree in management information systems from the College of Management. She is employed as a management analyst at MINNCOR Industries with the Minnesota Department of Corrections. Mathew plans on continuing to climb the career ladder toward becoming a successful IT manager or pursuing her dream job as a business analyst. She may eventually return to Metropolitan State to pursue professional certifications in business analysis and systems, applications, and products (SAP) in data analysis.

**Munira Maalim Isaq**, graduated with an entry level master of science in nursing from the, College of Nursing and Health Sciences. Isaq previously earned a health management degree from the University of Minnesota. She currently works on a telemetry unit at a Methodist Hospital. She served as vice president of the Metropolitan State's Nursing Student Organization for three years, organized on-campus blood drives, and maintained a partnership with the American Red Cross.

“It's been a pleasure teaching Munira,” said one of Isaq's nominators, Deborah Matthias-Anderson. “Her impact on the Somali community and contributions to the profession of nursing are already substantial. Her future is bright and wide open.”



**Mariah Wilberg** graduated with a master of public administration from the College of Community Studies and Public Affairs. She is the Statewide HIV Strategy and Services Coordinator with the Minnesota Department of Human Services. In 2019, she was invited to serve as Plenary Speaker at the United States Conference on AIDS. She was honored in the inaugural 40 Under 40 in Public Health by the de Beaumont Foundation, and received both the Esther J. Tomljanovich Award and a Minnesota Department of Health Star Honors Award for Positive Impact.

“Mariah is smart, dedicated, and motivated to be a positive voice,” said one of Wilberg's nominators, Crystal Fashant. “Her capstone project is a large undertaking whereby she is creating national standards around HIV/AIDS education so that they are based on the most current science, and this will be disseminated widely via the Minnesota Department of Health.”

# Out and About

## Retiree Luncheon

The Alumni Relations Office and Alumni Director Emerita Shelia Mohr '82 were pleased to host a gathering of retired faculty and staff for a luncheon this fall. President Ginny Arthur '17 addressed the group to share updates about the university and ask for their input for the upcoming 50th anniversary celebration. The gathering of old friends and colleagues will become an annual event.



President Arthur addresses the group



Sheila Mohr, President Arthur



Beverly Ferguson, President Arthur



Alice Magnuson, Daniel Abebe

## Metro State and Century Together

This October, alumni who graduated from both Century College and Metropolitan State University gathered at Clutch Brewing in Saint Paul to connect and hear from Metro State President Ginny Arthur and Century College President Angelea Millender.

It was particularly fitting to hold this joint alumni event at Clutch Brewing, owned by Jordan Standish '12 and Max Boeke '18, who are alumni of both schools.



President Ginny Arthur, Max Boeke '16, Jordan Standish '12, President Angelea Millender



Lutunji Abram '07, Emily Seddon, Em Antin '06

## Building Your Network

Alumni of the accounting and human resources programs got together to network at an event hosted by SALO in Minneapolis. College of Management Dean Rassule Hadidi, and President Ginny Arthur, addressed the group and participated in a panel discussion about building your network through alumni connections.



President Arthur, Dean Rassule Hadidi



Robert Morrison, David Nkwonta '04, Scott Pilgam '10



Mallory Mitchell, Nancy Uden '88

# Breakfast at the Capitol

All photos by Jeff Achen

At the start of each Minnesota State legislative session, Sen. Sandy Pappas '86 hosts her fellow alumni for Breakfast at the Capitol. At this year's event, alumni had the opportunity to hear from Sen. Pappas, Sen. Greg Clausen, Sen. Chuck Wiger, and Rep. Connie Bernardy. The lively discussion included a show of support by the legislators for many of the items on Metro State's legislative agenda.



Sandy Best '88, Sen. Pappas, President Ginny Arthur '17



President Arthur, Sen. Greg Clausen



Sen Pappas, Steve Campos '17



Sen. Chuck Wiger, Sandy Best



Sen. Wiger, Sandy Best, Sen. Pappas, President Arthur, Sen. Clausen

# News and Notes

Note: All towns are in Minnesota unless otherwise noted.

**D.A. Abrams** '95, Orlando, Fla., has been named the new managing director of the Center for Financial Planning. Abrams will provide leadership and vision to the center as well as work to increase the diversity, inclusion, and sustainability of the financial planning profession. Abrams is a Certified Association Executive (CAE) with experience in both private and nonprofit organizations.

**Dr. Jamal Adam**, '04, Duluth, was named interim dean of liberal arts and sciences for Lake Superior College in Duluth. He will provide leadership for associate degree programs in arts and fine arts, as well as transfer and online programs. Dr. Adam previously worked at Minneapolis Community and Technical College as program director for multicultural student support activities.

**Brett Anderson** '14, Saint Paul, was honored by Minnesota State University, Mankato with the Distinguished Young Alumni Award, which honors graduates who are 35 years old or younger who have positively impacted their communities and show promise for continued success. Anderson is a registered nurse, a certified public health nurse, and a board-certified nurse executive.



**Driss Amara** '15, Minneapolis, made his coaching debut as the running back coach for the Madison East High School Purgolders football team.



In an interesting twist, Amara's brother Ebrahim, is the defensive line coach at the rival high school, Madison La Follette.

**Creig Andreassen** '97, Minneapolis, has joined the regional law firm of Lommen Abdo as a shareholder in its Minneapolis office.



Andreassen's practice excels in Minnesota real estate law and helping banks work through troubled loans. He is certified by the Minnesota State Bar Association as a real property specialist. He also serves as an adjunct professor of negotiations at Mitchell Hamline School of Law.

**Joy Dolo** '11, Saint Paul, made her debut at the Guthrie Theater in a production of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night*. She is also a founding member of Blackout Improv, an all-Black improvisational comedy theater troupe based in Minneapolis.

**Gregg Drost** '93, Minnetonka, has retired from 27 years with Honeywell. He says that his Metropolitan State degrees—undergrad and MBA—made the success and longevity of his career a possibility.



**Dennis D. Jones** '01, North Oaks, although previously retired, has rejoined the workforce to become the new Fire Chief for the city of Andover. Jones, who started as a firefighter in 1989, retired in 2018, but found retirement "boring" and wanted to put his extensive education back to work. Jones is proud to be part of a team again. He plans to maintain the Andover Fire Department's reputation as fire department of the year.

**Akmed Khalifa** '08, Homestead, Penn., has recently published two books. *Cult of the Imaginary Circle* is a tale of tyranny, extreme hazing, extortion, and institutionalized violence in a legendary high school football program. *Hoppy Jones and the Broccoli Cascade* is the story of a warm-hearted, 7-year-old boy who loves everything about broccoli.



**Col. John R. Kreye** '97, Brooklyn Park, has retired from a distinguished career as Officer Senior Trainer in the 34th Infantry Division of the Minnesota National Guard. He credits his success in designing training exercises and advising the senior staff to the business degree he earned from Metropolitan State, as it taught him a lot about organization, finance, strategy, and project management.

**Scott Long** '19, Otsego, was sworn in as police officer for the city of Maple Grove. Officer Long, who—in his words—comes from "a law enforcement family," has a Bachelor of Science degree in law enforcement as well as a certificate of law enforcement skills. He was assigned to solo patrol in January 2020.

**Michael McMahan** '05, Osseo, was named the new senior vice president and healthcare leader at Ryan Companies. McMahan has been a leader in healthcare integration, performance improvement, and enterprise resource planning implementation initiatives. He was also recently named the chairman-elect for the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce.

**Aundria Morgan** '95, Minneapolis, has released a new memoir by Wise Ink Publishers entitled *Smiling is not Resilience*. It, along with her debut memoir *Cross My Heart and Hope to Die*, is available for purchase on Amazon.

**Michael O'Connor**, PhD '92, Lino Lakes, was named the recipient of the 2019 Minnesota Campus Compact President's Civic Steward Award for Metropolitan State University. This award is for a member of the faculty, administration, or staff or for a group that has significantly advanced their campus' distinctive civic mission by forming strong partnerships, supporting others' civic engagement, and working to institutionalize a culture and practice of engagement.

**Bukola Oriola** '17, Anoka, was published in the Nigerian newspaper, *Leadership*. Her article, "Woman of Substance – Stay True to Yourself," chronicles the personal and professional journey that has led her to repeated presidential appointments to the U. S. Advisory Council on Human Trafficking.



Bukola sees herself as "the next Oprah" and is a self-confessed "Coca Cola lover."



**Elizabeth Penny** '19, Northfield, was announced the winner of the Great Plains Sociological Association Undergraduate Student Paper Award. Penny's paper, "*The Art of Nonviolence*," examines the conditions that

legitimize modern non-violent resistance using the contemporary examples of the Line 3 resistance and the German anti-coal group, Ende Gelände.

**De'Vonna Pittman** '12, Minneapolis, announced her candidacy for the office of Hennepin County Board of Commissioners, District 1. Her platform focuses on affordable housing, workforce development, and reduction of disparities and inequities. She believes "that engaged and empowered people create healthier communities."

**Mary Post** '98, Apex, NC, has been named the new chief executive officer (CEO) of the American Academy of Neurology (AAN), the world's largest association of neurologists and neuroscience professionals, headquartered in Minneapolis. Post will start her new role in the Spring of 2020.

**Amy Sands**, Golden Valley, assistant professor for Metropolitan State's School of Communications, Writing, and the Arts, has been awarded an Artist Initiative Grant for \$10,000 by the Minnesota State Arts Board. Sands intends to use the grant to create new works inspired by the patterns found in Scandinavian handwork that will be exhibited at the American Swedish Institute in Minneapolis. She will give a gallery talk and free printmaking workshop on the exhibit's opening night in 2021.



**Benjamin Sinko** '08, Carver, was sworn in as an Eden Prairie Police officer. Sinko had previously served as an Eden Prairie community service officer. Before becoming an officer, Sinko worked in finance as a Minnesota State Fair reserve officer.

**Kevin VanHooser** '98, Princeton, has retired after 34 years of service to Isanti County as a county administrator. Of his career he says, "If there's anything I'm proud of during my time, [it's] hiring some really good people... It's always been a collaborative effort." VanHooser is looking forward to spending more time with his wife, two daughters, and three grandchildren.

**Brian Wagner** '18, Saint Paul, has started a new business, Archival Works, where he converts and transfers audio and video tapes to digital files for individuals and businesses.



He credits Metropolitan State's College of Individualized Studies for providing the education he needed to start and grow his own business.

**We want to hear from you.**  
Send your news to [alumni.relations@metrostate.edu](mailto:alumni.relations@metrostate.edu)

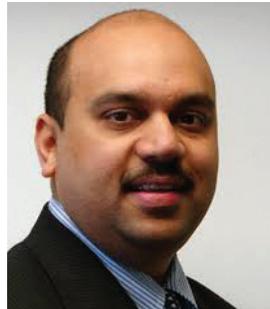
# Emeriti

**Taslima Khaled**  
**Becky Omdahl**  
**Christine Milbrath**  
**Gary Seiler**  
**Randy Strobel**

# In Memoriam

**Margaret “Peggy” (Childs) Barker** '76,  
Saint Paul  
**James F. Hulburt** '84, Two Harbors  
**Betty Jane Johnson** '89, Minneapolis  
**Randy Kopesky** '93, Lakeland  
**Joan Marie Mathews-Larson** '76, Arden Hills

**Nilla Franchere Osten** '79, Saint Paul  
**Kenneth John Philpot** '18, Baudette  
**James “Jake” Prifrel, Sr.** '76, Roseville  
**Seng Yang** '96, Saint Paul



**Dr. Firasat Khan** '05, earned a Bachelor of Science degree in engineering from Arizona State University. He pursued graduate studies at Metropolitan State University, earning both his master's degree in Management Information Systems (MIS) and his Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) degree.

His teaching career began in 1996. Before becoming a tenured faculty member at Metropolitan State University, he taught at Saint Paul College, North Hennepin Community College, and Minneapolis College. He also taught in the executive MBA program at the Carlson School of Management at the University of Minnesota. He became a full-time, fixed-term faculty member

in the Computer Science department at Metropolitan State University in 2016. In 2017, he was hired by the MIS department in the College of Management, where he earned tenure and became the director of the Master of Science in MIS and several Graduate Certificate programs.

His professional accomplishments are impressive and compelling. He was the CIO and director of Online Learning at Minneapolis College. He also served as the director of Security and Technology Programs with Advance IT Minnesota, where he acted as a liaison and retained the role of director of Academic Initiatives.

Firasat held a number of leadership roles in the Twin Cities chapter of the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM), of which he was a founding member; the Colloquium on Analytics, Data Science, and Computing (CADSCOM); and the Colloquium on Information Assurance, Cybersecurity, and Management (CIACAM). He was passionate about IT Security and Data Analytics. He supported the Data Derby Minnesota, Advance IT MN's statewide collegiate competition for data and business analytics.

At Metropolitan State, he taught in the DBA and masters' programs and developed courses in Security and Data Analytics. He was a masterful collaborator. He co-developed a cross-disciplinary program in Business Analytics and was working with computer science faculty to develop a joint program in cyber security.

He is survived by his wife and three children.

# Faculty

## Setting the Foundations for Success

By Matthew Spillum '06

Kate Ries radiates the kind of positivity one might expect from a person who regularly lends her efforts and influence to promote ideas that she believes have the power to help others. Whether it's her work in adapting a program for advancing student outcomes in chemistry education (CHEM Foundations), her assistance with Metropolitan State's First Saturday Science programming, or her advocacy for the university's SAFE Fund for students experiencing financial need or crisis, Ries considers such involvement to be as much a part of her job as teaching classes.

Ries came to Metro State as community faculty in 2012, having left a tenure track position at a school in San Antonio, Texas. Ries, "loved the school; it was a Hispanic-serving school, serving lots of first-generation students, and serving many veterans as well, given its location. The work was great, and there were a lot of similarities between it and Metro, but San Antonio was not a good fit personally. I had some friends

*"The work that we do is so important, and the things our students have to do to make it in every day are so impressive."*

up here, and Metro State was the first place to take a chance on me when I cold-emailed every place I could think of." Once she was at Metro, she "saw how special it is. The work that we do is so important, and the things our students have to do to make it in every day are so impressive."

Since moving into her resident faculty position, Ries has continued to pour into the ways that Metropolitan State can have a real impact in the lives of our students in and out of the classroom. One of those ways is through her work with CHEM Foundations, a program designed to support students to develop competency in chemistry and build lifelong learning skills. "I was attending these continuous meetings for transfer pathways in chemistry, and at one of them Lisa Smith (North Hennepin Community College) presented



on her STEM Foundations work. She had already expanded the program beyond chemistry, and her enthusiasm was so infectious. The data she presented was so promising—I loved this idea of having a separate section for students who scored C or worse on their first exam, then sending a positive message and congratulating them on being invited to STEM foundations. Zack Mensinger and I were at that presentation together and we knew we needed to get involved with this."

The STEM Foundations model may be rooted in a need, but the outlook is anything but a typical remedial framework. "It's all about positivity and growth—that growth mindset and giving students a person from outside the classroom,

who doesn't control their grade, who can act as an advocate for them and mentor them in positive student behaviors, like using the tutoring center and checking in with their advisor." As the program finishes its fourth semester at Metro State, Ries is pleased with the progress, "initially, we didn't have the funding that incentivizes students in their positive habits, and we saw similar results to those at North Hennepin Community College. This year, donors have come through to help, and we are going to try the full model where students receive a stipend. We're excited to try that out and see if we achieve even better results. We're also starting the BIO Foundations program this semester."

In addition, Ries has been active as a faculty support for the Institute for Community Engagement and Scholarship's (ICES) First Saturday Science programming, bringing hands on science education and entertainment to local children for free on the first Saturday of the month. While the programming itself has been long-running, Julie Chau (ICES student worker) and Awo Ahmed '11 (Community Engagement Coordinator for Literacy and Youth) "have really expanded its reach to youth of all ages and it has really taken off. I am just happy to be able to help out and volunteer when I can." Ries didn't get involved immediately after joining Metro State, as she was just getting her bearings. She says, "I started right around when Julie took over—she really inspired me." Even the curriculum and planning are done by Chau, which leads to many exchanges with parents that Ries finds hilarious: "I'll be there on a Saturday, with Elizabeth (Hinds, Chemistry Lab Specialist and Safety Officer), and we'll look older than everyone else working at the event. Parents will come up to us

and say 'you did such a good job with this,' and we have to say, 'nope, it's all Julie.'"

One of the most recent initiatives that Ries has been involved with is the SAFE (Student Assistance for Emergencies) Fund. Ries responded in November of 2019 to a message about the SAFE Fund's predecessor, the Metro Supports Fund, running out of funds within a couple of days due to overwhelming need. Kate asked for faculty and staff to join her by donating to make more funds available to our students.

"Our student population just really needs that help, and it makes a difference in whether they complete their education. I just thought, there have to be other people feeling this way, and maybe we can put another little pot together to help those

who still need it." Ries' message made an immediate impact, receiving backing from President Arthur to match SAFE Fund donations for a month. Ries' efforts helped raise \$5,600 for the SAFE Fund over the winter.

"Our students' lives are so complicated, and if there is something we can do to take some of that pressure off—so they can get to class and not have to worry about something outside of class—that's the least we can do."

*"Our student population just really needs that help, and it makes a difference in whether they complete their education."*



Britney Randolph, Kate Ries, Asha Mohamed

# From the Director



*When I sat down to write the editor's note for this issue of buzz magazine last February, the topic was audacious goals. Now its March and our global circumstances have changed due to COVID-19. As you read this issue, it will be May, and it is hard to predict what changes will have happened in the subsequent months. We hope that you and your loved ones are happy and well.*

The founders of Metropolitan State conceptualized and implemented a university for the audacious purpose of enabling every individual the opportunity to realize their untapped potential. In his address to the first class of Metro State graduates, then-President David Sweet said, "I want MMSC (Minnesota Metropolitan State College) to be the kind of college which produces a significant change in its students. I am certain that it can do this and that it can do this by remaining open to all who want to come. We must accept students where they are and help them become who they would be." For our university, the audacious goal was reimagining the conventions of traditional universities to make a degree possible for everyone who wanted to learn.

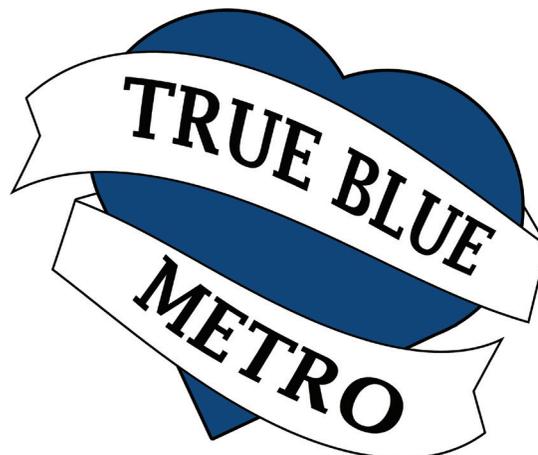
Our university continues to realize these founding aspirations, and we keep thinking big. For example, an old unused insect research facility has become a hub of community learning. The story of how the GROW-IT Center was imagined

and developed by faculty, staff, elected officials, and community members reflects the spirit of innovation that we have always embraced at Metro State. This fall we completed the first stage of this goal, and before the celebration was even completed, we had our eyes set on the next stage of the project. The pursuit of better ways to serve students is our driving force.

Larry Collette '99, who was selected alumnus of the year, is an ardent supporter of our aspirational mission. Larry has been engaged with Metro State in many capacities and has been particularly helpful to me. When I took the position of alumni relations director at Metro State, I turned to people who have had a long history with the university, and Larry has been generous with his time and feedback to help me be a better alumni director. I was delighted when he was nominated and selected by the Alumni Board from a field of impressive candidates.

What is your most audacious goal? For some of us, graduating from college was the biggest dream we could conceive of; for others running their own company or starting a nonprofit to tackle a need they see in their community was their audacious goal. For others, creating a life for their family that achieves a level of security and stability that they only imagined is their biggest, most compelling goal. Whether you are an individual or a university, the fantastic thing about achieving a big audacious goal is that you are not afraid to set another. So, keep going! And don't forget to share your success with us.

Kristine Hansen '07  
Alumni Relations Director



# Calendar

*The list of events is subject to change. Please visit the Metropolitan State website for the most up to date list of events, [www.metrostate.edu](http://www.metrostate.edu).*

**Every Third Tuesday** *Game Night at the Library*, Library and Learning Center Lounge, 4–7 p.m. Whether you want to try out a new video game system or show off your gaming skills, Metropolitan State University invites you to join us the third Tuesday of each month. Snacks and music provided. Game Night at the Library is sponsored by Metropolitan State Library and Information Services and the Saint Paul Public Library.

**June 11** *50 Conversations About the 50th Anniversary*, 5–7 p.m. Watch for more information in the alumni e-newsletter.

**June 13** *50 Conversations About the 50th Anniversary*, 8–9 a.m. Watch for more information in the alumni e-newsletter.

For more information about events, sign up for the alumni e-newsletter by emailing [alumni.relations@metrostate.edu](mailto:alumni.relations@metrostate.edu).

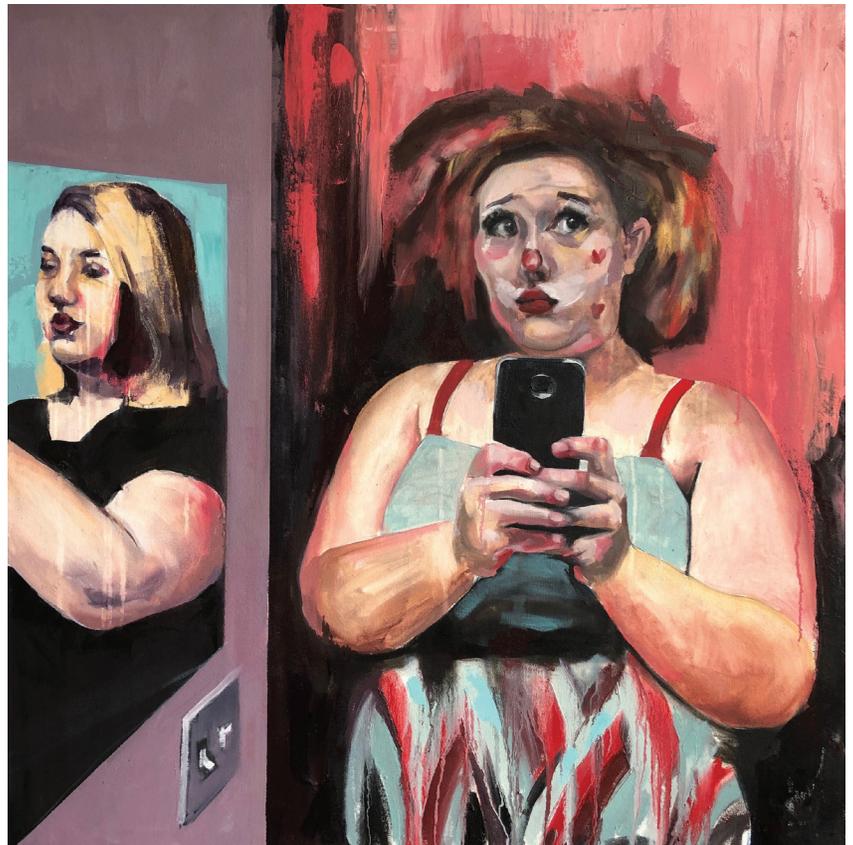
**June 23** *Make your gift; it's your last chance to be counted this year.* Your support will be counted this school year if you give before June 30th. Make an online gift any time at [www.metrostate.edu/give/give-now](http://www.metrostate.edu/give/give-now).

**June 25** *50 Conversations About the 50th Anniversary*, 5–7 p.m. Watch for more information in the alumni e-newsletter.

**Aug. 15** *Metropolitan State University 106th Commencement Ceremony Exercise*, Minneapolis Convention Center, 1301 Second Avenue South, Minneapolis.

**Aug. 19** *Metropolitan State University Convocation Live Stream*

**Sept. 21 through Oct. 22** *The Currency of Beauty* featuring the paintings of Lizzie Wortham, Saint Paul Campus, Gordon Parks Gallery. Gallery hours are Monday–Thursday, 11 a.m.–7 p.m.



Performing  
Lizzie Wortham



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MINNESOTA STATE

*Metropolitan State University,*  
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*Sacred Vision*  
Maria Columbus  
digital photograph, 2019