Seattle University, through the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, is doubling down on diversity and equity.
In what is being dubbed "an instant classic," Seattle University men's soccer bested 20th ranked Washington, 3-2, September 21 at a packed Championship Field. With the win the Redhawks secured the newly named Fewing Cup, awarded to the winner of the annual showdown between SU and UW.
from the president
Eduardo Peñalver: “At Seattle University, we understand the creation of such a welcoming community to be intrinsic to our Jesuit mission.”

on campus
New Dean Butch de Castro talks about his vision for the future of the College of Nursing.

on campus
Seattle University fulfills its commitment to fully divest, in line with its environmental leadership.

faculty spotlight
Chris Whidbey: “When the student becomes the teacher.”

cover story
From holding a Racial Equity Summit to elevating intersectional voices and working to increase and retain BIPOC faculty and staff, the Office of Diversity and Inclusion is doubling down on inclusive excellence.

career outcomes
Alumnus DJ Traina: “I’m behind the creation of advanced medical simulators.”

alumni spotlight
Alums Alex LaCasse, ’10, and Kabi Gishuru, ’08, are making meaningful change at Netflix.

athletics
Meet the new coaches of men’s soccer and women’s basketball.

last word
Student Body President Isabelle Alamilla, ’25, has big plans to get students more involved.

STAY IN THE KNOW

The Newsroom is Seattle University’s one-stop hub for the latest news and happenings across campus and beyond. Here you can read a diverse mix of human-interest, feel-good stories, from the latest news coming out of our colleges and schools to profiles of students and alumni who are making a difference in the world.

Like the content you read on these pages? Visit The Newsroom for more in-depth magazine stories and special features.

seattleu.edu/newsroom
As we celebrate the work of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion, we are proud of what that office has accomplished in a very short time. Under the visionary leadership of Vice President Natasha Martin, J.D., and her team, Seattle University has taken strides toward developing a culture of inclusive excellence that affords every member of our diverse academic community a sense of belonging. You can read more about Vice President Martin and the work of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion in this issue.

At Seattle University, we understand the creation of such a welcoming community to be intrinsic to our Jesuit mission. That understanding takes on added significance this year, as universities across the country have been forced by their state governments to scrub the words “diversity and inclusion” from their websites and respond to the decision from the U.S. Supreme Court that will make it harder for many universities to achieve diverse student bodies.

As we consider the implications of the Court’s affirmative action rulings, Seattle University is guided by certain commitments that will not change. One of those is our commitment to creating an inclusive campus community. Seattle University welcomes students, faculty and staff from all faith traditions, including many people who identify with no faith tradition and some who affirmatively reject faith altogether. We welcome people of all races, national origins, sexes, gender identities and sexualities. We welcome people with a diversity of viewpoints. This radically inclusive invitation is ultimately rooted in our Catholic faith, which teaches us that all human beings, without exception or qualification, are loved by God. We care about each individual member of our academic community, whom we have committed to educating as whole persons, in all their complex identities. The work of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion is one manifestation of that commitment.

Another way we live out our commitment to an inclusive academic community is through our hiring. Over the past two years we have taken tremendous strides on this front, creating the most diverse senior leadership team of any university in the Pacific Northwest. In this issue, you will read about two of our newest campus leaders. Butch de Castro, the new dean of the College of Nursing, joins us from the University of Washington, where he served as an associate dean. And Skyler Young, our new women’s basketball coach, joins us from the University of Portland, where he was an assistant coach.

In addition to inspiring our commitment to inclusion, our Jesuit, Catholic values challenge us to find innovative ways to care for our common home—the Earth. Seattle University has long been a leader on sustainability within higher education. We are justifiably proud to be the first university in Washington state to fully divest our endowment from fossil fuels, something we first committed to doing in 2018. Many institutions of higher education in this state and around the country have announced an intention to divest from fossil fuel investments, but very few have taken all the steps necessary to do so. Not only has Seattle University completed the process, but we’ve also done so within the five years set out in our original commitment.

These are just a few of the stories you will read about in this issue of the magazine. On every page, you will find something to inspire you about the way we—and our students and alumni—continue to live out our distinctive mission as Seattle’s Jesuit university.

Eduardo Peñalver
President
Father Topel: A Life of Service

Now retired, John Topel, SJ., reflects on his time—and accomplishments—at SU.

by mike thee

John Topel, SJ., was working on a fish trap in Alaska when a co-worker asked him, “What is it that you want to do with your life?” “To accomplish something,” says Father Topel, “I blurted out that I wanted to be a priest.”

His co-worker was not impressed. “He thought that was a terrible idea. So, I went out and sat on a log for a while and thought about all the things I wanted to do with my life. And I realized what I really wanted to do was be a teacher like the Jesuit scholars who taught me. They had a wonderful love of one another and community.”

Having gone to grade school at St. Joseph Parish on Seattle’s Capitol Hill and high school at Seattle Prep, Fr. Topel had been around SU for most of his life. He was a priest who would become Bishop of Spokane. The choice of those who taught me. They had a wonderful love of one another and community.

“I love teaching. Anytime I went into the classroom and saw the light in some student’s eye, I thought, ‘Wow, that was so exciting.’”

The university. “In my mind, I think they want to build SU’s identity, and I think they want to build SU’s identity as a Catholic university and as a teaching institution. I think we ought to be in dialogue with the secular world that we live in, and we also need to be aware of what got us our own deficiencies and what got us our own social good and solidarity with those who are offering—has a way of addressing some of those deficiencies. We have a wonderful president, and we have a wonderful provost, and we have a wonderful president of mission integration, and I think they want to build SU’s identity around Catholic social thought—for instance, the common good and solidarity with those who are offering—has a way of addressing some of those deficiencies. We have a wonderful president, we have an excellent provost, we have a wonderful president for mission integration, and I think they want to build SU’s identity around Catholic social thought. So, I’m optimistic about SU’s future.”

Sizing up the entirety of his time at SU, he says, “I’ve enjoyed everything I’ve done at the university.” And yet when asked what brought him the most joy, it all goes back to that epiphany on the log in Alaska. “I love teaching. Anytime I went into the classroom and students’ eyes opened wide and they said, ‘I’ve got it!’ That was the high point for me.”

To learn more or to contribute to the School of Law’s endowment in Fr. Topel’s honor, contact Feven Teklu at f.teklu@seattleu.edu.
Innovation and Inclusivity Drive New Nursing Dean

Butch de Castro talks about the future of the College of Nursing and how it is educating nurses for a changing health care landscape.

by tara lee

Before being named Dean of Seattle University's College of Nursing, Butch de Castro, PhD, MSN, MPH, RN, FAAN, was aware that its graduates were highly sought after by health care employers throughout the region. “This is because of the mission-oriented and values-based approach to health care practice they learn at Seattle University. With graduates being known with their strengths, I was excited about the opportunity to help further that legacy,” says de Castro.

Taking the helm from Dean Kristen Swanson, who retired at the end of the 2022-2023 academic year, de Castro began his tenure as Dean on July 1. Before coming to Seattle University, de Castro was a professor in the Department of Child, Family and Population Health Nursing at the University of Washington and served as the school's inaugural Associate Dean for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. He was also co-director of the Research in Nursing & Global Health training program and director of the Occupational & Environmental Health Nursing graduate training program at the UW. After graduating from UCLA with a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree, de Castro began his career as an operating room nurse and then became a public health nurse. He went on to earn a Master of Science in Nursing/Master of Public Health degree as well as a PhD from Johns Hopkins University. Following work in the health policy arena at the U.S. Department of Labor’s Occupational Safety and Health Administration and later, with the American Nurses Association, de Castro was a post-doctoral research fellow at the University of Illinois at Chicago, initiating his research on immigrant health.

In this Q&A, Dean de Castro talks about his vision for the College of Nursing, the future of the nursing industry, his favorite spot in Seattle and more.

What made you want to come to Seattle University?

de Castro: I was well aware of the College of Nursing’s reputation. Not only is my wife an alum (Rachel Calaqu, ’03), but many people throughout various health care systems speak so positively of its graduates. I believe strongly in education based in I esult tradition and benefited myself from attending a I esult high school.

What is your vision for the role?

de Castro: As Dean, I am intent that the College of Nursing pursues actions that actualize Seattle University’s Reimagining Our Strategic Directions 2022-2027 to be a school University of Distinction for a Time of Change. Co-creating with faculty and staff endeavors to meet its goals is a top priority. The prospect to help build out the future of Seattle University really animates me.

It will be important to imbue the operations and milieu of the College of Nursing with principles and ideals that reflect the university’s vision and priorities, along with the spirit of the Pacific Northwest.

“I want to foster a space that motivates and supports innovative and inclusive ways of preparing next generations of the health care workforce, as well as models progressive thinking that inspires our students, faculty and staff to strive for a just, humane world.”

For example, it alarms me that health care settings—ironically where people are supposed to get well—collectively make up one of the highest polluting industries in the world, which in turn causes illness and disease. I am hoping the College of Nursing can lead in modeling how health care can be taught and carried out in green, sustainable ways. At our Clinical Performance Waters, we will pursue actions that actualize Seattle University’s Strategic Directions 2022-2027 to be a Jesuit University of the Pacific Northwest.

What are you reading now?

de Castro: I am a Sometimes Lonely World by Vivek H. Murthy, MD, U.S. Surgeon General. It discusses how loneliness is increasingly becoming a driver of poor physical and psychological health. The book points out how we are social creatures who rely and thrive on meaningful interpersonal engagement. If every college students tend to feel lonely, isolated and even possibly struggle with impostor syndrome. We should be asking what health care providers actively engaging in public policy and politics as a way to promote health and wellness at the population level, in addition to providing care to individuals through their clinical roles.

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Leading the Way: Seattle University First in the State to Divest from Fossil Fuels

University fulfills its commitment to fully divest, in line with its environmental leadership.

by andrew binion

Seattle University scrubbed its endowment portfolio of fossil fuel investments at the end of June, becoming the first university in Washington state and the first Jesuit Catholic university in the country to fulfill this commitment of divestment, while charting a new course of socially conscious investing.

The university is a leader in the divestment and sustainability movements globally and nationally. In 2022, SU became the first Jesuit university in the country to pledge 100 percent withdrawal from publicly traded fossil fuel investments. According to the university’s Center for Environmental Justice and Sustainability, SU is also believed to be the first Jesuit university in the world to pledge to fully divest from investments in fossil fuels.

Divestment is a process of withdrawing investments from companies that hold fossil fuel reserves like coal, oil and natural gas. The money SU uses to invest—its endowment portfolio of fossil fuel investments at the end of June, was valued as of June at $285 million. Proceeds from the investments pay for things like student scholarships.

SU is also believed to be the first Jesuit Environmental Justice and Sustainability, a Fair Trade Designated University, SU’s endowment portfolio of fossil fuel investments from companies that hold fossil fuels. Now, SU is believed to be the first Jesuit university in the world to pledge to fully remove its money from investments in fossil fuels.

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Though the university completed its five-year divestment process, divestment is just one part of SU’s ongoing efforts toward building a sustainable community that supports human and ecological health, social justice and economic well-being through Socially Responsible Investing (SRI). Aside from being a substantive step toward confronting the climate crisis, fossil fuel divestment aligns with the university’s commitment to sustainability and environmental justice—tenets underscored in SU’s Resigning Our Strategic Directions and acknowledging and confronting the disproportionate exposure of poor communities and people of color to environmental hazards and health burdens. SU has led the way in environmental stewardship and initiatives that aim to combat climate change and improve the planet for all. It was the first university in the Pacific Northwest to earn the title of Fair Trade Designated University, its urban campus is officially a “wildlife habitat” and “tree campus” and the grounds are 100 percent organically maintained—meaning free of pesticides—and include many edible gardens. And, in an effort led by students, SU was the first school in the state to remove single-use plastic bottled water on campus.

“It’s all too tempting to become pessimistic about climate change,” says President Eduardo Peñalver. “But, as a Jesuit university, we are called to accompany our students toward a hope-filled future and to take actions to help bring that future into being. Even while we acknowledge the reality of the climate challenges we are confronting, I am very proud of Seattle University’s divestment effort, a concrete and thoughtful accomplishment that serves as an example for others.”

Aoiife Kennedy, ’25, president of Sustainable Student Action (SSA), the student group that started the push for divestment in 2020, says she is moved by what students who came before her accomplished.

“Divestment at SU was a difficult and lengthy process,” Kennedy says. “But the many inspiring students who were a part of this campaign serve as a powerful reminder of our collective influence and strength.”

Students Push for Move

“It really started with student initiative,” says Joseph Gaffney, ’22, who at the time was a member of the Board of Trustees and chair of the SRI working group, formed by former SU President Stephen Sundborg, S.J., to investigate divesting. The effort really started in November 2012, when members of SSA attended environmentalist author Bill McKibben’s “Do the Math” tour.

The “math” referred to calculations at the time that found that humans could continue to emit carbon dioxide up to 565 gigatons for the planet to stay below 2 degrees Celsius, the critical point where the risks of catastrophe would become unavoidable.

Yet, McKibben told the audience, including then-undergrad Ames Fowler, ‘22, burning the fossil fuels that corporations had in reserve would emit almost five times the safe amount.

“That was the spark,” says Fowler. “McKibben said divestment was something that both the Board of Trustees and energy engineers should do because it was the responsible action in the modern world that needs to move away from fossil fuels.”

The group of students spearheading this effort sought to engage both fellow students and administrators by holding a rally, gathering signatures and marching a faux oil barrel across campus.

Students kept pushing until the movement had developed its own momentum. As students began organizing with local racial justice movements—like Black Lives Matter after the 2014 death of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri— incoming classes took up the mantle of divestment and kept up the pressure. Fowler says divestment isn’t the solution for climate change, but it helps shape how the economy works.

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“It doesn’t fix the issue. It doesn’t stop the great coral reef from bleaching, but we have to change the scaffolding of our economy if we want a different world,” says Fowler. “And this is a rearranging of the scaffolding of our economy in a small, but critical, way.”

Wes Lauer, PhD, professor of civil and environmental engineering, says divestment was something that both the student body and the university as a whole could be proud. The practical effects of divestment are twofold, he says.

“It was about not investing in something we know to be unsustainable and that can lead to injustice and I think a large majority of students saw it that way,” says Lauer, who was faculty representative to the SRI working group. “But I think it’s also a way of helping to facilitate the conversation going forward about the right response to the climate crisis within the SU community.”

When the Board of Trustees voted to approve the five-year plan of pulling SU dollars out of those fossil fuel investments, the endowment was valued at about $230 million.

To give some context to the scope of SU’s divestment, in 2020, about $12.6 million, or 6.7 percent of the endowment, consisted of companies with fossil fuel reserves. Now, zero percent of the marketable portion of the endowment is invested in fossil fuels.

“Rellying on the advice of professional money managers retained by Seattle University, our position was we believed this could be done without significant financial loss and believed the risk was really worth it to implement the values of responsible action in the modern world that needs to move away from fossil fuels,” Gaffney says.

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Seattle University allowed five years to pull out of fossil fuel investments because of the complicated nature of how its endowment is invested. The university does not make individual investments in individual companies.

Instead of investing on its own, SU has an outsourced chief investment officer—a company called Cambridge Associates—that invests in funds. The funds consist of portfolios of the stocks and bonds of numerous companies, similar to mutual funds. The Seattle University Investment Committee, which oversees the endowment, gives Cambridge direction and sets expectations on investments.

The actual mechanics of divestment involving directing Cambridge to make no further investments in funds that have exposure to fossil fuel companies and further tasked it with analyzing current holdings, selling off those that included fossil fuel companies and reinvesting the proceeds in funds not having any exposure.

A Call to Action

In announcing the Board of Trustees decision to divest from fossil fuels, Father Sundborg said that as a Jesuit, Catholic university, SU had a special obligation to address the unfolding climate change crisis. He emphasized Pope Francis’ call to see the “grave urgency” of the moment.

“We join with others also at the forefront of the growing divestment movement and hope our action encourages more to do the same,” Father Sundborg wrote when announcing the decision to divest. “Together, we can amplify our collective voice and accelerate the transition to clean, fossil-free energy sources.”

Pope Francis’ 2015 encyclical letter Laudato Si’ called for action on the climate crisis and praises work like that of the SU students whose persistence was credited for ultimately persuading university leaders to back away from fossil fuel investments.

“Particular appreciation is owed to those who tirelessly seek to resolve the tragic effects of environmental degradation on the lives of the world’s poorest,” Pope Francis wrote. “Young people demand change. They wonder how anyone can claim to be building a better future without thinking of the environmental crisis and the sufferings of the excluded.”

The SRI working group explained the grim plausibility of turning a profit by extracting and using more carbon from existing fossil fuel reserves than the planet can safely handle.

“There is no proven technology to prevent the associated emissions from accumulating in the atmosphere,” the working group reported to the board. “The only way to avoid harmful warming is to leave much of the resource in the ground, thereby forgoing the profits and short-term economic benefits that would accrue if it was exploited.”

So SU’s announcement in 2018, six other Jesuit universities made some level of commitment to divest, according to the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities.

In leading to the way for Jesuit universities, SU has shown the path forward for other institutions of higher education in the state. Last year, the University of Washington committed to a deadline of 2027 to exit from direct fossil fuel investments.

Beyond Divestment

The vision to lead to fossil fuel divestment has been reinforced by Seattle University’s decision to commit to institutional participation in Pope Francis’ Laudato Si’ Action Platform (LSAP). One of the LSAP pillars is “Economical Ethics,” acknowledging that the “economy is a sub-system of human society, which itself is embedded within the biosphere—our common home.” This goal connects directly to decisions around future investments, such as divesting from fossil fuels and promoting ethical investments.

In June 2022, trustees took the step of instituting the requirement that endowment investments include an evaluation for the environmental, social and governance impacts, in addition to investment performance, diversification and other criteria. “This directive is becoming more common in universities’ endowment investment practices,” says Bret Myers, director of investments and engagement in SU’s Office of Finance, who added that these steps are also in line with the LSAP.

Robert Dahlin, ’21, was a student representative on the SRI Working Group board when SU hit the halfway mark early. He called divestment a necessary step and accomplishing it speaks to the university’s true commitment to promoting justice and sustaining the common good.

“Seattle University believes that we are called to make decisions that consider the needs of the most vulnerable,” says Dahlin. “By divesting from fossil fuels, we are making a statement that our investments should align with our values and mission.”
After living in different parts of the U.S. and the world, Laura Spitz, new Vice Provost for Global Engagement and professor of law, is happy to be back in the Pacific Northwest.

In her new role at Seattle University, Spitz is charged with leading the university’s global engagement efforts throughout the region and globally, as well as building and coordinating support for international students, faculty and staff here at home.

Spitz says she was drawn to this position after visiting the campus and speaking with President Eduardo Peñalver and Provost Shane P. Martin and learning about their vision for this role. She also met with colleagues and “heard about their incredible work and the university’s priorities, mission and values,” she says. “Those values are resonant with my own. This is a global university in a global city. The potential for greater engagement is tremendous.”

What are your priorities in the first six months?

Spitz: Listening, assessing and mapping. I am learning what is already taking place in global engagement and where the gaps exist. I want to position the office as fundamentally service oriented. After that, I imagine we will begin to think strategically about how to better coordinate and showcase all of the good work we are already doing and build out systems to better support engagement efforts.

Favorite part of living in the region?

Spitz: Of course, I love being close to family and friends in Canada. But mostly, I love the rich diversity of Seattle. This is a very diverse campus in the heart of a very diverse city—culturally, economically, geographically... the list goes on. If I was an international student, this is where I’d want to be.

As the new Director of Campus Ministry, Luke Lavin comes to Seattle University from Gonzaga University, where he not only served as director of Campus Ministry, but is also a double alum steeped in Jesuit tradition—first as an undergraduate and then as a PhD student in its Leadership Studies program. In between those degrees, he earned a Master of Divinity from the Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley in 2014.

At SU, Lavin will oversee a ministry department that is committed to assisting students as they explore their faith, regardless of if one is Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist or spiritual but not religious. Even those who don’t define themselves within these categories are welcomed by Campus Ministry.

What are your priorities in the first six months?

Lavin: My priority is to listen and learn. I am a huge believer in the power of story and narrative and I am excited to listen to and understand the university’s story through students, staff and faculty. Listening is a spiritual practice and it can be very challenging. To truly listen requires me to suspend judgments and perceptions and allow the story of others to emerge freely. Listening is at the heart of Ignatian discernment and the gift of being “new” is to be as attentive as possible to how the Spirit is at work here.

I look forward to investing time and energy to truly listen and learn from those I encounter and to get to know the place, people and community.

One of your hobbies is collecting vinyl records. What is your most prized piece of vinyl in your collection?

Lavin: An original pressing of the rap group De La Soul’s 1989 debut album, 3 Feet High and Rising. RIP to Plug 2!

—Andrew Binion

Seattle University’s new Vice President and Chief Financial Officer Chris Malins is known for the forward-thinking, solutions-oriented approach he brings to the world of finance.

Although Malins was selected for this role following a nationwide search, he has roots in the city and a connection with Seattle University.

Prior to joining SU officially in late August, Malins was Associate Vice President for Finance and University Treasurer at the University of Washington.

For Malins, he was drawn to this role because of SU’s reputation and that it is “in the heart of my hometown.” As for that connection, his father, Dr. Donald Malins, graduated in 1954 with a Chemistry degree and he has many friends and colleagues who are graduates as well.

What are your priorities in the first six months?

Malins: To understand how the business side of the university operates. I am incredibly fortunate to have skilled and experienced SU colleagues who can help me to get oriented.

What does a great day in Seattle look like?

Malins: Coffee with old friends at Grateful Bread Bakery, playing and listening to music, running Green Lake and having dinner with my wife and son. Just perfect.

—Tina Potterf
Q uinton Morris, DMA, enters his 17th year of teaching violin at Seattle University on a high note, having been promoted to full professor, the highest rank that a tenured faculty member can achieve. The full professorship means that Dr. Morris is only the second living Black violinist to achieve this academic milestone in U.S. history. Additionally, he is the first Black man and the first music professor promoted to full professor in the College of Arts and Sciences.

The significance of this is not lost on Dr. Morris. “The first was University of Denver Professor Gregory Walker. The second was a violinist to achieve a full professorship—anywhere in the country.”

In this Q&A Dr. Morris talks about what it means to be a full professor, what inspires his work and his show, Unmute The Voices.

**What does your promotion to full professor, the highest rank for faculty, mean to you?**

“I am honored because when I think of full professors, I think of Dr. Henry Louis Gates. I think of Dr. Maya Angelou, who was my literature teacher in my undergraduate studies. I think of Dr. Cornel West and Dr. Toni Morrison. I think of those greats who, while they’re not in music, earned the title of full professor. And now I have reached the same rank. I’m honored. I’m humble, thankful and grateful and I’m proud of me. And I don’t say that in an arrogant way, but academia is no easy course.

“My parents, my mother especially, and my mentors really gave me the skills to be able to climb all the way to the top because it was not easy. I’m thankful for my support system, the people who helped me through that. And I’m thankful to myself that I didn’t give up because I certainly wanted to many, many, many times. I appreciate how it appears that the university is really making a change in terms of diversity and equity. There are many more students now who look like me, which is nice to see around campus because for a long time there was really no one who looked like me and very few faculty and staff as well. I’m glad to see that the university is really taking strong initiatives to make that happen.”

“Tell us about becoming Classical KING’s Artist-Scholar-in-Residence and your show, Unmute The Voices.”

“CEO Brenda Barnes approached me two years ago about creating the show. Because I’ve taught music history and theory music courses in the University Honors program and many other music courses, Unmute The Voices (https://king.org/show/unmute-the-voices) is a way for me to incorporate all of those subjects into a one-hour segment while highlighting the music by composers and performers of color. I’m having an absolute blast curating the show because I truly love the music. My goal is always to connect with the listener in a way that not only persuades them to fall in love with the music, but also to learn a little bit of the history behind the music.

“The average classical music listener, of course, knows who Mozart and Beethoven are but they may not know the music of Joseph Bologne, the Chevalier de Saint-Georges, Florence Price or Jessye Montgomery, who are all so fascinating. Additionally, it’s a great way to talk about social topics, including the importance of racial equity and diversity within classical music. I’m very blessed to work in this field where I’m able to do this important work and grateful to Classical KING for its support.”

**What is your greatest lesson from teaching?**

“I enjoy teaching violin. There is a plethora of reasons why students play an instrument and my goal is always just to try to help them discover and find out why it is that I’ve taught performing arts students and I’ve also enjoyed teaching non-music majors. They all have their own goals. Generally, if you’re teaching a major, they are very focused on learning skills so they can build a career for themselves. I get a lot of students who are interested in taking lessons and they might have played in middle school or high school. I had one student this past quarter who took lessons in middle school and then quit when his mother, who was a violinist, passed away. He has been using the violin as a way to deal with grief and I’m grateful that he trusts me to be on the road with him. Everyone has their own path. Some students didn’t have a great experience in middle school or high school but they love the instrument, so they want to try again at the collegiate level.

“At SU, I have been able to really learn and home in on how to teach music to both people who are familiar with it and people who are not. This is a major skill that will live with me for the rest of my life. I’ve enjoyed helping students develop their own voice as a musician.”

**How do you work as Executive Director of Key to Change connect to Seattle University?**

“Seattle University is a Jesuit school and part of our Jesuit values is connecting with the community. Key to Change is really just an extension of my own learning, to be honest. For me, teaching in the community is normal because that’s what I always saw. At all the institutions that I went to, the professors taught high school students or middle school students from the community. I wish we did more of that at SU because I believe our institution could serve as the gateway for us to develop a deeper reach in the community, while also attracting and retaining future collegiate students.

“Key to Change students who would study with someone like me could expect to pay between $20 and $200 for a lesson. We offer lessons at a subsidized cost. Because of this access, three of our students will make their solo debuts with the Seattle Symphony this fall. Generally, with this kind of organization kids of color would not be given those types of experiences, certainly if they came from underserved areas. It really speaks to what we’re trying to accomplish, how we’re providing access and how we’re moving forward for students who have talent to be supported so that they can excel.”

**What are some of the highlights of teaching here?**

“I started playing the violin in public schools and took private violin lessons in high school with Walter Schwede, who at that time was the associate concertmaster (2nd chair violin) in the orchestra. I always dreamed of becoming an attorney but was inspired to pursue music once I started taking lessons with my professor in college. I switched my major from pre-law to music at the end of my junior year, transferred to an arts conservatory and started my new journey. I bet on myself and I’ve never looked back. It was one of the scariest, but smartest decisions of my life.”
When he arrived on the Seattle University campus as a freshman, Christopher Whidbey, ’10, was certain his next step would be medical school. But during his experience as an undergraduate researcher at SU, where he triple majored in chemistry, biology and philosophy, and helped mentor younger students, Whidbey envisioned a different path. This one combined his interest in scientific research, along with his concern about and care for the environment, to set his sights on medical school. Instead, his experience at SU, where he earned his PhD in Pathobiology from the University of Washington, working with researchers at Seattle Children’s Research Institute, where he made a breakthrough discovery while studying bacteria that can be leveraged to create treatments for conditions that affect pregnant people and that can lead to preterm birth.

“Given an opportunity, SU students and faculty can conduct research at an extremely high level and help push science forward.”

—Chris Whidbey ’10

Assistant Chemistry Professor Christopher Whidbey started at Seattle University thinking he would go to medical school. Instead, his experience as an undergraduate led him in a new direction.

“Coming in right as an 18-year-old, there’s so much that you don’t know about the possibilities as far as careers go,” he says. “So that’s one thing that I really try to do for students now and want to do with the Cottrell award is show them these are different opportunities, these are things that you can do that might not be medicine but might fulfill you even more.”

It’s not uncommon for students entering a STEM field to set their sights on medical school, says Chemistry Professor and Department Chair P. J. Alaimo, PhD, who Whidbey credits with encouraging him to pursue research.

“I hope I didn’t ruin his life by suggesting he not go to medical school,” Alaimo says. “But he has that questioner’s nature. His wanting to know more, dig deeper, to me, that’s not a physician, but an academic.”

Near the end of middle school, where his interest in biology and chemistry started, Whidbey moved from the Pugel Sound area and accompanied his mother to Ellensburg, where she was continuing her studies and where Whidbey was one of three Black students in his graduating class of about 200 at Ellensburg High School. His mother had intended to become a PE teacher but pivoted to public health and helped mentor younger students. Whidbey envisioned a different path—especially maternal health for people of color—with fostering students’ growth as scientists.

“It was really fulfilling in a different way than I had expected,” he says of his undergrad research experience at SU, where students were helping investigate the environmental fate of different endocrine-disrupting compounds. The research coincided with public warnings about BPA, a hormone disruptor used in plastic packaging that can make its way into food.

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The shockwave rippled across the country in August 2017, as images of a white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, flashed on phones and TV screens, showing it growing large and violent.

That summer on campus was fairly quiet, but nonetheless Seattle University Vice President Natasha Martin, J.D., could sense the anguish caused by such highly visible and disturbing images. “There was a lot of angst on campus and across the country at higher ed institutions, just a sense of, ‘What does this mean? How do we respond to this?’” says Martin, who at the time had just been appointed to her role as the VP of Diversity and Inclusion. “There was a lot of confusion, frustration and desolation and all of the things around it.”

Thinking it helpful to give faculty and staff a place to process what was being seen in the context of students and the future of education, Martin organized a forum, calling it “Educating for Justice.” The thinking was maybe 20 or so people would show up—instead, it was nearly four times that. “It was standing room only,” she says of the convening. “And I think what in that moment it reflected to me was a real need to elevate the work at this higher level for the institution. Inclusive excellence is the work of everyone.”

Rather than as a reaction to an outside event, a two-year task force commissioned by former SU President Stephen Sundborg, S.J., recommended the university should create a role such as Martin’s, elevating the work of DEI institution-wide and embedding it throughout the strategic priorities of the institution.

And from there, the work of the Office of Diversity and Inclusion (ODI) started to build momentum, launching with Martin as essentially its sole staffer. Prior to the office’s formation, DEI work was essentially its sole staffer. Prior to the office’s formation, DEI work was being spread among offices like the Office of Multicultural Affairs now The M O SAIC Center, and through faculty and staff individually.

Today, the office serves as a central source of collaborative outreach, education and coordination. ODI is also a driving force for strategic initiatives and efforts related to a broad range of diverse and intersectional experiences such as Black history and the impact of anti-blackness, LGBTQ+ support and allyship—including transgender visibility—Indigenous Peoples’ rights and more.

And it has added two more full-time employees, Senior Executive Coordinator Paige Powers and Assistant Vice President Laura Heider. All three are working toward the goal of promoting the full participation of students and the entire SU community around inclusive excellence and centering those who have been historically marginalized or excluded because of their identity. “This is not peripheral work,” says President Eduardo Peñalver.

“It’s not an add-on to what is seen as the real work of the university, but rather it’s integrating it into the heart of what we are trying to do.”

Reignited Strategic Directions

In the years since the office was founded, Martin and her team have been hard at work, serving as an umbrella for diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) and touching all points of campus, from academics to professional development, programming to events. The office has convened two campus-wide Racial Equity Summits. The last, in April—and the first in-person following the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions—saw the crowd grow so large that when the Pigott Auditorium filled up with participants, organizers had to continuously open overflow rooms to accommodate all who wanted to attend.

In July, Isabelle Alamilla, ’25, attended the National Jesuit Student Leadership Conference at the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts, and told others about the Racial Equity Summit. “The other schools were just in shock we were able to do that as they don’t have the same opportunities we do at Seattle University,” says Alamilla, who is this year’s Student Body President and has helped promote the work of ODI on campus. “It’s nice and refreshing to see the university is putting in the effort to have hard conversations and educate people who aren’t sure how to approach different topics.”

In partnership with the Provost’s Office, ODI has hosted numerous Red Talks, which is a quarterly lunchtime speaker series built around a theme—meant to elevate intersectional voices on a variety of timely topics—with a featured faculty member as keynote speaker.

SU hired an ombudsperson that reports to Martin and instituted a Campus Climate Incident Reporting and Response structure, formalizing a process where biased actions or engagement that impact the learning and working environments of the campus community can be reported and addressed.

From September 2022 through May 2023, the Campus Climate team received 54 reports through May 2023, the Campus Climate team received 54 reports through May 2023, the Campus Climate team received 54 reports through May 2023, the Campus Climate team received 54 reports through May 2023, the Campus Climate team received 54 reports. The Campus Climate team received 54 reports through the system, most of them from students. The reporting and response process prioritizes restoration and thriving, as well as offering support for productive engagement across differences.

The Campus Climate reporting process is part of the Lift TSU initiative, a roadmap toward inclusive excellence and part of Goal 4 of Seattle University’s Regenest Strategic Directions (LIFT SU stands for Listen and learn, impact through intentional action, fail forward and transform together).
Another element of LiFF SU is hiring and retaining BIPOC faculty. As the various departments and colleges on campus conduct their own hiring, ODI, in partnership with the Provost’s Office, released in the fall a guidebook for inclusive and equitable faculty hiring, “Hiring a Practically Diverse Faculty.”

Professor Jennifer Marrone, PhD, who teaches in the Management Department of the Albers School of Business and Economics, says she has sat on search committees that have benefited from the diverse guidance provided by ODI. “I have seen the shift in improvements in our processes as a result,” Marrone says.

Meanwhile, Heider and Powers have met with staff and faculty to help facilitate workshops and lead training sessions for equitable faculty hiring. These interactive sessions encourage open dialogue and rich discussions. With these accomplishments, President Parrilla says the office’s greatest achievement is making itself a vital part of the mission and fabric of the university.

“I’ve been impressed since I have been an undergraduate student,” said Parrilla, who at an anniversary celebration of ODI in June shared that as an undergraduate student he felt that a lack of representation—of faculty and leadership that looked like him—led to a feeling of not belonging, of the “university not being our place.” Conversely, the president spoke of SU being in the moment and on the right side of history at a time when dozens of states are exploring, if not enacting, anti-diversity legislation, including bills targeting the LGBTQ+ community. He noted that in some states, just the words “diversity” or “inclusion” are being scrubbed from literature, programs, curricula, and more. “This office didn’t begin the work of DEI at Seattle University,” Martin notes. “But I do think it has been elevated and amplified as a university-wide priority. And it serves the purpose of shaping the vision and the culture of the university so that we can have a unified agenda.”

Engineering Professor Frank Shih, PhD, serves as president of加工的大学Assembly for six years, a term that ended in June, and engaged frequently with ODI as he developed and proposals were presented to faculty. “With that office we are a better place and doing better with what we're bringing capacity,” Shih says. “We are here to do a job, which is to provide a good environment for our students to thrive and grow and it contributes immensely to that mission.”

WHAT IS DEI?

What exactly is diversity, equity and inclusion, or DEI? It’s a question Heider loves to field. “It’s an endeavor to ensure that everyone, regardless of their background, their identity, their demographic group or the circumstances of their upbringing, has an equal opportunity for success,” Heider explains. “Some people are born into situations that burden them with systemic disadvantages. This happens simply because of the way our society functions. What we endeavor to do in our line of work is try to change those systems in such a way that we’re able to mitigate the impact of those disadvantages and help our systems work equivalently well for everyone.”

There are high-impact practices that can lead to more equitable environments for students, staff and faculty. Martin says, but there is no magic “recipe” to make racism, sexism, homophobia and other forms of bigotry disappear. Rather, DEI requires both a systemic and personal perspective—what Martin refers to as requiring work on both the “systems and the self.”

“It is through human beings that the work of DEI is executed,” Martin says. “We can have all the strategies and plans and all of the roadmaps, but if we haven’t internalized our obligations and are not continuing to grow, we’ll be limited in what we can achieve.”

The work of ODI is more important than ever, considering that the office’s very existence might have been outlawed in another state. “We’re against DEI work is real, Martin and Heider say, and intensified as Americans turned out in protests by the thousands at the murder of George Floyd during the summer of 2020 at the height of the pandemic.”

Conversely, I think it comes from a place of profound fear,” Heider says. “When you’re used to privilege, equality feels like oppression.”

As more and more states roll back DEI efforts, like Florida and Idaho, and other DEI initiatives in higher education and corporate America are being criticized as fragmented efforts at best, Seattle University has gone in a different direction.

CEO Emily Conboy said that the 2020-21 school year was a milestone with diversity and inclusion as the “top priority of the university.”

“With that office we are a better place and doing better with what we're bringing capacity,” Shih says. “We are here to do a job, which is to provide a good environment for our students to thrive and grow and it contributes immensely to that mission.”

THE WORK WON’T DO ITSELF

The work of true and authentic diversity, equity and inclusion, what it asks of the institution and its individuals, isn’t always easy or comfortable. And that aligns with one of Martin’s messages—the work of ODI requires the people of the institution to be willing to be vulnerable and open to change. It also requires members of the community to give grace and allow people room to grow and to be held accountable for the collective work. And it goes for everyone.

“You’re going to get it wrong,” Heider says. “So you have to be willing to take the risk of getting it wrong. And I think a lot of people don’t even try because they’re afraid of that. You’re going to use the wrong pronoun by accident. You’re going to say something you didn’t know was a micro-aggression. You’re going to make a reference to something that you didn’t realize was oppressive. But if you don’t try anyway, and learn as you go, you’ll never get it right.”

It’s about working to grow intercultural fluency and deepening one’s understanding, says Martin.

“We have to remain focused on the growth mindset as opposed to the mindset of, ‘I’m a progressive person, I get it. I have no more learning to do,’” Martin says. “That’s just not how it works.”

Students say the office has been increasing its profile on campus and have availed themselves of its resources. Isiah Martin Lopez, 24, has been involved with ODI for years, both in assisting with events and also seeking support from office staff. With plans to become an attorney after he graduates, Lopez says he’s received resources regarding law schools along with academic support. He credits Martin with taking the time to help, which is meaningful.

“It’s from somebody who looks like myself, in a position of power, in a field I’m interested in,” Lopez says. “This is a huge thing that a lot of times can be overlooked. … I hope more people get involved with it.”

The future is about staying the course, Martin says.

“This is legacy work. The next five years is not going to solve all of the ‘isms’ that we are facing now. But what I hope is that together we can co-create the kind of institution where our students feel a sense of belonging so that they can go out and create a world that is more just and more loving and more equitable.”

FALL 2023
President Stephen Sundborg, S.J., commissioned a task force on Diversity & Inclusive Excellence, appointing as co-chairs Natasha Martin, J.D, and Alvin Sturdivant, EdD. The task force continued for an additional year to facilitate conducting the first-ever campuswide climate assessment.

**ESTABLISHMENT OF THE OFFICE OF DIVERSITY & INCLUSION**

- In Fall 2020, the task force delivered the first executive summary of the climate study, “Seattle University Assessment for Learning, Living and Working” to leadership and the campus.
- University establishes a cabinet-level position of Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion/Chief Diversity Officer, appointing Martin to this role.
- Martin establishes annual “Red Talks,” a campus-wide initiative where faculty present on a specific issue or topic.
- Launched later that academic year was “Red Talks: Student About Race,” hosted Ijeoma Oluo, Seattle-based author of So You Want to Talk About Race, who engaged with the campus through classroom visits and listening sessions.
- Created, planned and implemented the first bi-annual Racial Equity Summit. More than 1,000 people attended this first virtual summit, featuring keynote speaker Michelle Alexander.
- Under the auspices of LIFT SU, drove the creation, work and outcomes for working groups dedicated to BIPOC student recruitment and retention, campus climate and recruitment and retention of BIPOC faculty.
- Established “fireside chats” with incoming President Eduardo Pefalver and other leaders.

**MEANINGFUL ASSESSMENT**

- Co-sponsor of Mission Day, with the theme “Diversity, Equity and Inclusion at the Heart of Jesuit Education,” featuring Dr. Michael Eric Dyson.
- Convened and facilitated the Bias Prevention and Campus Climate Care Working Group.
- Co-sponsored a year-long lecture series with the Institute for Catholic Thought and Culture.
- Partnered with the Office for Multicultural Affairs on a Moral Mondays #BlackLivesMatter movement at SU.
- LIFT SU Goal One, Recruitment and Retention of BIPOC students, with co-chairs M. Michelle Mijene Kim-Beasley, Carol Cochran and J ulie Homchick Crowe, PhD, engaged in meaningful research to spur the creation of an ecosystem in which BIPOC students can thrive.
- Led the university’s movement toward racial justice in the wake of the murder of George Floyd.
- Partnered with the University Core common text program to host Jeoma Oluo, Seattle-based author of So You Want to Talk About Race, who engaged with the campus through classroom visits and listening sessions.
- LIFT SU Goal 2: Bias Prevention and Campus Care. This protocol centralizes and coordinates the approach to campus climate incidents, tracks these incidents and, through collaborative discussion, identifies high-impact practices to prevent future incidents.
- Launched a working group to realize LIFT SU Goal 3: Recruitment and Retention of BIPOC Faculty and Staff, under the leadership of co-chairs Frank Shih, PhD, and Colette Taylor, EdD. This working group developed a series of evidence-informed recommendations, resulting in new faculty hiring protocols and a comprehensive guidebook.
- Appointed Professor Brooke D. Coleman, J.D, as Special Assistant to the Vice President for Diversity and Inclusion.

**BREAKING NEW GROUND**

- Sponsored Dr. Robin DiAngelo’s campuswide workshop on her book, Nice Racism.
- Sponsored panel discussion with United Way of King County: Advancing Racial Equity—How BIPOC Businesses Benefit Us All.
- In collaboration with various campus partners, including Albers, the Center for Community Engagement, the Procurement Office and others, launched a Supplier Diversity program to boost university spending on women and minority-owned businesses.

**PROGRAMMATIC LAUNCH**

- Launched the 2023 Racial Equity Summit on the theme, Freedom Dreaming, featuring keynote speaker Dr. Imani Perry. The in-person summit drew more than 900 attendees and featured Freedom School sessions, led by staff, faculty and students.
- Established Freedom School Fridays, a monthly opportunity to revisit the Freedom School sessions that garnered a positive response at the Racial Equity Summit.
- Established a Supplier Diversity program to boost university spending on women and minority-owned businesses.
- Sponsored panel discussion with United Way of King County: Advancing Racial Equity—How BIPOC Businesses Benefit Us All.
- In collaboration with various campus partners, including Albers, the Center for Community Engagement, the Procurement Office and others, launched a Supplier Diversity program to boost university spending on women and minority-owned businesses.
DJ Traina, ’18, merged his passions for engineering and art in a unique career design and building advanced medical simulators to train medical responders from far away battlefields to the streets of King County.

“With one hand on the back of a patient’s skull—all the same hef as a bowling ball—the Seattle Fire Department paramedic’s other hand held an intubation device, called a video laryngoscope, probing for the right angle to guide it down the patient’s trachea to pump air into their lungs. “Until you grow a third arm, you want this hand free,” says a fellow paramedic, conducting the training and advising on how best to perform the life-saving procedure.

The “patient” in this training scenario isn’t human, but rather a state-of-the-art training manikin called the Advanced Combat Airway Management System, or ACAMS, one of 12 in existence, six male and six female, created by a Seattle University engineering graduate. This is no dummy—it’s a real department store. In fact, the “patient” is actually a cutting edge, advanced computer powered by a lithium battery and controlled with a laptop, inhabiting a high-tech torso made to look, feel, moan and struggle like a real human unable to breathe. First envisioned to ready combat medics for the chaos of a battlefield, the ACAMS have been conscripted locally as a training tool for paramedics.

Standing nearby, eyes fixed on the action, is DJ Traina. “This is the exact moment that we are trying to capture,” he says. “We are trying to capture every single detail that a paramedic would see in a real-life scenario.”

The training manikins are designed to help paramedics and doctors improve their skills in the face of emergency situations. The manikins are equipped with realistic responses, allowing doctors to practice various life-saving procedures such as intubation, CPR, and hemorrhage control.

For Traina, there is no left vs. right brain dichotomy. Instead, he believes that art and engineering should work together toward the common goal of human health.

Keeping it Real

Traina’s backstory reveals a unique skill set developed as a mechanical engineering undergrad at SU, closing the gap between the wizardry of theater and the miracle of medical science, leading directly to the unique job he landed in 2018 after graduation.

“By the time I graduated, I had been exposed to all sorts of cutting-edge technologies,” Traina says. “I had no idea that this was even a thing five years ago until I stepped in the lab for the first time,” he adds.

The backstory of the ACAMS comes from combat medics—many of whom men—and when the military discovered that many male medics were hesitating when treating female soldiers who had sustained chest wounds in combat.

“Historically there have been not a lot of anatomically correct female trainers on the market,” Traina says. “Of five companies, have started with a male model and ‘retrofitted’ the manikin for female anatomy.”

From the start, AJAMS were designed with patient-specific imaging of both men and women to make it as anatomically correct as possible.

Starting with a female model also provided an additional engineering benefit. “We knew that if we could fit all of the components into the smaller frame of the female, then the systems integration into the male would be much simpler than the other way around,” Traina says.

From Combat to Heart Attacks

Locally, the manikins are hard at work and that’s because each year every one of King County Medic One’s 270 members undergoes complex airway training that includes using simulators.

Eric Timm, director of paramedic training, says realism—known as “fidelity” in the world of medical simulators—is essential to keeping paramedics’ skills sharp.

“If you think about it, what skill level do you want for your family?” Timm says. “If your loved one, partner or family member needed the life-saving intervention of intubation, how skilled would you want that provider to be?”

CREST received a U.S. Department of Defense contract to build the first four prototypes. The subsequent eight were funded by Medic One and various partners. Whereas most medical manikins are generally white males, both the male and female AJAMS manikins can be outfitted to any skin tone or ethnicity.

This kind of fidelity, too, aligns with Medic One’s mission. Timm says. “We are trying to give everyone of all backgrounds.”

“Anytime you’re engineering something, there’s also an artistic component to it,” says Traina, who credits a painting class he took at SU with further awakening a talent for fine arts that he didn’t know he had. “Always in the back of my mind is thinking of merging the two together.”

For Traina, there is no left vs. right brain dichotomy and ideally art and engineering should work together toward the common ground between medical simulation and stagecraft.

Traina compared it to the intense emotions that can come from watching a play, where audience members give themselves over to the tragedy and comedy, suspending disbelief, allowing themselves to laugh and cry.

“When a learner gives themselves over to the ‘reality’ of the simulation and is fully immersed in it both physically and emotionally, that’s when the learning happens,” Traina says.

‘A Consummate Maker’

During Traina’s senior design project, for which Associate Professor of Engineering Joshua Hamel, PhD, served as his advisor, Traina’s team designed a counter for a spirometer, a medical device used to help reduce the likelihood of a patient contracting pneumonia after a lengthy surgery under general anesthesia. The counter allows patients groggy from sedation the ability to track how many cycles they’ve completed.

“Otherwise, you hand it to a patient, come back an hour later and they may or may not have done it,” Traina says. “But with our little add-on, you could tell how much they’ve done and if they’ve done it successfully or not.”

Hamel said while advising the team he took note of Traina’s talents. “His real strength started to show up, which was that he’s a consummate maker,” Hamel says.

At the same time that Traina graduated and began looking for a job, Hamel visited the CREST lab and later, when they started looking for his replacements, he knew Traina would be a good fit.

“Hey, I’ve got a bachelor’s engineering for you that I think would be perfect,” Hamel recalls telling his contacts. “You should talk to him.”

And, as Hamel says, “The rest is history.”
When you settle in to binge watch the latest buzzy-worthy series or plan a movie night from the comfort of your couch, if your streamer-of-choice is Netflix, chances are you are enjoying content that a Seattle University alum is very familiar with, playing a role in the creative process, helping to bring a diverse slate of stories—via TV and film—to life.

Much goes into making these stories a series or film. But this is more than just entertaining content—it’s about diversifying what’s on the screen to be representative of a global audience and to help curate an experience that features storylines and subject matter that is reflective of that viewership. Behind the scenes is the important work of creating tools and resources to make this all possible.

Beyond the entertainment side of Netflix, the importance of authentic representation carries over into the hiring practices of the company. This, too, is influenced greatly by another Seattle University alum.

Meet Alex LaCasse, ’10, and Kabi Gishuru, ’08, who are enacting and amplifying meaningful change at Netflix, with LaCasse working on the film and TV side and Gishuru in the workforce, recruitment side of the company. And, as if in a moment of serendipity, the two learned they were both graduates of Seattle University during a chance meeting at the Netflix headquarters in Los Angeles. They became fast friends.

“I had just started at Netflix and was in the LA office. Someone introduced us and we got to talking and we were floored when we figured out we both went to SU,” Gishuru says. “The Seattle U connection was foundational in our bond.”

LaCasse concurs: “So much of our connection and bond is rooted in Seattle U and the Jesuit system of values. I think most alumni feel this instantly when they meet—there’s just so many commonalities in how we approach life and people.”

In his role as Director of Inclusion—Content and Studio Operations, LaCasse helps advise executives in charge of what ends up on screen.

“In my work with our incredible film and TV executives, we talk a lot about the importance of representing our members across the globe in meaningful and multidimensional ways,” says LaCasse, who is in his fifth year with the company. “We strive to create films, series and games that appeal to all different tastes and interests and people. This includes, of course, communities that have been historically underrepresented on screen.”

LaCasse continues: “We know that TV and film have a direct impact on how people see themselves and how we see each other. What an opportunity we have to not only entertain people but also to perhaps bring them closer together.”

As a director of talent acquisition, Seattle native Gishuru was brought on four years ago to build out a diversity recruitment program. She had extensively worked in building similar programs in her previous position with ride-sharing company Lyft.

“It was about building something from scratch and doing it an industry-leading company like Netflix,” she says. “We were able to do great work, which has led to building the global team we have today.”

The path that led both LaCasse and Gishuru to Netflix started at Seattle University. Wanting to attend a school not too far from his home in Lake Forest Park, north of Seattle, LaCasse learned more about SU when he applied for the Sullivan Scholarship, which brought him to campus for a day and, in his own words, “instantly fell in love.” While his plan initially was to major in biology with sights on becoming a pediatrician, he took a women’s studies course and “was enthralled.” He also was looking at journalism, something he studied in high school, and ended up majoring in the two disciplines. During his time at SU LaCasse also became involved with the Children’s Literacy Project, working at Bailey Gatzert Elementary. That experience, he says, changed the course of his career.

“I became very interested in working with young people and as a result transitioned my focus from journalism to working in education,” says LaCasse, who followed graduation went to grad school to Loyola Chicago, where he earned a Master of Education and went into the education field full-time, first in Chicago and then New York City. It was in NYC that LaCasse went from teaching to working at a nonprofit focused on educating K-12 public school leaders on LGBTQ+ inclusivity. This included working with queer-identifying young people who were eager for support and insight into what was possible for them at high school.

In 2014, he returned to Seattle to teach literature at St. Joseph School. Then Netflix came calling and he applied for a program manager role on the inclusion team. At first LaCasse thought that it was a mistake when he got a response from the company.

“I think it’s a testament to how Netflix thinks about people. That even an educator, someone who has spent their life teaching young people, has something valuable to add. So I took the call and was so impressed with the intention and thoughtfulness at the company,” he says.

When LaCasse started at Netflix, there was no dedicated team focused on inclusion and diversity in the workplace. He was hired largely to change that.

“Seattle University played a pivotal role in not only his educational growth but also in his personal development, says LaCasse, something that carries over into his work in ensuring creating content at Netflix that is authentic.”

“Before I came to Seattle U I wasn’t out but it was the Jesuit environment that allowed me to live authentically as a queer person,” he says. “I felt so supported by faculty and students and my spiritual advisor Jerry Cobb, S.J. Seattle U allowed me to become who I am today in many ways more than one. This might surprise people. But there is something so special about that place. Not only is there a large queer student body but there are proactive efforts to make it as inclusive as possible for LGBTQ+ and other underrepresented students.”

“When it came time to look at colleges, Gishuru was very familiar with Seattle University—she grew up attending Catholic school—as her dad, grandmother and uncle are all alumni. She also liked the thought of being close to home but still living independently on an urban campus. Like LaCasse, originally her major was biology as she was eyeing pre-med with aspirations of becoming a doctor. That changed when she hit chemistry. A good writer, she shifted her major to English literature with

Alums Alex LaCasce, ’10, and Kabi Gishuru, ’08, are making meaningful change and amplifying diverse voices through their work at Netflix.
If you see an opportunity to create a more equitable space or industry, you must seize it. Netflix encourages this. I felt the same way at Seattle University—to go forth and set the world on fire!

ELLEN VOLUNTEERS

Ellen Montanana, ’12 grew up in a household that actively volunteered and gave back to their community. She knew she wanted a career that would continue this tradition and chose to earn her Master of Public Administration degree from SU because of the alignment she felt with the university’s mission of service to others. Montanana now works in a rewarding career that allows her to give back every day. On top of that, she is active with the Women of SU (WofSU) alumni chapter. WofSU is dedicated to connecting alumni and members of the SU community with service and engagement opportunities and more, with events in the Seattle area and across the country. Currently, she serves on the board by helping to coordinate a wide variety of service-oriented events.

One of her favorite events was a Christmas gift giving party for a homeless services organization. In addition to delivering clothes and essentials to the less fortunate, it provided much-needed holiday cheer during difficult times in people’s lives. Additionally, she has coordinated events with organizations such as Food Lifeline, Cougar Mountain Zoo and Young Women Empowered. Montanana fully realizes the benefits that volunteering offers. “It brings me a lot of joy and a sense of accomplishment to give back to my community and it has allowed me to make some really great friends and connections along the way.”

MARY JANE PAYS IT FORWARD

At Seattle University, we think of each alum as “one of our own.” With Mary Jane Brogan, ’09, that sentiment is felt in spades. She holds a master’s degree in organizational design, is the proud parent of an SU psychology graduate and works as a paralegal at the School of Law. “I wanted to be at an academic institution because I love education,” she says. “Seattle U was the perfect fit.” As her relationship with SU grew and evolved, Brogan resolved to become a Sustaining Supporter by giving back through monthly automated payments. “It’s not so much the amount,” she reflects, “but the intention behind the action. I decided to give because I can’t do my job without students!”

One of the defining qualities of giving is providing love, care and emotional support. For Brogan, giving financial support is exactly that, with an added emphasis on expressing gratitude, trust and joy. “What I’ve gotten back is immeasurable compared to what I’ve given,” she says. “By being here at SU, I’ve received unsurpassed love, care and emotional support. In addition to financial support, Brogan takes it upon herself to mentor law students. “As my relationship with SU evolved, Brogan resolved to become a Sustaining Supporter by giving back through monthly automated payments. “It’s not so much the amount,” she reflects, “but the intention behind the action. I decided to give because I== of being able to open doors is a privilege,” says Gishuru. Gishuru’s advice for future graduates is to ensure that whatever career path you choose aligns with your passions and core values. "The most important thing is to find a path that you love and that makes you feel fulfilled. Be open to new opportunities and don’t be afraid to take risks. With persistence and determination, you can turn your passions into a successful career.”
CJ. MENTORS

C. J. Chen, ’20, reflects with fondness at having a mentor to help him succeed.

During his junior year, Chen was matched with a mentor through LinkUp, an annual “speed networking” event that gives students the opportunity to practice networking, while asking questions and learning from alumni. Chen, who also earned his graduate degree from Albers in 2021, developed relationships with two mentors over the span of two years, both of whom worked in his chosen field of accounting. They typically connected on a monthly basis, either through email or in-person, to discuss Chen’s career path and preparation.

“As a mentee,” says Chen, “I received a lot of guidance and advice that definitely helped me into my career.”

It was such a positive experience that, after graduating, Chen was compelled to become a mentor so that he could provide an SU student with a similar experience.

“Seattle is very focused on giving back,” he says, “and that focus became a part of me.”

Chen was matched with an accounting student earlier this year and enjoys being the one to lend his expertise. His personal philosophy is to let the mentee drive the relationship in terms of what guidance and advice they want. “That’s how my mentors liked to work,” he says, “and I think it’s a great approach.”

TOM GETS INVOLVED

One of the easiest ways for Seattle University alumni to connect with their alma mater is through regional chapters and affinity groups. These groups are facilitated by the SU Alumni Association and provide opportunities for leadership networking, volunteering and more. One such group is the Veterans and Military Alumni Chapter—and that’s where Navy veteran Tom Hove, ’17, comes in.

Hove’s participation in alumni chapters can be directly traced to his time as a student at SU, when he was president of the Veterans Club and forged strong connections with fellow veterans. Always advocating for more support for the veteran community on campus, Hove was instrumental in establishing the O’streach Center, a space for veterans and first-generation college students.

“We tried to create a space for everybody to come in, feel comfortable and access what they need in a neutral space,” he recalls. “It was truly rewarding to see how we were able to help people and serve a vital need on campus.”

For Hove, it was a perfectly natural transition to stay connected to SU after graduation. Currently, he serves on the Alumni Board of Governors and as the president of the Military and Veterans Alumni Chapter. He continues to influence the journeys of veterans at SU through the Veteran’s Advisory Council and is advocating for a veteran’s memorial on campus. Additionally, Hove enjoys attending a variety of SU events, such as the Racial Equity Summit.

“Leaning into social justice is huge,” he says. “One thing I appreciate about SU is that when they say it, they mean it—and they do it.”

ANTIA DOES IT ALL

As the prime example of an alumna who participates in every way imaginable, Seattle Municipal Court Judge Anita Crawford-Wills, ’82, ’86, is a Seattle University superstar.

“The mission of educating the whole person and empowering students for a just and humane world is something that really drew me here,” she says, with emphasis. “I’ve always known that my life’s work is to help others, so the mission really resonates with me.”

As a 2006 graduate of the School of Law, Crawford-Wills’ alma journey began with participation on the Alumni Board of Governors. She says the mentors students, has been a season ticket holder for men’s and women’s basketball since 1988. Crawford-Willis says, “I feel I have lived out the mission of SU and I hope my school is proud of the things we’ve done.”

We certainly are.

Seattle University remembers those in our alumni family and university community we’ve lost.

Our Thoughts Are With You

Seattle University honors the memory of those in our community who we’ve lost.

Send notice of a loved one’s passing, including an online or print obituary if available, to tinap@seattleu.edu.
Longtime assistants Nate Daligcon and Skyler Young bring decades of coaching experience to their new roles leading men's soccer and women's basketball.

by mike thee

Two Seattle University athletics programs have new leaders this year. Nate Daligcon has taken the reins as head coach of men's soccer, while Skyler Young is the new head women's basketball coach. Daligcon is a familiar face, having previously served for 16 years as assistant coach for longtime men's soccer coach Pete Fewing (who retired after last season but remains with Athletics as Associate Athletic Director). Young, who brings two decades of collegiate coaching experience to SU, returns to the city where he got his first job after graduating from college. Following is a Q&A from conversations with the coaches.

**Daligcon:** What do you like to do away from soccer?

You had a successful playing career at Seattle Pacific University and professionally. Did you always have it in the back of your mind that you'd coach?

**Daligcon:** I never thought I was going to be a coach. When I finished playing in college and the pros, I went to work in the marketing department for a soccer company. One of my former teammates asked if I could coach a U12 girls team. I really enjoyed working with the players and after that I just kind of made my way to working with older players and then college.

You've been a big part of the program's success over the past decade. Do any highlights stand out for you?

**Daligcon:** When I joined Pete Fewing's staff in 2013, we didn't do well the first five or six games, but the team really stuck together. The culture was very solid and they wound up winning the WAC championship. Just to see those players have success and stick to the plan was great to watch. The 2015 team, which advanced to the Round of 16 in the NCAA Tournament, is another highlight.

What's kept you at SU all these years?

**Daligcon:** The university and what it stands for and just watching the players go through their four years and how they come out at the end and have a positive impact in the community.

As you take on this new role, what's your focus?

**Daligcon:** Making sure that everyone's pulling in the same direction. We talk a lot with the players about relationships, leadership, the culture of the group and how we can help them improve on the field and in the classroom.

What do you like to do away from soccer?

**Daligcon:** I love spending time with my family. My son plays soccer and my daughter runs track and field, so I get to as many of their sporting events as I can. I try to stay hands-off (with my son). I just watch the players go through their four years and how they come out at the end and have a positive impact in the community.

Young: You've been an assistant at your alma mater Western Michigan, as well as Detroit Mercy, Bradley University, Weber State and University of Portland. But before that, you were equipment manager for the Seattle Storm, so this is a bit of a full-circle moment for you.

Young: Yes, I arrived here (right out of college) in 2005, with five duffle bags and $200 in my pocket. I just love the city and how everyone accepts you for who you are. It's a sports town and a women's basketball town. I literally was working my whole career to get back this way. And this university, which is based on serving the community and helping people achieve their goals, aligns with me in life.

What can we expect of the team this year?

**Young:** We'll play with passion and togetherness. But also, we're not just going to be athletes, but complete individuals and role models in this community. I tell the team there are other people who would be salivating to be in your position. When we clap it up (in the huddle), we say 'grateful.' It's all about gratitude.

What can we expect of the team this year?

**Young:** I always wanted to coach, even in high school. I was raised by a single mother and my high school coach was a big mentor in my life. When I went to Western Michigan University, I was on the practice squad of the men's team and the women's basketball coach gave me a shot. He treated me like a son, allowed me to attend coaches' meetings and hear all the behind-the-scenes stuff.

You've been an assistant at your alma mater Western Michigan, as well as Detroit Mercy, Bradley University, Weber State and University of Portland. But before that, you were equipment manager for the Seattle Storm, so this is a bit of a full-circle moment for you.

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What do you do away from basketball?

**Young:** I love spending time with my dog Lucius (a chocolate lab). I love cooking, especially grilling. I'm a big ribs guy, briskets, slow-cooking. I do like golfing and fishing—even though I haven't had a lot of time to do either—and reading.

Read more in-depth Q&As with the coaches at The Newsroom (www.seattleu.edu/newsroom).

For the latest on all things SU Athletics, visit GoSeattleU.com.
MEET THE NEW STUDENT BODY PRESIDENT

Isabelle Alamilla, 25, has big plans to get more students engaged in governance while also working to elevate the voices and concerns of all students.

by Tina Potter

For Isabelle Alamilla, 25, being involved in student government is a passion that runs deep, one that began in earnest in high school in Utah and continued as an undergrad at Seattle University. At SU, Alamilla joined student government her freshman year, serving as a senator. From there she continued her work in student politics, ultimately deciding to run for Student Body President. Fast forward to today and Alamilla is ready to embark on her first full year as president.

“The reason I got involved in student government is that I love giving back to my community,” says Alamilla. “It teaches me how to deal with complex issues and conflict resolution and is really great for professional development. It’s also the people in student government. They push me to give 110%, if I let one student down, I’m letting everyone down.”

Alamilla’s path to Seattle University actually began when she was an eighth grader and she visited campus, which she was familiar with because her father attended law school here. (Fun fact: She currently lives in Bellarmine Hall, which is across the street from her parent’s first apartment together.) The university aligned with her Catholic upbringing and its location answered her desire to be in a big city.

“And I really appreciated the small school atmosphere and that it’s a Jesuit university.”

Operating under a shared approach to governance as president, Alamilla is ready to tackle several areas that impact students directly.

“This past year there have been a lot of changes, whether it is the tuition increase, wage disparities for faculty and changes in programs ... and students felt cut out of the conversation. They felt blindsided,” she says. “Part of what I want to accomplish is to have more effective feedback and collaboration between students and the administration. If students are experiencing something on the ground level, I want to be the first to hear about it.”

Alamilla does credit SU administrators for the collaboration and consultation that is already happening, noting support from and a “positive relationship” with President Eduardo Peñalver. Provost Shane P. Martin and Vice Provost Afzln Sturdivant, as well the university allowing a member of student government to sit on the Board of Trustees.

Another priority for Alamilla is to get more students interested in running for office. Currently, members of student government organize a regular “Cookie Council,” a group of candidates in the dining halls, allowing students to meet and ask questions of their Student Government of Seattle University (SGSU) representatives. As president Alamilla would like to do more events and programming that elevate the roles of her peers in SGSU.

“Immersing herself in the college experience goes beyond serving in the top spot. In her first year at SU she was part of the soccer club and co-chaired the annual music festival Quadstock. And in June she was honored with a student award for her efforts working with and promoting the Office of Diversity and Inclusion.”

Double majoring in business management and business analytics sets Alamilla up for opportunities to be a leader in business, she says. Her dream job is to become a CEO. “I tend to break glass ceilings,” she says. “And I want to be able to give back to my community in a way that matters and that is impactful.”

In her free time, Alamilla loves to spend time watching movies and hanging out with friends. And there is usually food involved — the food in Seattle is soul food to me.”

“I love any sort of Asian food, especially Korean BBQ.”

Favorite Restaurant(s): Dough Zone (dumpling house), Ba Bar and Jak’s Grill.
Favorite type of food: “I love any sort of Asian food, especially Korean BBQ.”
Favorite TV show you last binged: Ted Lasso
Favorite book(s): Divergent (of Unwind
Favorite class/professor: “Quantitative Methods in Applications with Richard Dadzie. This class made me want to do a double major. Out of all my classes, I have really enjoyed my math and statistics classes.”
Favorite place(s) in Seattle: “I really love the University District and going to Westlake. Also, Pike Place Market and Capitol Hill.”

“Part of what I want to accomplish is to have more effective feedback and collaboration between students and the administration. If students are experiencing something on the ground level, I want to be the first to hear about it.”

—Isabelle Alamilla, ’25

Favorite book(s): Divergent of Unwind
Favorite band(s)/musician(s): “I love R&B and (singer-songwriter) Tai Verdes.”
Favorite place(s) on campus: “I would have to say the Student Center and the Fitness Center, which is where I go to reset. My favorite quiet space is my room in Bellarmine.”

Favorite movie(s) or film genre: “My favorite genre is romantic comedies and action films. My favorite films: Holiday, Crazy Rich Asians and Divergent.”
Favorite restaurant(s): Dough Zone (dumpling house), Ba Bar and Jak’s Grill.
Favorite type of food: “I love any sort of Asian food, especially Korean BBQ.”
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There’s always something happening at Seattle University to inspire learning, connection and celebration.

**November 30**
Advent Mass & Christmas Tree Lighting

**February 9**
Alumni Awards

**February 29**
SU Gives

**April 13**
Day of Service

**April 26–April 28**
Class of '74 50th Reunion Weekend

**April 26**
State of the University with President Eduardo Peñalver

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