Participants from Saudi Arabia come to the School of Education and Human Services to learn via cultural immersion.

From Passion to Profession
Claudia Leandres helps the autism community.
Your gift opened doors for Lyndsay

“As a student in the teacher development program, I have access to thousands of books, up-to-date technological resources, and events and professional development opportunities to further my education. I am grateful to the many donors who help make these resources a reality for students in my program.”

— Lyndsay Vincent, Elementary Education, Class of 2018
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A Message from the Provost

One of the great benefits of a liberal arts education is its power to prepare students to gainfully navigate a vast world of knowledge, perspective and human experience. The more students are exposed to the complexity of the world — including the wide spectrum of people’s backgrounds, traits and characteristics — the more they are empowered to grow and prosper in our increasingly global community.

We know that university students learn at least as much through direct observation of their environment as they do by way of assigned readings and lecture hall discussions. Given this, we also know that employing a diverse faculty dramatically enhances the quality of learning experiences that colleges and universities create. This is true simply because students bear witness to a greater array of experiences, ideas and perspectives different from their own.

A diverse faculty is also more likely than a largely homogeneous one to provide all students a sense of belonging and significance. Individuals in minority groups, particularly, need not feel that they are isolated. At the same time, a diverse faculty imparts, by implicit example, the understanding that aspiration and success are open to individuals from an array of backgrounds and viewpoints.

As long as higher education strives to advance the well-being of humankind, ensuring that there is diversity among faculty ranks cannot be viewed as a commendable resolution or laudable campaign. Rather, it must be seen as a fundamental necessity.
The Oakland University School of Education and Human Services (SEHS) is and has always been a community-engaged professional school.

In this issue of our annual magazine, you’ll see many inspiring instances of our faculty, students and staff engaging with professionals in education, human resources, leadership and counseling. We are at our best when, as we often do, we roll up our sleeves and work alongside our communities.

Someone who might want to keep his sleeves rolled down is beekeeper Brian Peterson, who is also a public school teacher and SEHS instructor. You’ll also meet a Keeper of the Dream award winner and student Daryl Blackburn, researcher and faculty member Tomoko Wakabayashi, spelling “innovator” Joe Dombrowski, behavior analyst Claudia Leandres and 40-plus-year teacher Zita Burton.

We value diversity and inclusion, striving to see our world from as many perspectives as possible and to be of service in a multitude of settings. This year’s projects have taken us from China to Saudi Arabia, working with people aged toddler to elderly, with a range of abilities. There is space at our table for all; as dean, it is my hope that these pages showcase a spectrum of our work in the community and that as a reader, you are inspired to join us or the communities in which you can serve.

Jon Margerum-Leys
Dean | School of Education and Human Services
SUMMING IT UP

The School of Education and Human Services is made up of several key components. At the root of these are its students.

**731**

- Counseling
- Early Childhood Education
- Educational Leadership
- Reading and Language Arts
- Special Education
- Teacher Development
- Training and Development

**243**

- Counseling
- Early Childhood Education
- Educational Leadership
- Reading and Language Arts

**1,063**

- Human Resource Development
- Teacher Development

**111** Staff members

**106** Part-time faculty members

**64** Full-time faculty members

**450** Field placements per term

**240** Student teaching placements
Already graduated? Missing SEHS? Follow us to stay up to date on all that we do.

SEHS celebrates teachers and the many reasons why they teach.

Helping graduates celebrate as they reach a milestone.

Making time for fun during the annual employee kickball tournament.

Education and Human Services

“I teach because I learn something new from my students every day.” - Lisa Kowalson

#ThisIsOU #TeacherAppreciation #WhyTeach

Education and Human Services

There is such a thing as losing gracefully. Congrats to all of today’s kickball players!

#ThisIsOU #Kickball #NothingWrongWithLosing

Oakland U SEHS

Congratulations to all the graduates receiving degrees today! Time to celebrate!

#ThisIsOU #Graduation

Oakland U SEHS

Helping graduates celebrate as they reach a milestone.
SITE SUPPORT

The Oakland University Reading Recovery Center increases literacy expertise through the addition of two new sites

This year, Oakland University’s Reading Recovery Center added two new sites to its growing list of locations — one in Oakland County’s Troy School District and another in the Warren Woods Public Schools of Macomb County.

“These new sites are quite progressive,” says Mary Lose, Ed.D., a professor in Oakland University’s Department of Reading and Language Arts and director of the Reading Recovery Center. “The plan is to increase literacy expertise across the districts by providing specialized training for their teachers through our Center’s three, year-long, graduate-level programs in Reading Recovery, Literacy Lessons, and Literacy Support.”

Reading Recovery Teacher Leaders Kristin Piotrowski (in Troy) and Richelle Barkley (in Warren Woods) will guide the sites’ educators through the specialized trainings and instructional techniques, providing critical support in collaboration with OU’s Reading Recovery Center.

“The goal is to have additional teachers trained in these highly effective literacy programs through OU, thereby expanding their intervention services to children at risk for failure,” explains Lose. “We continue to celebrate the difference we make on behalf of teachers and children throughout Michigan through our work at the OU Reading Recovery Center.”

OU’s Reading Recovery Center is one of just 18 across the U.S. and serves nearly 60 school districts in Michigan.
It took only one beekeeping course for Brian Peterson, SEHS ‘04, to fall in love with nature’s buzzing beauties. “The moment I opened the hive and had the privilege to become a part of the honeybee world,” he remembers, “I wanted to know more about this extremely organized and complex society.” Now, at his Beekeeping for Beginners workshops, he eagerly encourages learners to share the love. “Even today, years later, I am amazed every time I open a hive.”

Peterson is an OU adjunct professor, an elementary school teacher and founder of Bees in the D — a nonprofit focused on beekeeper education and raising awareness about the plight of the honeybee. But it is his passion to teach that ties all of his work together.

“Trainer, mentor, coach, director, team leader and, of course, teacher are all titles that I feel are interchangeable. No matter what title or what profession, all these roles involve education. For that reason I feel that an education degree is one of the most versatile of all degrees,” says Peterson, who received his master’s degree and specialist degree at OU in educational leadership. “Though I spend my days as a teacher, my degree has helped me follow my passions, to build a life I am very proud of.”

In many ways, says Peterson, his degree helped him be the best that he can “bee.”

“The educational leadership program helped me gain a greater knowledge of the teaching profession and build my confidence to become a more effective teacher in the classroom. This confidence has spilled over into my personal endeavors, including founding the nonprofit organization Bees in the D.”

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Summer School

Each year, the School of Education and Human Services hosts education enrichment opportunities through various workshops over the summer. “It’s not just for educators but for all community members including teens,” says Lisa A. Reeves, executive director of outreach and program services at SEHS. “Michigan summers are amazing, and we are excited to provide these enrichment opportunities.”

This year’s workshops included:
- Beekeeping for Beginners
- Connecting with the Distracted Student in the Classroom
- Educating African American Males
- Mindfulness for Educators
- Mindfulness Part II with Self-Compassion
- Mindfulness Retreat
- Mindfulness for School Leaders
- Promoting Diversity and Equity in the Classroom
- Introduction to Restorative Practices

For information about the School of Education and Human Services’ 2018 summer workshops, please contact Kelly Quintana at kquintana@oakland.edu.
KEEPING CONTROL

A new project aims to connect the self-regulation skills of young learners to success

Self-regulation supports children’s abilities to adjust behavior, control impulses and promote learning, explains Dr. Tomoko Wakabayashi, an associate professor of education in the Department of Human Development and Child Studies at Oakland University.

“These skills are considered important for children’s social-emotional development and academic achievement, and related to children becoming socially responsible adults,” she adds.

This year, Wakabayashi received a new $560,994 subaward for the U.S. Department of Education’s Invest in Innovation (i3) Development grant awarded to the HighScope Educational Research Foundation. The five-year collaborative project — which will include approximately 2,024 students across 88 classrooms in the Detroit Public Schools Community District (DPSCD) — aims to help preschool and kindergarten students increase their self-regulation skills. Wakabayashi will serve as co-principal investigator and co-director.

“We will collaborate with classroom teachers at DPSCD and use the latest research to enhance HighScope’s curricular components — Plan-Do-Review (PDR) and Conflict Resolution (CR),” she explains. “We
will then train and coach additional DPSCD preschool and kindergarten teachers, monitor and assess implementation, and evaluate the impact of the enhanced PDR/CR on teachers and children.”

To assess the effectiveness of the project, HighScope will also partner with Michigan State University researchers who will serve as independent evaluators.

“The results of this project will ensure teachers have the tools they need to increase students’ self-regulation abilities to support their academic achievement and to help them build the skills needed for lifelong success,” says HighScope President Cheryl Polk, Ph.D.

According to Wakabayashi, the project builds on the results of HighScope’s Perry Preschool Study, which was conducted from 1962 to 1967 in Ypsilanti, Michigan. In the study, approximately 123 low-income African-American children between ages 3 and 4 were randomly divided into a program group that entered a high-quality preschool program based on HighScope’s participatory learning approach, and a comparison group who received no preschool program.

As of 2005, the study found that adults at age 40 who underwent the preschool program had higher earnings, committed fewer crimes, were more likely to hold a job and were more likely to have graduated from high school than adults who did not have a preschool education.

“Infused with the latest self-regulation research, which did not exist when the HighScope curriculum was first envisioned for Perry in the 1960s, the enhanced PDR/CR will not only offer everyday opportunities to practice (self-regulation), but also ensure that teachers deliver PDR and CR more systematically, so that children will learn to integrate the strategies acquired through PDR/CR into their routine thoughts and actions, not just during the prescribed time of day,” Wakabayashi says. “It is speculated that the PDR sequence and emphasis on CR were the ‘key ingredients’ in improving the Perry children’s abilities to plan, problem-solve and reflect on consequences, thus regulating their behaviors, which led to higher academic achievement and increased social responsibility.”

She adds, “We’re hoping we can demonstrate similar positive outcomes with children in Detroit.”

For more information about the project, please visit oakland.edu/hdcs

MENTAL MAINTENANCE

Using a series of questions, the campus MindKare Kiosk raises mental health awareness

Mental illness on college campuses is on the rise, according to a 2016 survey of 95,761 students by the American College Health Association. The survey reports college students treated for depression increased by 10.7 percent since 2011 and anxiety increased by 11.6 percent.

In order to combat this statistic and increase mental health awareness, Oakland University partnered with Easterseals Michigan and Screening for Mental Health Inc. to install the state’s first MindKare Kiosk in OU’s Kresge Library.

The freestanding kiosk uses an interactive touch-screen display to provide users with quick, anonymous assessments of six mental health issues: generalized anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, bipolar disorder, eating disorders and substance use disorders.

“Providing counseling services for Oakland University students and the community is a priority of the School of Education and Human Services,” explains Dean Jon Margerum-Leys, Ph.D. “Through a free and accessible system that will provide students with an assessment of their mental health and access to quality, local treatment centers and other resources, Oakland University is pleased to take the lead with Easterseals Michigan and Screening for Mental Health Inc. in bringing this technology to Michigan.”

Easterseals Michigan secured a $27,000 grant from the Flinn Foundation to bring the Screening for Mental Health MindKare Kiosk program to Michigan.

And thanks to its prime location on campus, the MindKare Kiosk makes getting a mental health checkup as easy as checking out a book.
LEARNING TO LAUGH

Joe “Mr. Dee” Dombrowski’s viral April Fool’s Day prank puts teaching in the limelight

When a video clip went viral that showed fourth-grade teacher Joe Dombrowski giving his students a comically difficult spelling quiz, he used his newfound fame to extol the virtues of teaching.

“It’s given me a platform to reach more teachers, to inspire them to be the best that they can be for kids and to continue thinking outside of the box,” says Dombrowski, who received his master’s degree in educational leadership from Oakland University in 2016.

“We always talk about top-down leadership in the program and how it’s important to inspire every single person that trickles down underneath you no matter how far that goes. And that comes down from the principal, down to the teachers, down to the students.”

In recognition of the joke’s genius, he was invited to The Ellen DeGeneres Show twice and presented with a $10,000 check at Oakland Elementary School in Royal Oak. But all jokes aside, Dombrowski explains that keeping his students engaged was the prank’s main purpose.

“That was a short, five-minute break — a brain break between subjects, where I played a little dad humor on the students to get them laughing and make a memorable experience,” he says.

“The experience made them want to keep coming back to school and loving school, which was my ultimate goal.”

This school year, Dombrowski will be starting at a new school in Illinois’ district 54 where he says he is excited to get to know his students.

“Because if you don’t have those connections and that relationship in class then you don’t really connect with the kids in a way that they can connect with the curriculum,” he says. “One of the biggest things that I learned from my time at Oakland was to be innovative in your practice. So, what I am trying to do, learning from Oakland, is to inspire my students to be better than anything they could ever imagine and continue to lead.”

For Dombrowski, leadership starts with a good a sense of humor.

Faculty Focus

How to build a bond between student and teacher in the classroom is a crucial portion of the educational leadership program in the School of Education and Human Services. At OU, this begins with building a bond with faculty.

“Every single professor that we had was beyond exceptional,” says Joe Dombrowski. “I tell everybody I was so impressed with my experience at Oakland because they pushed us to work harder and to be better than anything we thought we could be. When I left the program, I truly felt like I was ready to move on.”

Still, he says, there are a few lessons from his professors that he’ll always carry with him:

“Dr. C. Suzanne Klein, Assistant Professor, Central Office Coordinator, and Galileo Co-Coordinator, has been one of the biggest inspirations in my time at Oakland. She really helped me focus on taking the lens of leadership and looking at it from this bigger picture,” says Dombrowski. “Putting myself into the shoes of everyone that will be affected by every administrative decision, using her style of leadership and bringing that into my own life has really changed the way I am able to navigate that throughout my career in education. And I am just so thankful that I had my time working with her.”

“Dr. Beth Feiten, Director of School and Field Services, is the person who gave me my first shot at being an educator,” says Dombrowski. “She hired me in 2012 as a fourth-grade teacher when she was the principal of Roosevelt Elementary School. I owe her so many thanks for taking a risk on a brand new teacher. I am so grateful to have learned and been inspired under her leadership.”
LIFE LESSONS

OUCARES helps adults with autism spectrum disorders learn the skills necessary to gain and maintain employment

The Oakland University Center for Autism Outreach Services (OUCARES) offers programs and services for people with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) ages three through adulthood with the mission of improving their quality of life. A particularly distinctive program that has garnered a lot of attention for OUCARES is its Pre-Employment Skills Training for adults with ASD.

The program, launched in early 2016, is designed to prepare adults with ASD to gain and maintain employment and learn skills to help them live independently successfully. This includes helping participants with professional skills such as writing resumes and interview coaching and with technical skills such as learning computer programs.

The first step is to help participants understand what their needs are, explains Kristin L. Rohrbeck, director of OUCARES. "They learn how to set realistic goals for themselves, how to break down those goals and utilize the resources that they have to be more effective to reach their goals," she says. "We spend time creating resumes, cover letters, and other documents to give participants an electronic portfolio of customized professional materials they can use to help them get a job." Although the training is not a job placement program, Rohrbeck says the professional skills that participants learn certainly will help them succeed in a workplace setting.

"Participants need to know how to communicate with supervisors, how to interact with coworkers and topics to avoid in an employment setting," she adds. "If you’re someone who is on the autism spectrum, you may not necessarily understand all of those social norms that someone without autism would. Our program is intentional about teaching those social norms, giving participants practical experience and allowing them to make mistakes — and learn from them — as they test out their new knowledge."

Prior to joining the program, almost all participants report that they could not successfully find or maintain a job. From a previous group of participants, about 70 percent were able to find and maintain a job three months post-program or have gone on to further their education to work toward their career goals.

"Some of these individuals have jobs when they enter our program or get a job while attending. Some of them have had jobs and lost jobs. Some have high school diplomas and college degrees. Others do not," she says. One of the important requirements for the Pre-Employment Skills Training is that participants be committed to learning skills that will improve their quality of life and help them take further steps toward employment.

"This program is specifically designed for people who can follow directions, can communicate and have basic independence skills," says Rohrbeck. In order to provide thorough instruction,
participating groups are kept small with a 3-1 ratio of participants to staff. “We want to be able to give a lot of attention to our participants.”

She adds, “We customize our lessons to the individual needs and interests of our participants, and having small groups allows for more direct feedback as well.” OUCARES also utilizes Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) strategies to help teach positive and appropriate behaviors for a workplace setting and to decrease behaviors that might be detrimental to employment.

The program has been a mutual learning experience for participants as well as Oakland University student interns from across campus, from communications to counseling to human resources. Employers are also invited in on the process to conduct real-life interviews and foster networking opportunities. "Interviewees don’t typically get constructive feedback from a real HR professional after a job interview," says Rohrbeck. "This is helpful in learning what went well during the interview process and what did not work so well. From there, participants learn how to integrate that feedback and step up their interview skills in the future."

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**National Recognition**

This year, OUCARES received two national awards in recognition for its work to raise awareness and train staff in Oakland County Parks to interact with children and adults with autism through its autism spectrum disorder (ASD) trainings.

“The Oakland County Parks Staff work directly with OUCARES Summer Camp participants so it is important that the staff understand the challenges any of our participants may have,” says Stephanie Laubach, OUCARES program coordinator.

“For the public, it is important that the park’s staff understand that individuals with ASD and their families may be utilizing their services and knowing about Autism will assist the park staff in their public interaction.”

OUCARES received the NACPRO (National Association County Parks and Recreations Organization) Removing Barriers 2016 Special Award and was chosen to receive the 2017 best program in parks and recreation award in the country from the National Association of Counties (NACo).

Topics discussed during the trainings include best communication practices, social interactions, sensory issues and learning styles.

“One of the most important aspects in the ASD training is to help the Oakland County Parks staff understand what autism is, specifically related to the challenges and characteristics an individual with ASD may demonstrate,” says Laubach. “A few of the strategies we discussed were: using pictures, photos and written words, breaking down information when teaching or interacting, redirecting the focus to manage challenging behaviors and troubleshooting common issues park staff encounter.”

This is the second consecutive year OUCARES has given the training for Oakland County Parks, and they will continue holding the trainings at conferences next year.

For more information about how your organization can receive autism spectrum disorder trainings, please contact the OUCARES at oucares@oakland.edu.
EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGE

What begets a world-class education? Participants in the Galileo-Saudi Arabia Leadership Project have come to the School of Education and Human Services to learn via cultural immersion.
When the first of three cohorts in the Galileo-Saudi Arabia Leadership Project arrived in February to a snowy Michigan, “The Saudi educators were not only encountering jetlag but were also facing the realities of making arrangements for living in a foreign country with their families,” explains Suzanne Klein, assistant professor of organizational leadership and coordinator of the school immersion segment of the Leadership Project. Arrangements included finding living quarters, schools for their children, doctors, grocery stores, and, most important, acclimating to the weather. “I lovingly call them the pioneers,” says Klein.

Participants in the Galileo-Saudi Arabia Leadership Project — teachers, supervisors, counselors and school administrators — are small pieces to a larger puzzle. Last year, Saudi Arabian Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman unveiled the Saudi 2030 Transformation Plan. The Vision 2030 plan included goals to develop service sectors such as health, infrastructure, tourism, recreation and education.

For six months, the participating students will study educational leadership via cultural immersion and transfer what they’ve learned to their classrooms at home in Saudi Arabia. Ultimately, the aim of the Galileo-Saudi Arabia Leadership Project is to help participants expand their understanding of school organization, instruction and leadership practice through experience with evidence-based practice.

“I think it is a bold move from the government to send them to gain these experiences and bring them back to Saudi Arabia to start the change,” says Klein, explaining that from a call for proposals from universities across the country, Oakland University was chosen along with a handful of other universities to provide a learning experience.

“Oakland was chosen for the value that it placed on teacher leadership and the notion that the responsibility for learning is shared by all the staff,” she says. “Leading from every chair is the way that I describe it. That it’s not just the former leadership structure but the informal leaders in the building who can develop change.”

The Galileo-Saudi Arabia Leadership Project consists of four primary components: a program orientation, comprehensive ESL classes, school immersion experiences and a learning seminar each week called Campus Fridays.

“I learned that American education is tailored to satisfy student needs and also the community needs. I saw the community and school involved in their kids learning, and that is something I would definitely take back home.” - Abdulrahman Alghamdi

Participants visited local schools to have experiences tailored to their educational roles and professional
interests. They also visited individual teachers and classrooms where they spent seven to eight weeks shadowing an education professional.

“There were three different kinds of experiences that they had. Then there were some common experiences that they had on Fridays and on other visits with me,” says Klein. “When I took them for school immersion we did visits and we used the national leadership standards to help them view schools in terms of their vision, values and goals, how they support the success of every student and what kinds of professional experiences to grow the skills of the staff — all those kinds of things.”

The idea is to explore new educational concepts while improving on old concepts in the process. “We are blurring the lines,” says Klein.

The project welcomed a second cohort of participants in August and will welcome its third wave of participants later this year. With each group comes the opportunity to improve upon the project’s process.

“I would like all of our participants to be able to take a new sense of

Campus Fridays

During Campus Fridays, Galileo-Saudi Arabia Leadership Project participants delve into the skills they’ve learned during their school visits.

“These Fridays allow rich conversation and the opportunity to have guest speakers and dialogues that require extra time for thinking, processing and conversation of how these new ideas are changing them as educational leaders,” says Cindy Carver, associate professor of Organizational Leadership. “As such, the curriculum shifts as participants gain English skills and familiarity with American classrooms. In the early months, we are establishing a sound pedagogical foundation upon which participants will build their knowledge and skill.”

One of the first lessons learned is the difference between the American educational system and the Saudi system.

“Later in the program we invite faculty to share their expertise on topics that range from reading promotion and high-leverage instructional practices, to handling difficult behaviors in the classroom,” says Carver. “Constant throughout is an intentional effort to model effective adult learning strategies, e.g., establishing group norms for how the group will work together during the Friday seminar.”
confidence, a new framework of themselves as educational leaders in the light of research-based, best practice,” says Anne Donato, Ph.D., director of the Galileo-Saudi Arabia Immersion Project. “I would like them to be personally elevated to a fresh new paradigm of what is possible as an educational agent of change, especially in light of Vision 2030 for Saudi Arabia, and to know they are surrounded by other educational leaders that they can reach out to for support.”

“We are all trying to do what is best for children, what is best for education, what is best to make educational delivery richer, deeper and more robust,” she says. “To learn from each other, to see other points of view, to watch an educational approach be applied in several different ways reinforces for me that the more voices we have at the table, the more diversity we share, the clearer and brighter our educational vision will be for our children — and for us as educators as we move to new levels of leadership.”

“Every day I discovered a new thing with other teacher leaders in the schools we visited. We went there, and we found many things in schools. I learned many strategies that will help me when I return to Saudi Arabia. I have made a plan to train my colleagues. I am interested in technological education and I am focused on applications that can be used in the classroom. I plan to teach my students how to use these applications to learn English.” - Ali Asiri

Through collaboration, the ultimate goal is to support creating a new set of leadership skills and best educational practices that will move across the globe to benefit students and educational leaders in Saudi Arabia, explains Donato.

21 percent of female participants in the first cohort

24 number of participants in the first cohort

61 number of children traveling with participants to the United States
DREAMING BIG

Oakland University senior Daryl Blackburn, a human resource development major, received a 2017 Keeper of the Dream award in recognition of his efforts to promote diversity, cultural understanding and activism on campus and in the community.

“It meant the work I am doing on campus and the difference I’m trying to make here and everywhere is not going unnoticed and that one person can make a difference,” Blackburn says about the award. “If you have a goal, just go for it.”

Here, Blackburn talks dreams, graduation plans and promoting diversity and inclusion as a student leader.

What are your dreams after graduation?

My short-term plan — start grad school; long-term, I want to have my own nonprofit. I would like to do something along the lines of the Make-A-Wish Foundation or like the Rainbow Connection in Rochester.

The Rainbow Connection granted my wish when I was little and sent me to the Give Kids the World Village in Kissimmee, Florida. I will be going again in February 2018 to lead 15 students for spring break as a site leader.

Explain the importance of promoting diversity and inclusion as a student leader.

Promoting inclusion both on and off campus gives everyone a sense of belonging and is important to make everyone feel that they have a say in what goes on around campus.

My biggest thing is to show people that one person can make a difference regardless of disability or age. I believe it gives people hope.

In what ways has the School of Education and Human Services prepared you to realize those dreams?

SEHS has given me actual experiences with others, such as book drives and service learning projects. SEHS has also helped me see the importance of communication skills — going out, talking to people and getting real-world experience.

Why did you choose the human resource development major?

I like the business aspect of human resource development, but I also really like the leadership aspect, being able to help make others better through teaching and guiding.

Any key takeaways you’ve learned about leadership from the program?

Human resource development coordinator Jennifer Wenson, Ph.D., taught us a lot about how types of leadership impact people. If you use someone’s name when you talk to the person, it makes them feel more like you care. Of course, she made it a point to learn all of our names right when we started.

Faculty Focus

“Teaching starts with the human connection. If you know your students, it is easier to identify with their style, likes and dislikes. Using practical examples to model theory is a method that works for me and seems to be appealing to my students,” says Dr. Wenson. “Daryl is just one of the many students at Oakland University who connect to stories as a technique to learn concepts. However, his uplifting spirit and kind heart are what really resonated with me as his instructor.”

Jennifer Wenson, Ph.D.
Human Resource Development Coordinator
Three principles have steadily guided Zita Burton’s more than 40 years in the classroom: “Strive for my personal best, be kind of heart and never lose my sense of humor,” she explains. The rest is about getting your hands dirty. “During my field study, I knew teaching was for me. Oakland University’s philosophy of hands-on learning is a hallmark of its elementary education degree program.”

Burton began teaching at Havel Elementary School in Sterling Heights after graduating from the School of Education and Human Services in 1977. Over a career dedicated to enriching the lives of her students through education, she’s become a fixture in the Macomb County community. This year, she retired and received the 2017 Utica Community Schools Teacher of the Year award in recognition of her work.

“Zita has a tireless energy and is committed to her students and their success,” said Christine Johns, Ed.D., superintendent of Utica Community Schools, during an award ceremony at the Community Education Center in Sterling Heights.

In addition to the award, Burton received the keys to a new black Mustang with a free two-year lease, courtesy of Suburban Ford.

“When you think of someone who makes a difference and is a champion for children, you think of Zita,” says principal of Havel Elementary, Kristina Barel, who nominated Burton for the award in the elementary teaching category. “Her compassion, patience and faith in her students reflects who she is.” It also reflects her learning experience at OU, explains Burton.

“Oakland influenced me throughout out my teaching career. Best practices guided the curriculum and became my classroom techniques,” she says. “I recall being in Professor Murphy’s and Professor Stamps’ classes and felt their passion for teaching. I knew I wanted to share that same enthusiasm with elementary school children.”

A video featuring Burton’s current and past students played during her award ceremony. And in accepting her award, Burton had this advice for future elementary school teachers: “Always create an atmosphere in your classroom where children feel comfortable talking and sharing. You’ll face challenges — and it’s alright to make mistakes.”

Making mistakes is a crucial part of learning and teaching, she says.

Zita Burton is one of the 22,000 OU alums who call Macomb County home and who have spent their careers making it a vibrant and thriving community.

“Zita’s extraordinary dedication to our Macomb County community exemplifies how OU prepares graduates to be professionals who make significant contributions within their fields,” says Julie Dichtel, Oakland University executive director of Macomb County Outreach. “Throughout the years, OU’s School of Education and Human Services has prepared its graduates to be K-12 teachers and school district administrators who influence the lives of Macomb County’s youth — our future leaders.”

Julie Dichtel
Executive Director, Macomb County Outreach
BEHAVIORAL BREAKTHROUGH

After her son’s autism diagnosis, Claudia Leandres was determined to know everything there was to know about the disorder. In the process, she found a passion for a new career as a board certified behavior analyst, enabling her to support other families coping with autism.

Claudia Leandres’ son Antonio was medically diagnosed with autism at the age of six. But before his behavior was given a name, she remembers there were symptoms.

“First of all, eye contact. He made poor eye contact – very brief eye contact,” says Leandres, a board certified behavior analyst. “The second one, which was like a very big one for me, was the way he used to play. He would prefer to stay alone than engaging with other children.”

Leandres, a native of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, moved to the United States in 2001 because of a job opportunity for her husband. She was a practicing attorney at the time. But when her son was diagnosed with autism, she felt she only had two choices: “I’m either going to go crazy or I am going to learn everything I possibly can about autism,” Leandres remembers. She chose to learn.

In 2015, Leandres graduated from the competitive master’s degree program in special education with a concentration in applied behavior analysis (ABA) at the School of Education and Human Services. She’s now in the early stages of opening an applied behavior analysis clinic of her own.

“You kind of go through a really rough patch until you find out what you’re going to do,” she says about her journey.

According to the Autism Society, an estimated 3.5 million Americans live with an autism spectrum disorder. Although autism isn’t a new word for most Brazilians, Leandres says “they need a lot of help.”

COMPASSIONATE CARE

The Oakland Center for Autism Outreach Services (OUCARES) offers recreational sports, social and life skills programs, employment skills trainings, summer camps and special events for people with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) age three through adulthood. In addition, OUCARES supports families of people with ASD and our broader community by offering parent support groups and trainings, workshops, special events, expert presentations, referrals and an autism resource library. The mission of OUCARES is to improve the quality of life of individuals impacted with ASD by offering quality and comprehensive programming across the lifespan.

Camps include Pee Wee Camp, Summer Day Camp and Life Skills Camp, offering summer programming for all ages.

For more information about OUCARES, please contact oucares@oakland.edu.
“That’s one of the reasons why I am doing so many conferences in Brazil, so I can bring some awareness and some professional help,” she says. In addition to her work as a behavior analyst in the U.S., Leandres is a coordinator with Movimento Orgulho Autista Brasil, a national Brazilian organization dedicated to raising awareness about autism.

“Although Claudia knew that she wanted to make a difference in the lives of students with autism and, or, other special needs, she wasn’t quite sure exactly how she wanted to do that,” says Susan Martino, director of program development at SEHS. “I am often the first person potential graduate students speak with when they are looking for additional information. Claudia had a lot questions about program options and what she was actually eligible for.”

The ABA program was the best fit because it enables graduates to help people on multiple levels.

“At that point, she was ‘all in’ at every level. Even before the accrediting board approved our master’s degree with ABA concentration, she and her husband had purchased a building to serve as Claudia’s future ABA clinic,” says Martino. “She was so passionate about wanting to make a difference, not only in the lives of individuals with autism but everyone affected by it, as well. Although I definitely saw her determination, I had no idea how broadly she would actually manifest her vision.”

It is fairly common to have students in the ABA program who have a personal connection to autism says assistant professor Jessica Korneder.

“We have a new cohort start each fall. I would say that in the 12-20 students in those cohorts there are usually 1-2 people who have a close family member with a diagnosis of autism,” she says. “The two most rigorous parts of the program are the academic content and practicum experiences. There are many concepts to acquire, and understanding of those concepts can sometimes be challenging. While the practicum experiences are rewarding, they also involve dealing with challenging behavior and teaching individuals with cognitive delays. The work is so important, and I think that can be overwhelming at times.”

She adds, “The biggest change I have seen in Claudia is her confidence in conducting assessments, making presentations, teaching courses and guiding families.”

Leandres’ son is now 12 years old and has shown significant improvements in his capabilities to engage and learn with his peers.

“He doesn’t need one-on-one engagement. He has minimal support, and he’s going to start seventh grade soon. He’s doing everything like the other children are doing,” she says. “One of the reasons why I believe in ABA is because I see it working with my own son.”

As a parent coping with autism, Leandres says the best advice she can give to other parents is to get educated.

“It’s how they say knowledge is power,” she says. “Autism is not the end of the world. It seems like it. It feels like it. But getting educated was the best decision that I made. Because once you know what you are dealing with, then you can help.”

Degree Designation

In 2013, the national Behavior Analyst Certification Board (BACB) approved the course sequence for the School of Education and Human Services’ master’s degree program in special education with a concentration in applied behavior analysis (ABA). The creation of the program is partly in response to Michigan’s Autism Insurance Reform Bill in 2012, which requires insurance companies to pay for autism diagnosis and treatment for children up to age 18.

“We recognized the need to have a program, approved by the BACB, that would result in increased numbers of Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBA) in Michigan,” says associate professor Jan Graetz. “The coursework certainly provides foundational psychological theory and the in-depth knowledge and skills needed to understand positive behavioral change. While the focus may be on preparing professionals to work directly with individuals on the autism spectrum and with other disabilities, we encourage students to see themselves as ‘researchers’ who can advance the field.”
The makings of a great educator begin with “compassion” says Distinguished Professor Ron Cramer, Ph.D. From there, amiable qualities will follow: “It is important to make time for everyone, keep your office hours, to talk, to listen, to not rush people out your door, to treat students as individuals and human beings,” he says. “Students want to hear that you understand what they’re going through and not how much teaching is a tough job.”

This year, Dr. Cramer retired from the Reading and Language Arts department in the School of Education and Human Services and put an endpoint to a career in higher education spanning nearly five decades.

“We took a small department of reading, and over the course of 50 years we developed a very good school of education,” says Dr. Cramer about his start at the University in 1967. Oakland was considerably smaller then, but he could see big potential to grow.

“We had a group of special people willing to put the time and effort into something that would put the art of teaching at a higher level and give us the ability to stretch out in different directions,” he says. One of those special people included Dr. Cramer’s friend of more than 30 years, Professor Emeritus Dorsey Hammond, also of the Reading and Language Arts department.

“I was going to stay for a couple of years, and I ended up staying 30 years,” says Dr. Hammond. The two friends met as grad students at the University of Delaware. “He is an excellent scholar. He has great intellectual discipline. He is the best at mentoring doctoral students at the dissertation stage of anyone I ever saw.”

Lastly, he adds: “I always thought that Ron was fortunate to be at Oakland, and Oakland was fortunate to have Ron. What I mean by that is, when Ron came to Oakland, it was a young university. And he and a handful of other people helped it mature.”

“It has been a pleasure to work with Ron Cramer for the past 14 years. He leads others in so many ways. He has been a volunteer and encouraged many, many others to give. He has made his own donations; and then set up the Ron Cramer and W. Dorsey Hammond Reading Legacy Fund to close a gap that he personally witnessed. Ron has changed lives here for decades and continues to do so.”

Angie Schmucker
Vice President, Development and Alumni Relations

In his time at Oakland, Dr. Cramer served as chair of the Reading and Language Arts department.

“We built it up and put together a program that was designed to treat students with respect, gentleness and compassion,” says Dr. Cramer. “My biggest strength was showing my students that they matter as an individual and that they aren’t just another student. When students had problems and other faculty members turned them away, I fought for them and let it be known that everyone had something that could be worked with.”

His point being, it takes a compassionate teacher to bring that “something” out.
Angie and Cliff Snitgen photographed at Hart Middle School in Rochester Hills. (©) Alex Godin.
PERFECT MATCH

Married educators Cliff and Angie Snitgen reflect on saying “I do” to teaching

There was never any doubt that Cliff Snitgen, SEHS ‘17, would attend Oakland University. While his father worked as a manager in a clinical research lab facility on campus, Snitgen got acquainted with the curriculum, focusing on education. “I essentially grew up with Oakland University,” says Snitgen, who received his bachelor’s and master’s degrees in English from the School of Education and Human Services. “Over the years, I have returned to OU for my graduate and post-graduate degrees, and it has been in some ways a symbolic event to see the University grow and develop as my own career and life were advancing.”

Early on, Snitgen knew he had a knack for helping others. Oakland helped him affirm that teaching was the right fit. “It began when I was in high school and worked on our school’s yearbook. That experience of working with others to accomplish a common goal really drove me to pursue a career in teaching,” he says. “While completing my student teaching as part of the undergrad degree, I was told that I had a calm presence in the classroom. My professor was always very complimentary of my ability to speak with other students. That was the moment I knew I had chosen the right field.”

Snitgen teaches English at Davis Junior High School in the Utica Community Schools district and coordinates a schoolwide, peer-to-peer mentor and transition program for incoming seventh-graders transitioning into school. After recently receiving his Education Specialist Degree from SEHS, he plans to transition into an administrator role in the district.

“Oakland has helped me immensely as I create strong networks of like-minded educators and school officials who want to create better learning environments for all our students,” says Snitgen. “As I move forward in my career, I am confident that I have the tools and skills necessary to succeed.”

Snitgen did not meet his wife and fellow educator Angie, SEHS ’06, during his time at OU. But their shared love for teaching and their OU experience certainly made them a perfect match. Angie transferred to OU on a tennis scholarship, preferring the University’s personable learning environment more than larger universities. “OU provided a more intimate atmosphere for me to succeed,” she says, and the school affirmed her decision to pursue teaching. “Each of my OU field placements at various schools reaffirmed that I was on the right path.”

Angie received a bachelor’s degree in elementary education from SEHS and has a master’s degree in K-12 curriculum. She works as a social studies teacher at Hart Middle School in Rochester Hills, Michigan, and says she feels honored to be a teacher. “Despite the current climate and politics it’s an unbelievable profession,” she says. “We need more young and enthusiastic individuals to answer the call of teaching.”

Cliff adds: “Remember, you don’t have to become a teacher, you get to become a teacher.”

Faculty Focus

Educators leave a profound imprint on their students as learners. During her time at Oakland University, Angie Snitgen remembers Dr. Mary Zepplin as someone who taught her how to be innovative and encouraging in the classroom. “She taught the foundations of teaching math, but the strategies could also be used in social studies as well,” she says. “One of my favorites was ‘Think. Draw. Explain.’ Today, there are even more strategies that follow this same type of format such as Visible Thinking and Cultures of Thinking.”

For Cliff, that person was Dr. Robert Anderson. “I remember vividly literature courses taught by Dr. Robert Anderson, in which he encouraged me and challenged me to find greater depth and meaning lurking behind the words,” he says. “He also encouraged a sense of fun in his classes and fully embraced my horrible British accent as we read aloud dramatic works as a group. It was clear Dr. Anderson was someone who truly loved his subject and wanted students to feel that same sense of affection. Moments like these have helped shape the educator I am today.”
T.J. JOURIAN, Ph.D.
Assistant Professor,
Department of Organizational Leadership

As an assistant professor in the Department of Organizational Leadership, Dr. T.J. Jourian teaches courses in the Higher Education Leadership programs. His research centers on trans populations, perspectives and realities in higher education and beyond, with a particular interest in working with queer and trans populations of color.

“What initially attracted me to Oakland University was mostly on paper — the opportunity to create and advance new curriculum and scholarship, the appeal of a tenure-track role, which is quickly becoming a rarity in academia,” he says.

“What initially attracted me to Oakland University was mostly on paper — the opportunity to create and advance new curriculum and scholarship, the appeal of a tenure-track role, which is quickly becoming a rarity in academia,” he says.

“While these are still relevant as I transition into the institution, what I am also finding is the sense of collegiality and community held by colleagues in the Department of Organizational Leadership and the School of Education and Human Services, the ability to see each other's humanity and the desire to work together and support each other in our endeavors that has made OU the right decision for me.”

Originally from Lebanon and Cyprus, his appointment is a move back to Michigan for Dr. Jourian, who received his bachelor's degree in general management and a master's degree in student affairs administration from Michigan State University. During his time there, Dr. Jourian was featured in the docu-series TransGeneration, chronicling an academic year in his life.

In addition to gender, race and sexuality, Dr. Jourian is interested in their multiple intersections with class, disability and faith; student activism and leadership; collaborative and critical methodologies and frameworks; and social justice and diversity pedagogy in higher education and student affairs. Through his investment and connections in a variety of communities, Dr. Jourian aims to elevate and prioritize the voices of those most in the margins of higher education.

“The more time I spend in higher education, the more I encounter instances where the rhetoric of social justice missions replete with references to equity strongly conflict with institutional leadership and culture,” he says. “Each instance holds much to learn from, but the consistency that these instances show up across the country makes me reflect on the life and teachings of activist and philosopher Grace Lee Boggs. Boggs often spoke about the personal transformations that are necessary for sustainable change. This in mind, I am eager to learn how to bring on institutional transformations.”

James Silvestri

OAKLAND UNIVERSITY  |  SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN SERVICES
KRISTIN MCILHAGGA, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor, Reading and Language Arts Department

Kristin McIlhagga’s interests in teacher education, literature, equity and educational justice are what led her to Oakland University, she explains. “My research work is impacted by and intersects with all these areas.”

As an assistant professor in the Reading and Language Arts department, McIlhagga will continue to grow the School of Education and Human Services’ long-term commitment to young adult and children’s literature as a complement to teacher education.

“I’m looking forward to building on the fantastic work of Jim Cipielewski and Linda Pavonetti with the Authors and Illustrators course and the incredible collection of original illustrator artwork. I also appreciate the diversity of interests in the reading and language arts department. I think that there is strength in working with colleagues who don’t all think the same.”

Varying points of view evoke teachable moments, which are valuable in the classroom as well as the workplace says McIlhagga.

“These experiences reinforce that there is not one ‘right’ interpretation of a text or solution to an issue,” she says. “It also shows that I learn from you while you are learning from me.”

In teaching, a major part of the learning process is to support students as they make connections between theory and practice, explains McIlhagga.

“‘Theory’ is the aspect of pedagogy that we don’t see. I often refer to it as the intellectual work of teaching,” she says. “I am constantly working to help the students in my class to make theory-practice connections that are meaningful for them and their unique situations.”

To do this requires a cycle of continuous learning and growing, which is the part of teaching McIlhagga loves most.

“In the past I’ve taught methods courses onsite at elementary schools, and I’m interested in exploring other coursework and experiences for OU education students.”
BECOMING A TEACHER

Recently graduated teacher Alex Cammarata uses practices learned at OU in his student teaching

As a graduate from OU’s Secondary Teacher Education Program (STEP), Alex Cammarata recently completed his first student teaching assignment. Cammarata says he gained a valuable set of skills needed to confidently lead a classroom during his time at OU. “The program introduced me to the fundamental principles of teaching by providing an environment of hands-on experiences, along with the opportunity to discuss and reflect on my practice. A key to my growth as a teacher was being able to critique my attempts at mastering the professional standards,” he says.

Cammarata credits a large portion of his success to the knowledge and passion of his professors at OU, including Assistant Professor Anthony Tuf Francis. “Professor Francis was a tremendous factor in preparing me for my teaching position,” he says. “He respects the profession and expects his students to hold it to an equal level of respect. He provided excellent insight into what is needed to become a ‘rock star teacher,’ while encouraging us to continuously improve our practice. I’m thrilled that I was able to work with Professor Francis and I’m definitely a better teacher because of it.”

While completing his student teaching, Cammarata influenced several children struggling in more ways than one. “I noticed students who had problems at home, with friends or just with study habits in general. My role as a teacher gave me the opportunity to reach out and help them be the best version of themselves. I was able to impact my students by both creating personal connections and by helping illuminate their academic abilities through our classroom work,” he says. There are endless reasons to choose the profession of teaching, but for Cammarata, there is none more important than being able to make positive changes in the lives of his students.

For additional information on OU’s secondary teacher education program, visit oakland.edu/STEP.
Our commitment to community building at a local, regional and national level is inherent in the expansive curriculum we offer at the School of Education and Human Services. With the help of our global graduates, this commitment extends beyond international borders.

Recently, Dean Jon Margerum-Leys, Ph.D., and I had the opportunity to visit some 40-plus SEHS grads that live in the Guizhou province of southwest China. Working as faculty members, teachers, deans and presidents of institutions, these graduates have become fixtures in the province’s cultural fabric, which has, by extension, welcomed our University as part of that culture, too.

During our stay, we hosted an alumni reception and invited SEHS grads to share their Oakland University experiences from a global perspective. This exchange affirmed that we are making an impact, and we are building an international community of Golden Grizzlies. And even in a far-flung place, the sense of pride those grads have for OU’s students, faculty and staff feels like we never left home.

David Tindall
Development Officer | School of Education and Human Services

Alumni Story Project

The School of Education and Human Services (SEHS) launched the Alumni Story Project in summer 2017. The project pairs current students with alumni to have a conversation surrounding the alumnus/a’s OU experiences: college program and activities, favorite memories, why they chose OU, and what they believe makes SEHS special.

“This project gives us the opportunity to connect with those who have left our campus, hear from their perspective how it’s changed, and learn from their stories in order to create a more dynamic student and alumni experience,” says SEHS Development Associate Stephanie Erickson.

The input alumni provide will be invaluable as SEHS sets long-term institutional goals and continues to improve on the student experience.

For more information, visit oakland.edu/sehs.

Mentoring Program

The School of Education and Human Services is creating a new Alumni Mentoring program sparked from the SEHS Alumni Story Project, pairing alumni with OU students in their field on the basis of experience and interest. In the pilot program, launching fall 2017, mentors will meet face-to-face with their students, provide guidance and advice, and have the opportunity to share their story through paneled presentations.
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