

APRIL 11 • HAMLINE UNIVERSITY



# ANNUAL AWARDS 2025

THANK YOU TO OUR SPONSORS!



# Welcome!

To our honorees and guests,

Congratulations to every student, staff, faculty, alum, and community partner recognized this year.

This awards ceremony comes at a time when clouds of uncertainty make it harder for us to see into the future. The colleges and universities that make up Seed Coalition are grappling with challenging enrollment dynamics and shifting governmental policy. The community partners they rely upon are struggling with skyrocketing community needs and uncertain funding. In spite of that dynamic, we gather to honor you and the many acts - small, medium, and large - happening in communities when campuses engage meaningfully and equitably with local partners.

So let today's ceremony be a beacon for the good work students, faculty, staff, and community partners put out across the Midwest. Higher education will always have a public purpose and we look forward to celebrating your commitment to fulfilling that purpose now and into the future.

With Respect,  
Rob Barron

## The Awards

**Presidents' Awardees** are designated by campus leaders.

*The Student Leadership Award* recognizes a student or student organization that models a commitment to civic responsibility and leadership.

*The Civic Engagement Leadership Award* recognizes a faculty or staff member that has advanced their campus' civic mission by forming strong partnerships and supporting others' civic and community engagement.

*The Community Partner Award* recognizes a person or organization that has enhanced the quality of life in the community and engaged in the development of reciprocal partnerships with the college or university.

**Engaged Campus Awardees** are nominated by campus leaders and chosen by a selection committee.

*The Alumni Leadership Award* recognizes an alum making strong contributions to their community and demonstrating civic leadership.

*The Community Collaboration Award* recognizes collaborative work among community and campus leaders that is deep, reciprocal, and transformational.

*The Emerging Innovation Award* recognizes a recent project, program, or initiative making unique and innovative contributions that demonstrate strong future potential, including student-led projects.

# PROGRAM

## Welcome

**Dr. Kathleen Murray**, Interim/Acting President Hamline University

## Introduction

**Dr. Anne Harris**, Board Chair, President Grinnell College

## Voices of Change

Hear from three of our awardees as they share stories of personal growth, reflections on the challenges and rewards of civic engagement, and moments of collaboration, leadership, and transformation.

### **Dehkontee Jayee**

Metropolitan State University  
Presidents Student Leadership Award

### **Michelle Lehwica**

Concordia College  
Presidents Civic Engagement Leadership Award

### **Canaan Cooper**

St. John's University  
President's Student Leadership Award

---

## Presentation of Awards

**Rob Barron**, Executive Director, Seed Coalition

**Dr. Anne Harris**, Board Chair, President, Grinnell College

## Celebrate and Connect

Take time to chat and congratulate our awardees!

To view a full list of all awardees and a description of their accomplishments, please scan this QR code:



# Presidents' Student Leadership Awardees

This award recognizes an individual student or a student organization that models a deep commitment to civic responsibility and leadership, evidenced by initiative, innovative and collaborative approaches to addressing public issues, effective community building, and integration of civic engagement into the college experience.



## **Nina Makem, Augsburg University**

Nina has been an integral part of Campus Kitchen throughout her time at Augsburg, building community through hosting food workshops and regularly showing up for neighbors in Cedar-Riverside at food distributions in Riverside Plaza's Health Commons. Nina brings innovation and new ideas that improve how we do this work every day.



## **Caris Worsham, Bethel University**

When tutoring children at the faith-based organization, the Life Center, Caris Worsham (Psychological Sciences and Reconciliation Studies double major) reached out to Dr. Elisabeth Lefebvre to see if students enrolled in her Educational Equity course could contribute to the Life Center tutoring program. Because of Caris' efforts, Bethel students have enabled pupils to realize their learning goals. She led a Life Center GED class for adult learners. She participated in the Rondo based Urban Garden and Farm Alliance which develops students' gardening skills and fosters connection with community gardeners. Such is her empathy, Caris turned her position as a Teen Challenge intern into a paid position and embraces learning from diverse peoples.



## **Macy Ellis, College of St. Benedict**

Macy Ellis is a senior who has worked with the Initiative for Native Nation Relations since she was a first-year and has been a critical part of the college's partnerships with the White Earth Nation. Macy has been a key part of grants with the Council for Independent Colleges, the McKnight Foundation, the National Endowment for Humanities, and the Minnesota Humanities Center. She's been active doing archival and oral history research for these projects and has presented her findings at the White Earth Tribal Government Center and the Stearns History Museum. Macy's dedication to this work has made an invaluable impact as we continue to reconcile and foster relations with our native nation neighbors.



## **Owen Erickson, College of St. Scholastica**

Owen is pursuing a Bachelor's degree in Psychology and Educational Studies with a minor in Organizational Leadership, maintaining an impressive 4.0 GPA. Owen's involvement in various student organizations and committees showcases his commitment to leadership and community engagement. He serves as a Student Trustee on the College's board and he is active in the Student Government Association. His roles as an Event Coordinator for Student Activities and a Campus Ambassador further highlight his dedication to fostering a sense of community and belonging among his peers. Most recently, Owen was 1 of 30 students in the United States selected to attend a National "Future Leaders Summit" offered by the Council for Opportunity in Education.



## **Alisha Debleye, Concordia College**

Alisha Debleye has demonstrated exceptional leadership and civic responsibility as the leader of the Mentoring Opportunities for People of Color (MOPOC) program for the past three years. Under her guidance, this mentoring program between Concordia students and high school youth has continued to grow, connecting historically underserved students with college mentors who empower them with knowledge, skills, and confidence for their future. Through this work Alisha lives out the college mission to "influence the affairs of the world," as the program fosters belonging, builds relationships, and expands access to opportunities in higher education and the workforce to students of color.



## **Student Senate, Concordia University, St. Paul**

CSP's Student Senate is being honored for their outstanding commitment to student democracy and their dedicated efforts in advocating for Minnesota State grant funds. They have offered various student trainings, met with legislators, and mobilized students to engage in the democratic process. Beyond their work on grant funding, the Student Senate has led numerous advocacy initiatives aimed at amplifying student voices. Through thoughtful planning, collaboration, and tireless dedication, they have empowered students to take an active role in shaping policy decisions that affect their future.



## **Chloe Jade Lepak, Drake University**

Chloe is Drake's current Voter and Civic Engagement Coordinator and, prior to this year, served as Voter Engagement Senator in the student government. Through classroom presentations, tabling events, media interviews, and partnerships with regional and national voter advocacy groups, Chloe led a non-partisan effort during the 2024 general election season that resulted in hundreds of students registering to vote for the first time and many more accessing the ballot through in-person, absentee, and satellite voting. Chloe's integrity, resourcefulness, and dedication to fostering civic engagement continue this semester as she encourages her classmates to explore a range of ways to participate in political life in between elections.



## **Wiralba Pichardo, Grinnell College**

For the past three years Wiralba Pichardo '25, a political science major with a concentration in education at Grinnell College, has integrated her personal, professional, and civic aspirations through her role as a Service Leadership Work-Study Student at the Grinnell-Newburg School Foundation. In this role, Wiralba has dedicated her time to supporting immigrant families, particularly those in the district's English Language Learner (ELL) programs. She has been a vital bridge between these families and the district, advocating for access to resources, securing grant funding, and helping the district build stronger community connections. Beyond Grinnell, she has also mentored students and advocated for education access in the NY and MA areas.





# Presidents' Student Leadership Awardees



## **Hamline University Student Congress (HUSC), Hamline University**

*This past semester the Wesley Center Department was understaffed and HUSC stepped up to facilitate a number of excellent voter registration supportive activities. Their Election Day event was a huge success brought many students to take advantage of rides to the polling place.*



## **Lydia DeGross, Inver Hills Community College**

*Lydia started as a senator in Student Senate, but evolved her leadership to work in areas she is truly passionate about, sustainability and environmental responsibility. She leads the Volunteer Club and started the Environmental Club on campus. Her passions led her to a work study position in the Community-Based Learning department focused on environmental initiatives. Her work includes seed sowing for a campus pollinator garden, recycling initiatives, and leading a student petition for a solar array grant. She has done long lasting work for our campus community and is an incredible example of a civically minded student leader!*



## **Mena Feleke, Macalester College**

*Mena has exemplified community engagement in all four of her years at Macalester. Over two years in the Lives of Commitment program, she supported elementary school students with homework and literacy through weekly volunteer shifts, taking on a substantial leadership role as a sophomore. As CEC student staff, Mena has taken strong initiative in organizing College Access visits, corresponding with school leads, recruiting student volunteers, and leading activities. Here and in long-standing roles with the Breakthrough summer school program, QuestBridge, and Macalester student government, Mena has long demonstrated a sincere commitment to community and an aptitude for leadership.*



## **Dehkontee Jayee, Metropolitan State University**

*Dehkontee Jayee is a dedicated advocate who seeks to amplify marginalized voices and foster collaborative, community-driven solutions. As an Annex Teen Clinic Empower Health Intern, she worked to address health disparities by developing culturally competent health strategies and engaging stakeholders in health equity promotion. As a researcher at Atlas of Blackness, she analyzed surveillance of foster youth data to advocate for policy reform. Creatively, she leads photography workshops for foster youth to empower them to express their identities. This is all in addition to juggling motherhood, school, and a campus job where she helps Metro State University students access academic supports.*



## **Nasharia Patterson, Mount Mercy University**

*Nasharia exemplifies the core values of leadership, civic responsibility, and community engagement at Mount Mercy University. As President of Student Government Association, Vice President of the Black Student Union, Co-President of Gen 1, and an AmeriCorps Change Maker, Nasharia has demonstrated exceptional leadership and initiative. Her ability to work across diverse groups, with varied constituencies, and in multiple leadership roles, showcases her commitment to innovative and collaborative approaches to addressing student issues and needs. Nasharia is truly dedicated to fostering community and inclusivity in all spaces she occupies.*



## **Iliana Murphy, Simpson College**

*Ilianna served as VP of Simpson's student body and has thrived at Simpson as a Fellow of the Culver Public Policy Center throughout her 4 years. Ilianna has led student-driven communications and programming initiatives that engage her fellow students in constructive dialogues on challenging political and public policy issues. During her sophomore year she served as her class president and the following summer interned at Iowa Interfaith Power and Light. She drew on her leadership and advocacy skills to help build a coalition of students from diverse faith backgrounds who collaboratively raised greater awareness about ongoing environmental concerns and their intersecting religious and non-religious commitment to care for creation.*



## **Jailah Smith, Southwest Minnesota State University**

*Jailah Smith is a very active student at SMSU. She has served as an Admission's Ambassador for two years, a mentor for the AOS Summer Bridge program, member of the LatinX club, a student member of the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion committee for SMSU, focus group leader for BIPOC campus climate, a member of student senate, and this year she created the "First Generation student club." In addition, to her active role on campus she is a great student and an excellent leader for AOS students.*



## **St. Catherine University's Special Olympics Club, St. Catherine University**

*St. Catherine University's Special Olympics Club is leading the social justice movement of Special Olympics Minnesota at St. Kate's by connecting college students with and without intellectual disabilities through sports. The club engages community members and students from across the university to host developmentally adapted physical education events with Focus Beyond, a special education program for young adults that provides support for the transition from high school. The club was co-founded by Katherine Lew during her first year at St. Kate's, and Hadley Ninow is undertaking an Honors Project to make the partnership an embedded part of the Exercise and Sport Science curriculum.*



# Presidents' Student Leadership Awardees



## **Canaan C. M. Cooper, St. John's University**

*Canaan Cooper is a senior bio-chemistry major pursuing a future in medicine. In November 2024, he was selected to serve in the inaugural Bahamas National Youth Assembly, and will serve a 2-year term. Canaan is committed to making things better for the youth in his home country, even though he cannot be there physically due to his studies at CSB+SJU. Among the issues he hopes to champion in his new position are breaking the stigma surrounding mental health issues in The Bahamas and increasing the diversification of his nation's economy. He is a charismatic and gifted speaker, poet, ambassador, and mentor and has left an indelible mark within our community.*



## **John Arnell, St. Olaf College**

*In his four years at St. Olaf, John has displayed exceptional service and leadership within both the St. Olaf campus and the greater Northfield community. As a member of the St. Olaf EMTs, John plays a vital role in providing medical care to the St. Olaf community. In addition, he contributes to the Teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) program where he provides academic support to non-native English speaking youth in Faribault. He also serves as a mentor to a Northfield elementary student through the Project Friendship program.*



## **Sun Joo Lee, University of Iowa**

*Sun Joo Lee, a Ph.D. candidate in music therapy at the University of Iowa, researches therapeutic group singing as an evidence-based intervention for Parkinson's Disease (PD). Her work addresses voice and speech impairments, depression, and social isolation in individuals with PD. As a Graduate Engagement Corps (GEC) member and GEC Grant recipient, Sun Joo partnered with the Iowa City Senior Center to create Tremble Clefs, a choir for individuals with PD. This community-engaged project demonstrates the power of music therapy to improve both physical and psychosocial well-being for those living with Parkinson's Disease.*



## **Muthu Meenakshisundaram, University of Minnesota Morris**

*Throughout his time at UMM, Muthu has demonstrated an exceptional commitment to addressing public issues through innovative collaboration and community building. Whether organizing candidate debates, facilitating cross-ideological dialogues, or securing resources for community programs, Muthu demonstrates a remarkable ability to bring diverse groups together to address shared challenges. Muthu has organized city council candidate forums and numerous summits between ideologically opposed groups, creating spaces for constructive dialogue and mutual understanding.*



## **Revitalizing Waterloo's Tree Canopy: Public Admin Students, University of Northern Iowa**

*Public administration students in Dr. Jayme Renfro's senior seminar course studied the lasting impacts on neighborhoods in Waterloo lacking tree canopies. Their semester-long project involved planting trees in these areas to benefit the community. Olivia Schneider and Anton Benjegerdes highlighted the environmental and economic benefits of trees, such as improved air quality and reduced heating and cooling costs. The project, part of PROJECT HERE, aimed to inspire community involvement and address geographic inequality. The class planted around 160 trees, involving community members and the National Guard in their efforts.*



## **Kylie Buchholz, Wartburg College**

*Kylie Buchholz '27 is a remarkable leader and compassionate presence on the Wartburg College campus. Kylie tackles every challenge with unwavering dedication and a positive spirit, inspiring those around her. She effortlessly steps up where needed, even taking on extra responsibilities, all while maintaining a calm, kind demeanor. Kylie's humility and approachability create a welcoming environment for everyone. Her invaluable contributions are evident in her leadership of the National Science Teaching Association chapter, involvement in aquaponics research, participation in the Science of Love fundraiser, mentorship of FIRST Robotics, and support of the First-Year Mentoring program.*



## **Zoe VandeBerg, Winona State University**

*Zoe VandeBerg has been a committed leader by restarting the Turtle Island Student Organization, committing to programming to educate her peers on Indigenous sovereignty, experiences, and perspectives, and building community partnerships. Zoe also seeks to bridge her work as an Indigenous student leader and scholar via public presentation on her research. She has held educational events focusing on a variety of topics to help with student and community engagement.*

# Presidents' Civic Engagement Leadership Awardees

This award recognizes a member of the faculty, administration, or staff or for a group (e.g., advisory committee, task force, project team) that has significantly advanced their campus' distinctive civic mission by forming strong partnerships, supporting others' civic and community engagement, and working to institutionalize a culture and practice of engagement.



## **Jenny Wheatley, Augsburg University**

Jenny Wheatley works with artists to build exhibits that reflect their communities and experiences. In 2019, 2022, and 2024, Jenny facilitated a partnership between Soomaal House of Art and Augsburg Galleries that aims to harness the power of art as a tool for intellectual and civic engagement by advocating and advancing the creative development of Somali visual artists.



## **Mary Ann Harris, Bethel University**

Dr. Mary Ann Harris, a Bethel University Business Marketing Professor, has dedicated a significant portion of her career to equipping Bethel students in their endeavors to develop their marketing acumen and business skills while aiding organizations and companies to advance their marketing strategies. A key component of her senior marketing seminar centers on presenting students with opportunities to assist clients from the non-profit and for-profit world in their plans to energize their marketing models and maximize the reach of their client-based enterprises. Community business leaders have expressed a deep appreciation for the Bethel students who have enabled them to grow their businesses under the assured expertise of Dr. Harris.



## **Dr. Brittany Merritt Nash, College of Saint Benedict & St. John's University**

Dr. Brittany Merritt Nash, is an assistant professor of history at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University (CSB+SJU). She serves as faculty fellow for the Bonner Foundation's community engaged learning initiative grant cohort, as the director of The Bahamas Oral History Project, and as the co-director of the Great River Covenants Project, a multi-institution collaboration that documents identified racially restrictive covenants in Central Minnesota. This project, with the work of her CSB+SJU Honors students, has studied the covenants lasting impact on segregation and social determinants of health.



## **Alworth Center for the Study of Peace and Justice, College of St. Scholastica**

The Alworth Center for the Study of Peace and Justice seeks to bridge social and political barriers to bring people of all ages and philosophies together to work toward the common goals of peace and justice. Although the Center was endowed decades ago, Karen ('82) and Royal Alworth continue to be involved today. Karen said, "The Alworth Center for the Study of Peace and Justice has had great success under Dr. Tom Morgan's leadership," and it is now led by Dr. Tim Lorek. The Alworth Series is guided by an advisory board comprised of faculty, staff, alumni, and community members who inform the work of the Peace and Justice center and shape the programming and themes, as well as provide broader connections."



## **Michelle Lehwica, Concordia College**

Dr. Michelle Lehwica exemplifies civic engagement through her transformative work connecting Concordia students with incarcerated youth. In her Religion, Race & Social Justice course, students visit the juvenile detention center to engage in meaningful conversations that foster empathy, understanding, personal growth, and relationships. Students bear witness to the youths' resilience and their capacity for love, hope, and healing—despite their backstories of trauma and injustice, and they are humbled and challenged to ask how they will use their privilege to contribute to a more just world, where everyone can flourish. Dr. Lehwica's dedication to education as a force for social change empowers students and youth alike.



## **Anna Gruen, Concordia University, St. Paul**

Anna Gruen is celebrated for her work with Chai Dosti, an international student community initiative. Through her leadership, Anna has fostered meaningful relationships between international students and local community members, creating a welcoming and inclusive environment in Minnesota. Anna displays an unwavering commitment to build cross-cultural connections by partnering with area churches and community organizations to provide international students with opportunities to engage with local families. Through these partnerships, she has facilitated relationships that not only help students acclimate to a new environment but also strengthen the broader community by promoting cultural exchange and mutual understanding.



## **Dr. Dian Nostikasari, Drake University**

Dr. Nostikasari is an Assistant Professor of Environmental Science and Sustainability Studies whose teaching and research explore the intersections of environment and lived experience. She is a dedicated service-learning practitioner who has led Drake students in course partnerships with city planners, social services providers, artists, and K-12 students – always with the goal of promoting access to safe, healthy, and vibrant community spaces. In and out of class, Dr. Nostikasari has helped students and community members share their stories with larger audiences using ArcGIS and other digital storytelling technologies.



## **Grand View Career Center, Grand View University**

Grand View's Career Center partnered with Goodwill, Men on the Move (Evelyn K. Davis Center), and Dress for Success, along with campus groups like the Diversity Alliance, Nontraditional Student Alliance, and Human Services Club, to host a Professional Clothing Pop-Up event. Recognizing the need for professional attire for internships, jobs, and interviews, the event provided 103 students with clothing. Community organizations not only donated clothing but also educated students about their services for future support. Additional donations from Grand View staff, faculty, and alumni to help students as they prepare for their careers.





# Presidents' Civic Engagement Leadership Awardees



## Andreas Jozwiak, Grinnell College

Dr. Andreas Jozwiak, Assistant Professor of Political Science, exemplifies Grinnell College's civic mission through his teaching, research, and service. He has developed three community-engaged courses, including a high-impact housing policy class where students collaborate with local organizations to address real-world challenges. His leadership extends to the promotion of a culture of pedagogical engagement among his faculty peers. He shares best practices, presents at conferences, fosters long-term community relationships, and works to integrate civic engagement into the College's academic programs and policies. Committed to the long-term sustainability of community-engaged learning, he is a driving force behind civic learning at Grinnell.



## Jermaine Singleton, Hamline University

English Professor Jermaine Singleton leads students in community collaboration with the STD clinic, Red Door Clinic, and in his course titled Introduction to Black Studies. His courses take students beyond a stereotypical lecture and test-based class confined within a classroom and encourage real world application of the course content. He stated: "Civic engagement is where Hamline can connect knowledge and insight into action that affirms the public purpose of higher education. In a climate in which DEI is under siege, we'll need to double down on its aims: student success, collaborative action, economic development, and curricular innovation."



## Rachel Marzahn, Inver Hills Community College

Rachel volunteers to lead our Bee Campus USA committee that commits Inver Hills to reducing pesticides, expanding pollinator habitats, and educating the community on pollinator conservation. Rachel actively works to make sure all campus civic engagement work has a spotlight on campus social media. She runs an anti-racist book club on campus. She is willing to work with students on their community projects when her expertise would help.



## Uniservitate Grant Team, Loras College

Professors Jake Kurczek, Andrew Massena, and David Pitt collaborated with Professor Nancy Zachar Fett to highlight her course, Medicare and More, as a model for student engagement in service and community awareness. The course provides hands-on learning about government assistance programs, while the project's grant-writing team demonstrated the power of honoring service-centered efforts. The grant enabled Professor Zachar Fett to attend the Uniservitate Global Symposium at Lumsa University in Rome, where she presented her course design, learned from global service leaders, and met Pope Francis.



## Dr. Myrl Beam, Macalester College

Myrl Beam, PhD has undertaken mapping the landscape of abolitionist organizing in the Twin Cities alongside students in his Abolition Feminism: Race, Gender, Sexuality and Critical Prison Studies course. As part of this community-engaged work, Dr. Beam has established deep multifaceted connections with multiple community partners including REP, which focuses on non-carceral responses to community safety rooted in mutual care & transformative justice. In addition to his exemplary community-based coursework, Dr. Beam has been a valuable thought partner in considering how Macalester's Community Engagement Center might continue to strengthen and build our infrastructure around faulty engagement & community-based coursework.



## Dr. Michelle Palmborg & Dr. Carolina Fernandez Branson, Metropolitan State University

Dr. Palmborg and Dr. Fernandez Branson concluded research on a project funded by the Office of Minority Health through the City of Minneapolis. In partnership with the city and three community clinics, their work enhanced health literacy by listening to patient needs through survey and focus group data. The analysis of this data led to a robust quality improvement plan tailored for each community clinic. This plan was designed to increase health literacy among diverse populations, ensuring that community members possess the knowledge and resources necessary to make informed decisions. With nearly 17,000 patients benefiting to date, the project represents a significant step forward in addressing health disparities in our community.



## Ellie McDowell, North Hennepin Community College

Ellie McDowell has shown exceptional leadership in fostering strong, reciprocal partnerships between NHCC and the City of Brooklyn Park. Her efforts in bringing the Brooklyn Park Farmers Market to campus have strengthened NHCC's community engagement and expanded access to fresh, local food. Ellie also led a food sustainability initiative, ensuring leftover market produce supports NHCC's food pantry, addressing student food insecurity. Additionally, she helped integrate two local vendors into campus dining, enriching campus life and supporting small businesses, making a lasting impact on NHCC and the broader community.



## John Pauley, Simpson College

John Pauley's Critical Thinking in Systems course aimed to identify areas of research in order to assist in understanding the surrounding community. Students looked at how to identify social problems and possible solutions, hypothesized that all social problems identified would be strongly related to other problems, and recognized that social problems are systemic and all social systems stand in relation to others. The final project was a presentation to the campus and local communities in December 2023. Following these presentations, John and two students were asked by the city of Indianola to do additional research and create a resource map identifying the gaps in resources for adolescent mental health in Warren County.



## Ben Walker, Southwest Minnesota State University

In 2024, Ben served as a faculty liaison for Mustangs Vote, SMSU's Voter Engagement Initiative, which is housed in SMSU's Center for Civic and Community Engagement. He offered valuable feedback as the initiative was rebranded. Ben attended the MN Student Voter Summit to connect with other campuses across the state and learn how to better engage SMSU students to vote. At this event, he learned about a mock polling site event, which was incorporated to Mustangs Vote programming. He also coordinated the visit of MN Secretary of State Steve Simon to campus. He spoke about voting to faculty, staff, and students and was even featured on the Mustang Blueprint, a podcast put on by SMSU students.





# Presidents' Civic Engagement Leadership Awardees



## St. Kate's Mini-Courses at MN Correctional Facility – Shakopee, St. Catherine University

St. Kate's Mini-Courses at Minnesota Correctional Facility – Shakopee connects St. Catherine University with people incarcerated at Shakopee Prison through non-credit enrichment courses. Participants watch video lessons on the prison's television system and correspond in writing with St. Kate's faculty and students. Since this growing partnership with the Minnesota Department of Corrections began in 2022, it has involved 9 faculty and 30 students from St. Kate's, and 76 participants from Shakopee. As a women-focused university and Minnesota's only state women's prison, the two communities share a unique opportunity through this project to learn from each other and build community together.



## Emily Carroll, St. Olaf College

Assistant Professor of Nursing Emily Carroll has sought out many new relationships with community partners to diversify the settings, patients, and geography of community-based clinical learning experiences for nursing students. She leveraged her deep connections with the HealthFinders Collaborative to revamp the Public Health Nursing course where students provided hearing and vision screening services for every 1st, 3rd, and 5th grader in Northfield. She also advises the Public Health Education and Wellness Club (PHEW) and serves the community on the Northfield Hospital Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Board and the Rice County Community Justice Council.



## Brady L. G'sell, University of Iowa

Brady G'sell is an Assistant Professor of Anthropology and Gender, Women's, and Sexuality Studies. Her research explores the intersection of citizenship, kinship, and economy in the daily lives of South African families. Prof. G'sell co-created Iowa City's inaugural African Festival of Arts and Culture held this past fall and played a key role in planning the 2024 Engagement Summit hosted by the Office of Community Engagement. At the summit, she led the session "Do Good Well: Building Community Partnerships," highlighting best practices for fostering meaningful and mutually beneficial collaborations between faculty, students, and community organizations.



## Allen & Freda Pedersen Community Garden Collaborators, University of Minnesota Crookston

The Allen and Freda Pedersen Community Garden was the first community garden at the Crookston campus in 2014 and the result of the generosity of the late Allen & Freda Pedersen. This project has had many collaborators: the City of Crookston, Sodexo, Valley Technology Park, U of M Crookston, Northwest Research & Outreach Center, the Agriculture and Natural Resources Department, and Crookston Area Community Fund (CACF) helped make the garden more robust with raised beds, a garden manager and revenue from the Farmers Market as well as awareness of food security within the community. Produce from the garden is used in the campus dining hall and student workers are employed to care for the garden's maintenance.



## Kerry C. Michael, University of Minnesota Morris

Dr. Michael's collaboration with Horizon Public Health has modeled a dedication to creating a trauma-informed community by raising awareness of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and promoting resilience through education, collaboration, and evidence-based strategies. Her leadership and dedication have strengthened partnerships and driven impactful initiatives that benefit the entire community. Dr. Michael mentored a college student who went on to become a Health Educator for Horizon Public Health, bringing her work full circle.



## Justin Holmes & Panthers Vote, University of Northern Iowa

The Panthers Vote Program at the University of Northern Iowa is a nonpartisan initiative aimed at increasing student participation in elections. Led by the Department of Political Science and Dr. Justin Holmes, the program collaborates with the American Democracy Project, Campus Election Engagement Project, Northern Iowa Student Government, and UNI Athletics. It focuses on voter registration, education, and turnout, encouraging students to engage in the democratic process. The program has received recognition for its efforts, including the 2020 Gold Seal from the ALL IN Campus Challenge for a 73.1% student voter turnout.



## The Baldwin Leadership Fellows, Wartburg College

The Baldwin Leadership Fellows are selected as first-year students. Together, they engage in meaningful service throughout their time at Wartburg College. Each cohort participates in the design and implementation of community service projects. Examples of initiatives include the annual "Pack the Backpack" program with the Northeast Iowa Food Bank as well as a variety of connections with local schools and the Wartburg community. Participants enrich campus discussions about leadership education and civic engagement. Since 2015, this prestigious program, funded by Mark and Peggy Baldwin, has cultivated servant leadership through Wartburg College's Institute for Leadership Education.



## Mike Henderson, Winona State University

Mike Henderson is the Director of the Outdoor Education and Recreation Center (OERC) at Winona State University. Mike has been instrumental in fostering meaningful partnerships that connect the university with the surrounding community. Collaborating with regional school districts, he has engaged learners in experiential adventures. Local businesses and corporate groups have also benefited from customized teambuilding programs hosted at the OERC, strengthening ties between WSU and the business community. Thanks to Mike's leadership the Winona State University Ice Park recently received national recognition. Ice climbing is integrated into the curriculum, and the ice park also serves community groups, clubs, and other organizations nationwide.

# Presidents' Community Partner Awardees

This award recognizes a community-based partner or organization that has enhanced the quality of life in the community in meaningful and measurable ways and has engaged in the development of sustained, reciprocal partnerships with the college or university, thus enriching educational as well as community outcomes.



## **Naima Dhere, Augsburg University**

*Naima plays an important role in building community and knowledge in Augsburg's Community Garden. As a farmer, she grows plants essential for Somali dishes and helps others grow their own food. She provides vegetables and homemade sauces for distribution in Cedar-Riverside and consistently shows up to share knowledge and to help gardeners.*



## **Life Center, Bethel University**

*Nestled in the hub of urban South Minneapolis, the Life Center, a faith-based non-profit, acknowledges the human dignity of those they encounter. They embrace a humane and deeply honoring approach to engaging with those finding themselves facing challenging circumstances. Individuals from all walks of life and ages find solace and a haven when they interact with Life Center staff and volunteers - many of whom have endured similar trials and challenges. The stories and life experiences of neighborhood members matter to the Life Center team. Bethel students, staff, and faculty experience first-hand the transformational impact of the Life Center whose love flourishes for the hurting and appreciation of people from all backgrounds endures.*



## **Melissa Zula, Central College**

*Melissa is a long-standing volunteer with the Pella Food Shelf, serving as the director of operations. Melissa has a huge heart for helping and supporting others, whether that be serving guests at the food shelf, mentoring Central students, or collaborating with other organizations to take an idea and put it into motion. Melissa is dedicated and hardworking, extremely organized, focused, friendly, approachable, and passionate about educating others. Melissa has partnered with Central College through various service-learning and capacity building classes, guest speaking, and as a supervisor for the Iowa College Corps program.*



## **Stearns History Museum, College of St. Benedict & St. John's University**

*The Stearns History Museum has been crucial to the ongoing work our institutions are doing to provide high impact practice opportunities for research. Through a mutually beneficial partnership our students facilitated research on the topic of the history of racial covenants in central Minnesota. Student researchers worked with Grant Wilson to locate additional primary sources in the museum archives. The museum is able to use the educational materials created by faculty and students at CSB+SJU for this project for public history education. These resources are used to create an in depth and more diverse picture of the history of Stearns County, filling gaps that exist in our institutional and communal knowledge.*



## **Essentia Health, College of St. Scholastica**

*Essentia Health has worked for many years in partnership with CSS to address the nursing workforce challenges on behalf of the patients in northeast MN, & support future health science professionals. Our shared Benedictine roots & shared values give us a unique commitment to our community. This collaboration is a testament to the visionary work of the Benedictine Sisters, who established both the College and St. Mary's Hospital in Duluth in the late 19th century with a profound dedication to nurturing health care professionals. Leadership from both institutions has played pivotal roles in successfully achieving this funding and supporting educational programming and are recognized for their outstanding contributions to nursing education.*



## **Adult Basic Education of Moorhead, MN, Concordia College**

*Moorhead's Adult Basic Education (ABE) program is a vital community resource that empowers learners through education. ABE has transformed lives by providing English language instruction, GED preparation, workforce education, digital literacy, and more to those who have been underserved in traditional education. The program has built a sustained, reciprocal partnership with Concordia College, as college and ABE students have come together to learn from and with each other while creating community. Through its commitment to equity and opportunity, ABE has measurably improved the quality of life of residents in Moorhead through education and partnerships.*



## **Friends of Midway Peace Park, Concordia University, St. Paul**

*LCSP is honored to nominate Friends of Midway Peace Park for the Community Partner Award in recognition of their outstanding dedication to fostering community engagement and environmental stewardship. Their commitment to creating and maintaining a vibrant, welcoming space for all has made a lasting impact on the surrounding Union Park district neighborhoods and beyond. Their advocacy for green spaces in urban settings has not only enhanced the physical landscape of the neighborhood but has also contributed to the well-being and social cohesion of its residents, connecting youth and adults alike through various events and programs.*



## **Shannon Draayer, Drake University**

*Shannon is Executive Director of Community Nutrition at Des Moines WesleyLife and has been a phenomenal partner to at least six Drake courses. She has worked with students in an undergraduate data science class to uncover county-level food insecurity data; she has collaborated with a psychology class to create an intergenerational support network where college students and their homebound neighbors connect over family recipes; and she has introduced political science and occupational therapy students alike to Des Moines seniors to share meals and learn together through Generations Over Lunch events. This spring, Shannon created a work-study position to ensure that initiatives begun with Drake courses will continue.*



# Presidents' Community Partner Awardees



## **The Food Bank of Iowa, Grand View University**

Grand View created a new partnership with the Food Bank of Iowa to expand its Food Pantry, ensuring a steady food supply for students facing food insecurity. The university also collaborated with the Food Bank to host The Longest Table, a free community event fostering connection over a shared meal. The event united East Des Moines neighbors, strengthening community bonds and raising awareness of food insecurity. This initiative reflects Grand View's commitment to positive neighborhood impact. Through partnerships with local leaders from Highland Park, Union Park, Capitol Park, and MLK Jr. Park, the university develops sustainable initiatives that address community needs while creating student engagement opportunities.



## **Interfaith Action of Greater St. Paul, Hamline University**

This organization was chosen for their continued commitment to interfaith engagement around important issues such as welcoming everyone, working with those living with housing insecurity, and building important connections across religious difference in a very difficult time for this type of work.



## **North Country Food Alliance, Inver Hills Community College**

North Country Food Alliance (NCFA) is a worker-run non-profit that takes action to strengthen food sovereignty in the Twin Cities Metro Area. Their mission is to share healthy, culturally appropriate food; build community gardens; support local farmers; and reduce commercial and local food waste. NCFA provided our Student Food and Resource Center with fresh produce throughout the growing season. This was especially important this past summer when our campus community garden was offline. Inver Hills appreciates their partnership in supporting our students' health and education through this invaluable resource!



## **The Center for Victims of Torture, Macalester College**

The Center for Victims of Torture has been a key human rights organization in the Twin Cities metro area for decades, providing direct care for people who have experienced torture, supporting human rights workers around the globe, and educating and advocating for human rights issues. Each year, CVT hosts a group of Macalester student employees, interns, and volunteers, and they always nurture and support Macalester students to learn, grow, and contribute in meaningful ways. For so many students, their CVT experiences and dedicated supervisors have been transformational and continue to inform their work and community engagement.



## **CLUES (Comunidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio), Metropolitan State University**

Comunidades Latinas Unidas En Servicio (CLUES), Minnesota's largest Latino-led nonprofit organization, ensures the advancement of social and economic equity and wellbeing for Latinos in Minnesota. With a mission closely aligned to Metro State University's of economic and social mobility for our community through the lens of inclusion, equity and anti-racism, CLUES has been an enduring and valued university partner in serving our local community in variety of ways, including collaborating on food distribution and vaccine clinics, mural projects, college accessibility, and civic engagement work like CLUES' Youth in Action (YA!) Program participation in Model Legislature and Metro State Votes.



## **Central Furniture Rescue, Mount Mercy University**

Central Furniture Rescue has been a wonderful partner for Mount Mercy University (MMU) and others in the Cedar Rapids community. They believe that all people deserve to be treated with love, dignity, and kindness, and they provide furniture and household items at no cost to individuals and families who are transitioning out of homelessness and into their own places to live. They have worked with MMU for several years to eliminate unnecessary waste on our campus by allowing us to donate items (furniture, household goods, etc.) during the end of year student move-out from the residence halls. They then repair and clean the items and share them with members of the community to help them get back on their feet.



## **Dr. Sean Payton, North Hennepin Community College**

Sean Payton should be selected for the Presidents' Community Partner Award for his exceptional leadership in civic and community engagement through the Brother 2 Brother (B2B) program at North Hennepin Community College (NHCC). His work has been instrumental in building deep, reciprocal partnerships between NHCC, local organizations, and professional networks, creating sustainable pathways for student success. Under his mentorship, B2B has become a nationally recognized chapter of AA<sup>+</sup>MEND, supporting the educational attainment, leadership development, and career readiness of men of color. Through his vision and commitment, Sean has strengthened community ties, institutional accountability, and systemic change in higher education.



## **Des Moines Metro Opera, Simpson College**

The partnership between DMMO and Simpson directly benefits students in the Simpson music program by attracting high-quality prospective music faculty and students alike. Simpson students also benefit from hands-on experiences DMMO offers in a variety of fields through their summer internship program, which typically engages several Simpson students each summer. Through the internship program, students gain exposure to the workings of a multimillion-dollar professional arts organization. These opportunities extend beyond the music department; DMMO regularly employs Simpson students studying other fields as well, including accounting and finance, human resources, theater, and business administration.



## **Juneteenth Celebration Planning Committee (City of Marshall), Southwest Minnesota State University**

The Juneteenth planning committee is led by the City of Marshall with collaborative partners from Southwest Minnesota State University, Marshall Public Schools, Marshall-Lyon County Library, and the More Network to bring the annual Juneteenth celebration to our community. It is a one day of event, that provides recognition of the final enforcement of the Emancipation Proclamation, officially ending slavery.





# Presidents' Community Partner Awardees



## **Wisdom Wellness, St. Catherine University**

*Wisdom Wellness is a volunteer-run clinic providing weekly free medical services at low-income senior living communities, including Elders Lodge in St. Paul, which houses predominantly Native American seniors. Since the founding of Wisdom Wellness in 2019, St. Kate's students in Nursing, Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, and Public Health have had a consistent presence at Elders Lodge through clinicals, community-based internships, and community-engaged learning courses. By combining the wisdom of current and retired medical professionals with the new perspectives and energy of emerging professionals and students, Wisdom Wellness offers a rich environment for shared community support.*



## **Growing Up Healthy, St. Olaf College**

*Growing Up Healthy (GUH) programs provide significant support for families in Rice County with infant, toddler, and preschool-age children, particularly Spanish-speaking families. GUH promotes early connections between parents, children, and educators, emphasizing creative ways to learn through play, enhancing parenting skills, and helping children prepare for school. The programs have served over 520 children since 2018. GUH has partnered with psychology academic civic engagement courses for several years to identify specific areas, including research, data analysis, and resource development, that will help advance GUH goals.*



## **Open Heartland, University of Iowa**

*Open Heartland is a nonprofit community center dedicated to empowering immigrant families to thrive in Johnson County, IA. This volunteer-run nonprofit organization provides 400+ families with access to basic necessities: food, clothes, hygiene, connections to local resources, youth and adult enrichment programs, and most importantly, community. Through the simple actions of neighbors connecting with neighbors, the Open Heartland community provides friendship and support to families as they navigate their new lives in Iowa.*



## **Crookston Area Community Fund, University of Minnesota Crookston**

*The Crookston Area Community Fund (CACF) contributed funding and collaborated in a transformational effort with a handful of departments (academic/nonacademic) to reignite the Allen & Freda Pedersen Community Garden. The Allen and Freda Pedersen Community Garden celebrates the legacy of the Pedersen's in growing flowers, fruits, and vegetables to share with others, including food security awareness. The addition of raised beds, produce sales at the local farmers market and donations to the food shelf the garden (2014) is a result of great generosity (the late) Allen & Freda Pedersen. Other partners: City of Crookston, Sodexo, Valley Technology Park, U of M Crookston Ag and Natural Resources, Northwest Research & Outreach Center.*



## **Anne Hennen Barber, University of Minnesota Morris**

*Anne has been a driving force behind numerous community-university partnerships. Her commitment to literacy, lifelong learning, creating a welcoming community, and community engagement has had a profound and lasting impact on individuals of all ages and backgrounds. Anne has spearheaded programs that have strengthened the library's connection to diverse communities, fostering an inclusive environment where everyone feels welcome. She has worked with multiple community-engaged learning courses and is a trusted community partner in UMN Morris' TREC (Tutoring, Reading, and Empowering Children) program.*



## **Peoples Community Health Clinic, University of Northern Iowa**

*The Peoples Clinic enhances community life through initiatives like the People's Community Garden, providing free produce to patients. The garden, launched in 2019 in partnership with UNI's Center for Energy & Environmental Education, aims to fight food insecurity and improve access to fresh vegetables. Additionally, Peoples collaborate with local schools to offer behavioral health services, reducing barriers for students. The clinic participates in community health assessments and improvement plans, working with local health organizations to address health equity. These sustained partnerships with the community and UNI enrich both educational and community outcomes.*



## **Bremer County Emergency Management, Wartburg College**

*Wartburg College celebrates Bremer County Emergency Management, honoring their partnership in the Community Emergency Response Training (CERT) program. This impactful collaboration with Wartburg's Institute for Leadership Education has provided over 200 students with FEMA-based training and CERT certification over the course of nearly 15 years. Bremer County Emergency Management's unwavering support has been crucial to the program's sustained success. Their dedication has enriched student learning and fostered a strong commitment to community preparedness. This enduring partnership exemplifies innovative civic engagement and is highly deserving of this recognition.*



## **The Honoring Dakota Project, Winona State University**

*The Honoring Dakota Project-The aim of this partnership is for acknowledgment of and preservation of sovereignty, as outlined by the mission, and to strengthen campus connections to Winona organizations and Honoring the Dakota Project and provide community-based pedagogy through engaged conversations. The benefit of this community partnership to our students has been immeasurable, as it has provided educational and cultural support for Indigenous students on campus along with vital cultural education for non-Indigenous students to better respond to historical and continued colonial violence, and collectively shape systemic changes for the future.*





# Engaged Campus Awardees

## Engaged Campus Award for Alumni Leadership



### **Pernell Cezar, University of Northern Iowa**

Pernell Cezar, is a 2010 UNI graduate and co-founder of BLK & Bold Specialty Coffee. His company donates 5% of its proceeds to youth programs, supporting areas like coding, urban farming, and college preparation. This aligns with the civic mission of higher education, emphasizing community engagement and support for future generations. His work not only supports local communities but also promotes conscious consumerism, encouraging people to make purchases that have a positive impact. Cezar's leadership in creating a successful business that promotes conscious consumerism and social responsibility further demonstrates his strong contributions to the community.

### **Honorable Mention:**

Alex Piedras, Grand View University

## Engaged Campus Award for Community Collaboration



### **AE: 588 Beats, Rhymes, and Inclusive Minds developed by Kelly Thelen and Michela Carattini, Southwest Minnesota State University**

The graduate course AE: 588 Beats, Rhymes, and Inclusive Minds was co-developed by Kelly Thelen and Michela Carattini. The course serves licensed educators in the Worthington Public Schools and the Nobles County Integration Collaborative (NCIC) schools to address the urgent need for more engaging, culturally relevant, and equitable curriculum in Worthington, Minnesota's culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms. This campus-community partnership was deep, reciprocal, and transformational because it was co-created with local educators, ensuring that the course content was directly aligned with the challenges and goals of teachers in the district. Rather than applying a one-size-fits-all model, teachers co-designed the learning experience.

### **Honorable Mentions:**

Community Emergency Response Training, Wartburg College

## Engaged Campus Award for Emerging Innovation



### **Ava Carnes and Jack Campbell, Simpson College**

Ava and Jack conducted research on mental health literacy, which they've shared on campus and with the Indianola community, demonstrates their commitment to finding ways to solve problems that impact school-aged children and their families. Their approach is rooted in local-level research, and they are invested in sharing their findings with all audiences that might benefit. The students shared about their experience, "What prompted our research was our desire to source out the root causes of the evident uptick in mental health struggles in adolescents in recent years, specifically in Indianola and Warren County. We asked the question: 'What are the current challenges the kids of our community facing that obstruct them from receiving them?'"

### **Honorable Mention:**

Enactus-Mindful Meals, Southwest Minnesota State University &  
Nikki Harken, University of Northern Iowa

## 2024-2025 Members

- Allen College
- Anoka-Ramsey Community College
- Anoka Technical College
- Augsburg University
- Bemidji State University
- Bethel University
- Buena Vista University
- Central College
- Central Lakes College
- College of St. Benedict & St. John's University
- College of St. Scholastica
- Concordia College
- Concordia University, St. Paul
- Dakota Technical College
- Drake University
- Grand View University
- Grinnell College
- Gustavus Adolphus College
- Hamline University
- Inver Hills Community College
- Loras College
- Macalester College
- Metropolitan State University
- Minnesota State University Mankato
- Minnesota West Community & Technical College
- Morningside University
- Mount Mercy University
- Normandale Community College
- North Hennepin Community College
- Northwest Technical College
- Simpson College
- South Central College
- Southwest Minnesota State University
- St. Catherine University
- St. Olaf College
- University of Iowa
- University of Minnesota Crookston
- University of Minnesota Duluth
- University of Minnesota Morris
- University of Northern Iowa
- Wartburg College
- Winona State University

## 2024-25 Board of Directors

**Chair:** Anne Harris, *President, Grinnell College*

**Vice Chair:** Julio Vargas-Essex, *Vice President of Student Affairs & Enrollment Management, North Hennepin Community College*

Nicholas Benson, *Executive Director of the Office of Community Engagement, University of Iowa*

Michael Berndt, *President, Dakota Technical College & Inver Hills Community College*

Alicia Faust, *Executive Director, Willis Dady Homeless Services*

Mary Holz-Clause, *Chancellor, University of Minnesota Crookston*

Kumara Jayasuriya, *President, Southwest Minnesota State University*

Rachelle Keck, *President, Grand View University*

Brian Lenzmeier, *President, Buena Vista University*

**Treasurer:** Ginny Arthur, *President, Metropolitan State University*

**Past Chair:** Scott Olson, *Chancellor, Minnesota State*

John Manning, *Director of Marketing and Communications, Minnesota Private Colleges*

Barbara McDonald, *President, College of St. Scholastica*

Mark Nook, *President, University of Northern Iowa*

Paula O'Loughlin, *Provost and Senior Vice President of Academic and Student Affairs, Augsburg University*

Suzanne Rivera, *President, Macalester College*

Janet Schrunk Ericksen, *Chancellor, University of Minnesota Morris*

Jared Seliger, *President, Allen College*

David Weerts, *Associate Professor, University of Minnesota*