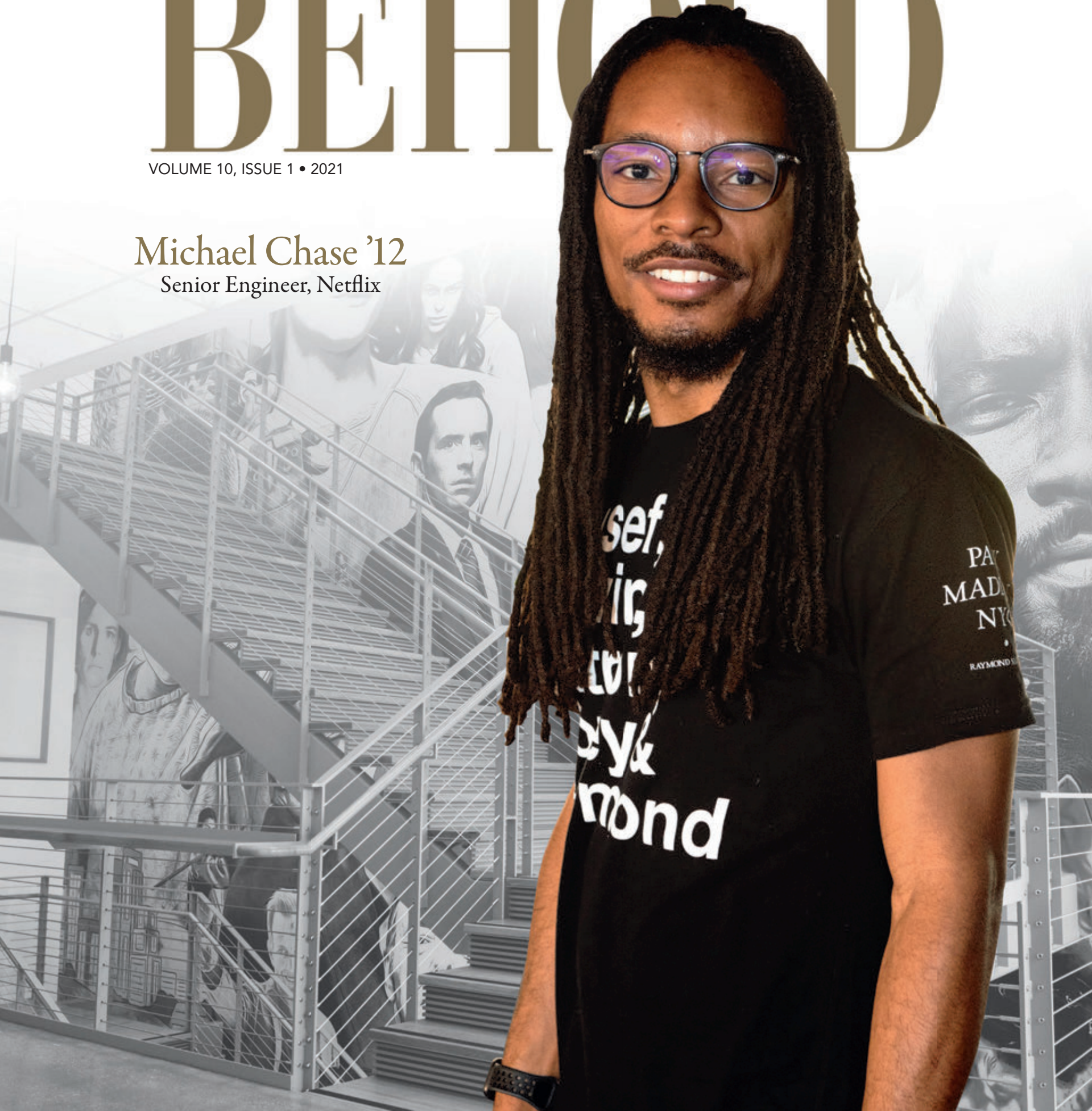


NORFOLK STATE UNIVERSITY

BEHOLD

VOLUME 10, ISSUE 1 • 2021

Michael Chase '12
Senior Engineer, Netflix



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for University Advancement

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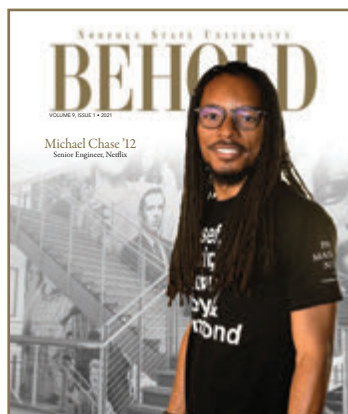
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Michael Chase '12
Senior Engineer, Netflix



Regine Campbell (left) and
friend in front of her work
"No Justice, No Peace:
Unrest and Responses in 2020
America" at the Wise Gallery.



David Lauder
"Black Swan," 2002

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From the Desk of the Vice President for University Advancement

It is a great time to be a fundraiser! Because out of tragedy has come a victory. Many in our nation have begun to see Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) with new eyes. Indeed, the last 18 months have been difficult when we look at the death of George Floyd and the totality of the lives lost to the COVID-19 pandemic. But what it has given rise to is a second look at our institutions for some individuals and corporations, and for others it has been a first look—and hopefully, a true and genuine look—at the mission and achievements of HBCUs.



Perhaps in some circles the question, “Are HBCUs relevant?” no longer has to be asked. Corporations and philanthropists can now better understand our historic and still relevant mission. They can easily see the excellence in the highest serving HBCU graduate in the nation—Vice President Kamala Harris. And new donors and old ones are willing to provide their support.

The historic investment by philanthropist MacKenzie Scott (page 24) is a seal of approval, certifying that Norfolk State is on an upward trajectory. Other major corporations like Dominion Energy, Virginia Natural Gas, Apple, Amazon and Diageo North America Inc. (page 23) have joined her in making principal gifts to support Norfolk State. In the midst of a global pandemic, there has never been a better time to be a part of the Spartan Nation!

In this edition of BEHOLD, we spotlight how the racial reckoning and awakening has affected Norfolk State University as a whole as well as the role that alumni, faculty and staff have played in bringing about change.

You will enjoy reading the story about Michael Chase, an NSU alumnus, and how an internship opportunity moved him to a path where he is currently a senior engineer at Netflix (page 16). This career move afforded him the opportunity to create an exclusive program for NSU students in partnership with Netflix. Additionally, Alumnae Alisia Smith-Rucker '94, a veterinary regional manager for Royal Canin, and Dr. Alveda J. Williams (B.S. '97), corporate director of inclusion at Dow, are breaking down barriers within their corporations and have played roles in helping their employers to hear the voices of their Black employees, recruit at HBCUs and reach out to the Black community (pages 28 & 29).

Several intriguing discussions about the state of social and racial justice in America are featured. Our very own NSU President Javaune Adams-Gaston (page 12) provides her perspectives on where we are as a nation and the critical role that Norfolk State will play in this conversation. Discover how Mensah Bey, an NSU alumnus and adjunct professor (page 14), used a street mural in Norfolk's Five Points neighborhood as another powerful tool to contribute to this discussion.

Since 1935, Norfolk State has been a major contributor to the social, economic and political environment in Hampton Roads. We will continue our engagement in national conversations while producing the best and brightest alumni. The last 18 months have been a watershed moment as that has helped us enter a new chapter unprecedented in the life of the University. Please enjoy this edition.

Sincerely,

Clifford Porter

Vice President for University Advancement

NORFOLK STATE UNIVERSITY

BEHOLD

VOLUME 9, ISSUE 1 • 2021

A MAGAZINE WITH GLOBAL REACH

The word “Behold” is often used by those who love Norfolk State. It sums up the excellence of the University and pride felt for it. That is why when it came to naming the magazine featuring the accomplishments and progress taking place at Norfolk State, “Behold,” easily came to mind.

Javaune Adams-Gaston, Ph.D.
University President

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RESILIENCE AND INNOVATION:

Our Journey during the COVID-19 Pandemic

By DR. LEONARD BROWN AND DR. JUSTIN MOSES

With a pandemic that has directly or indirectly impacted us all, multiple acts of violence projected on communities of color, and political unrest, we have all felt an overwhelming burden. Countless lives around us have been lost including some of those in our NSU community. Despite these losses, we have supported and uplifted one another by sacrificing what was normal to us. We've taught, we've learned, we've worked remotely, and many of us worked on campus to support the operations and provide support for students that remained on campus. We shifted, adjusted, and leveraged our resources to maintain a standard of excellence by being innovative in our provision of academic instruction and support to our student population. We demonstrated a culture of care by taking the steps required of us to remain safe and we went above those requirements to ensure that our campus was able to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 that spread around us. Just this semester, nearly 10,000 COVID-19 tests were performed for students, faculty and staff, an Open Vaccination Clinic was held on campus, and personal protective equipment was distributed multiple times.

Due to mitigation efforts such as these and our collective commitment to safety, we have maintained a low COVID-19 positivity rate while also maintaining an engaged university community, none of which would have been possible without a resilient, caring, and purpose-driven campus community.

It is important to recognize the many individuals that have devoted their service, their time, their expertise, and their care to the care of others on a daily basis. The Covid-19 Task Force, representing all aspects of our community, worked diligently to plan for and execute our community response to COVID-19. Dr. Vanessa Blowe and her staff in the Spartan Health Center have advised the entire University

community and was highly involved in the planning and implementation of health and safety protocols at NSU since the Coronavirus was identified in 2019. Our Facilities staff who has worked non-stop to ensure the campus was equipped with PPE, was sanitized on a consistent basis and so much more.

Our faculty, in conjunction with numerous administrators and staff, led the charge to create safe and virtual learning spaces and environments to ensure the continuity of the University's academic enterprise and operations. Our Office of Information Technology ensured that students had access to technological assets through the distribution of laptops and wireless routers and that our faculty had the appropriate devices in and outside of the classroom to provide the highest level of academic instruction. Our Housing and Residential Life staff supported students living on campus since the pandemic began and worked around the clock supporting students in quarantine. In addition to the people previously mentioned there is a long list of faculty, staff and students who joined together to get us through this year.

The NSU community has been resilient and has responded proactively and innovatively to the challenges that the pandemic presented. Despite these challenges, we have sustained many successes. Our students have performed exceptionally in the classroom, in athletic events, in professional endeavors, and in the community.

As we look forward to the future, NSU will continue to excel and as we prepare and posture ourselves for a post COVID-19 environment, the support of our alumni, partners, and community at large will be critical to our success. We look forward to the time where we can safely congregate on campus as a family.

BEHOLD!

A Witness to HISTORY



First Lt. Angelena Garland escorting the group to the unknown soldier.

On January 20, 2021, U.S. Army First Lt. Angelena Garland stood at attention at Arlington National Cemetery waiting for a motorcade. Garland '17 holds the position of Ceremonies Operations Officer in Charge for the Ceremonies and Outreach Directorate for the Military District of Washington. It was an assignment that she had received just three months earlier in October 2020. Her responsibilities that day were the most momentous of her career. The men and women arriving in those vehicles were among some of the most powerful, most respected and most accomplished in the world.

On that crisp January day, Garland would not just witness history, but become a part of it. January 20, 2021, was the Presidential Inauguration of Joseph R. Biden Jr., the 46th president of the United States, and it was Garland's responsibility that day to serve as lead escort for the Wreath Laying Ceremony for the 59th Presidential Inauguration. The motorcade that she was waiting for carried President Biden, First Lady Jill Biden, Vice President Kamala Harris and Second Gentleman Douglas Emhoff. Former presidents Barack Obama, George W. Bush and Bill Clinton and former first ladies Michelle Obama, Laura Bush and Hillary Rodham Clinton had arrived just 30 minutes prior.

During the ceremony, held at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, Garland escorted Jill Biden, Emhoff and Tracy Jones, wife of the Commanding General of the Military District of Washington, U.S. Army Maj. Gen. Omar Jones.

Being in the room with those 10 powerful people was a lot to take in, Garland said. But it gave her hope. "I have so much respect for every single individual that was there..." she said. "It gave me hope to see a group of people from



First Lt. Angelena Garland saluting during ceremony.

different backgrounds with different beliefs coming together to embrace each other and partake in a monumental moment in American history.”

Yet the gravity of the moment didn’t hit her until later.

It wasn’t until she saw herself on television and talked to family and friends that she understood it. “Even to this day, I’m in awe.” The “awe” is not just being in the presence of presidents, first ladies, and the second

“It is just SO important to me that we continue to elevate Black History and subscribe to the advancement of our people.”

gentleman, but in the presence of Black history makers — the first African American president and first lady and the first woman, Black and South Asian vice president.

“My children and grandchildren will open their history books, read about their achievements and their contributions to the Black community, discuss the importance of representation and filling spaces, and I will get to share with them that I was present for these moments. It is just SO important to me that we continue to elevate Black History and subscribe to the advancement of our people.”

To serve as lead escort at the ceremony is something that Garland admits that she never thought she would be a part of and that amazes her: “To have such a significant role in the ceremony...especially coming from Lynchburg, VA, — such a small place and representing for so many people, for so many brown skin girls, on such a large scale.”

She has embraced the moment and has a message for anyone who may be struggling because she was once there too. Garland said that she wasn’t a perfect teenager, nor a straight-A student, but she changed. “I know it’s so easy to give up when life gets tough and current circumstances seem to provide little room or hope, but your life can change as soon as you convince yourself that you deserve more.” **B**



Photos courtesy of THE WHITE HOUSE



“The appearance of U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) visual information does not imply or constitute DoD endorsement.”



NSU PARTNERS WITH SENTARA HEALTH TO HOLD VACCINATION CLINIC

On Wednesday, May 5, 2021, Norfolk State University partnered with Sentara Health to host a Pfizer first dose vaccine clinic for anyone 16 years or older from 2-7 p.m. The clinic took place on campus in Echols Hall and served the NSU community, the surrounding community, and anyone who was seeking a comfortable environment to get vaccinated against COVID-19. The University encouraged students, faculty, and staff to get vaccinated and helped participating students find their second dose if they left the local area at the end of the semester.



Dr. Adrienne R. Washington, assistant professor of interdisciplinary studies, was quoted in a *New York Times* article about how certain nicknames for the pandemic have become popular. Washington spoke about how people create new terms or nicknames as a coping mechanism for grave situations such as referring to the Coronavirus as “Rona.”



Dr. Carl E. Bonner Jr., professor of chemistry and materials science, was celebrated as a Trailblazer by *Chemical & Engineering News*. The weekly magazine for the American Chemical Society recognized the work and legacy of Black chemists and chemical engineers throughout the US. Bonner was interviewed by NSU alumnus **Isaiah Speight**. Read the article at <https://bit.ly/3f6PBIM>



Marcia Neblett, assistant professor of fine arts, is among the artists participating in the *Nourish* exhibition at the Virginia Museum of Contemporary Arts in Virginia Beach. *Nourish* is a collaboration between 12 artists and local food experts that features new works commissioned by the museum. Neblett partnered with Ashley Grosch of The Farm Life in Pungo to create a series of drawings featuring vegetables titled *Chaotic Garden*. The exhibit opened in February and runs until June 6.



Pamela Boston, Esq., Norfolk State University general counsel, was featured in the January 2021 edition of the *National Bar Association Magazine*. The article, “The Practice of Law: A Roundtable Conversation with General Counsels,” included perspectives and insights from Boston and university counsels from Tuskegee College and Ohio Northern University on the dynamic nature of practicing law in the higher education setting. Boston, a graduate of Bennett College and the Marshall-Wythe School of Law at the College of William and Mary, has served as the University general counsel since 2006.

MEDIA ZOOM IN

on Professor's Expertise

In the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. along with the rest of the world shut down. Office complexes, restaurants and many factories became ghost towns. But not all businesses stopped functioning. Those that could have their employees work remotely continued operating. Overnight, videoconferencing replaced face-to-face meetings.

It was different, a whole new world. But this new mode of work quickly produced what came to be known as “Zoom fatigue”—the exhaustion, worry, and burnout feelings that sometimes accompany mild to extreme usage of videoconferencing software.

During that time, Dr. Andrew Franklin, NSU associate professor of psychology, became a much sought-after expert for his knowledge, understanding and ability to break down this new phenomenon to media who couldn't get enough of the topic.

Franklin has provided expert commentary for such stalwart publications as *National Geographic* and *the New York Times Magazine*. He's talked about it on BYU Radio's current events show, *Top of Mind*, hosted by award-winning journalist Julie Rose; and he's been quoted and requoted on blogs, in lifestyle columns and in or on all forms of media around the world.

How did this happen?

“Under the leadership of Dr. Scott Debb, Dr. Ernestine Duncan and Dr. Karen Holmes, a master's in cyberpsychology program was developed at Norfolk State University. It is the first-ever program of the kind in the United States, and I was given an opportunity to teach an ethics and research methods course within the program given my background in statistics,” Franklin explains. “When COVID-19 grounded face-to-face life to a halt, several journalists were scrambling to learn about the psychosocial and emotional ramifications of conducting so much of our personal and professional affairs on Zoom,” he said, and then adding, “I guess of all the professionals they sought, I happened to be the most responsive and interested.”

Based on research Franklin explained that during face-to-face interactions our brains pick up on verbal and nonverbal cues. However, video chatting doesn't allow for that as easily. We may not see a person fidgeting or talking with their hands because the view is generally of just the head and shoulders. Unable to detect these nuances, our brains work harder to focus on what was being said.

A year has passed since society as a whole began videoconferencing and many of us have learned to adjust, finding ways to outsmart Zoom fatigue. “I think many have adjusted to the videoconferencing world by realizing the value of minimizing their picture in picture (PIP) screen, shutting down their cameras, using the chat space for correspondence, and even using avatars to provide

gestures and a visual presence when needed,” said Franklin.

Now that people are becoming fully vaccinated against COVID-19, restrictions are being loosened or lifted and businesses are reopening, Franklin makes an observation about how we may interact given the prevalence of videoconferencing over the past year. “I really do not foresee us going back to our pre-pandemic ways for a variety of reasons,” he said. “One reason is because videoconferencing provides so much flexibility, accessibility and convenience and some individuals will just find it difficult to relinquish that luxury if given the option. I think this will be seen in the private and public sectors and in various industries.”

Yet, Franklin said, “Hybrid/home office working is certainly the future in a lot of industries, and I am sure some industries will experience a surge as individuals bask in the excitement of face-to-face gatherings that only months of repression and isolation can bring.” **B**



IF YOU'RE FEELING ZOOM FATIGUE, FRANKLIN OFFERS SEVERAL TIPS THAT MAY BRING SOME RELIEF.

- Schedule time in between virtual meetings
- Practice mindfulness and/or meditation
- Establish daily routines
- Disconnect from Zoom when you can
- Turn off your video when engaged in videoconferencing and if it is appropriate to do so
- Avoid multi-tasking when videoconferencing (e.g., shut down the internet browsers)
- Look into voice-driven avatars
- Consider walking during a virtual meeting
- Be kind and compassionate to yourself and others as we all continue to adapt to connecting over videoconferencing platforms

SPECIAL SECTION:

A 'RECKONING' AND AN 'AWAKENING'

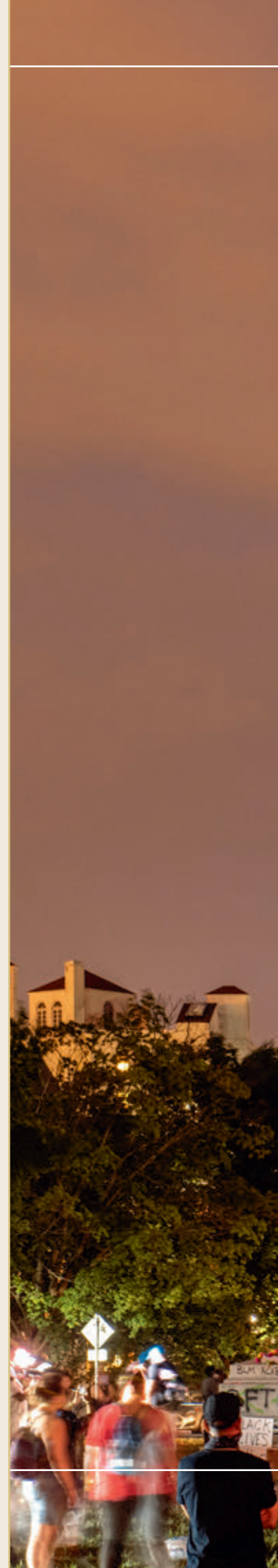
2020 WILL GO DOWN IN THE HISTORY BOOKS AS A MILESTONE YEAR, A YEAR FOR BOTH ITS TRAGEDIES AND ITS TRIUMPHS. THIS ISSUE OF BEHOLD DOCUMENTS THE TRIUMPHS THAT CAME OUT OF THE TRAGEDIES OF THE COVID-19 GLOBAL PANDEMIC AND THE AFTERMATH OF THE DEATH OF GEORGE FLOYD AT THE HANDS OF POLICE OFFICERS.

It has been a year of racial reckoning and an awakening for our nation. It has brought the hard work and the absolutely high-quality education, initiatives and contributions of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and our own alumni to the national forefront.

Corporations began looking at what they could do at their own places of business as well as ways to contribute to racial equity initiatives. In this section, you will find articles about the many actions that companies and individuals have undertaken as a result of this unprecedented time period.

In the days following George Floyd's death, upon seeing the outpouring of marches and cries for justice and equality, Floyd's six-year-old daughter, Gianna Floyd, made one of the most profound comments when she said, "Daddy changed the world."

As we publish this edition of BEHOLD, that change has come in the recognition of the long history, accomplishments and promise of HBCUs. It is our hope that the progression of change continues to resonate and reverberate beyond 2020 and throughout the nation's businesses and industries, governments, institutions, communities and colleges and universities. **B**





THE LEGACY OF RALPH NORTHAM

By SUSAN SMIGIELSKI ACKER

IT WAS A TOUGH IMAGE TO SEE. VIRGINIA GOV. RALPH NORTHAM, IN BLACK FACE, STANDING WITH A MAN DRESSED IN A KU KLUX KLAN COSTUME.

THE PICTURE, SURFACED IN FEBRUARY 2019, WAS IN THE 1984 EASTERN VIRGINIA MEDICAL SCHOOL YEARBOOK, WHERE NORTHAM EARNED HIS MEDICAL DEGREE. OVER A COUPLE OF DAYS, NORTHAM DENIED IT WAS HIM IN THE PICTURE, THEN ADMITTED IT WAS HIM WITH AN APOLOGY. (A THREE-MONTH INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATION COULD NOT DETERMINE WHO WAS IN THE PHOTO.)

IMMEDIATELY AFTER THE PHOTO WAS REVEALED, IT LED TO OVERWHELMING CALLS FOR HIS RESIGNATION.

AMONG THOSE WHO WANTED THE GOVERNOR TO RESIGN WERE RICHMOND NAACP PRESIDENT DERRICK JOHNSON, PLUS REPUBLICAN AND DEMOCRATIC LEADERS.

HOWEVER, NORTHAM REFUSED, PROMISING TO RIGHT HIS PAST WRONG BY MAKING CHANGES IN THE COMMONWEALTH AND EDUCATING HIMSELF.

Two Norfolk State professors, Dr. Soji Akomolafe, chair of Norfolk State's Political Science Department, and Dr. Cassandra Newby-Alexander, dean of the College of Liberal Arts and professor of History, played a significant role in educating him and helping the Commonwealth move forward.

They agree he's kept his word.

"One thing about Gov. Northam is he's a public figure, he's not a politician. He shoots straight. He admitted he did something wrong and he said he would work to fix it and that's what he's been doing," Dr. Akomolafe said.

Leaders from Virginia's African American community, including from Norfolk State, requested a meeting. It was set to last one hour, but lasted much longer, Dr. Newby-Alexander said.

At the meeting, the governor's attitude was that he wanted to and needed to learn more about African American lives, she said.

"He saw it as an opportunity to make a difference. He decided to go on a journey of enlightenment," Newby-Alexander said.

The main areas discussed were the disparities in criminal justice, healthcare, education and economics, said Dr. Akomolafe.

Northam learned from Dr. Newby-Alexander that African American history is taught incorrectly. This led to him issuing an executive order in August 2019, to create a 34-member Virginia Commission on African American History Education in the Commonwealth. He did so at an event to mark the first slaves' arrival at Fort Monroe in 1619.

Dr. Newby-Alexander, who served on the commission, said this was a fitting tribute. Executive Order Thirty Nine reads in part: "The history of African Americans in Virginia, and our nation, is difficult, complex, and often untold. A robust understanding of this important history and its continuous influence on our communities today should be an essential component of the knowledge gained by every Virginia student. ...Virginia's standards must be inclusive of African American history and provide opportunities for students to engage deeply, drawing connections to its relevance in our contemporary communities. ..."

The commission released its final report in August 2020 with Dr. Newby-Alexander giving significant input on Virginia's Standards of Learning tests.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

A major development, said Dr. Akomolafe, is the appointment of Dr. Janice Underwood to serve the Commonwealth as the nation's first cabinet-level Chief Diversity Officer in the Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. The office collaborates with the state agencies to ensure equity and inclusion.

"He takes the Office of Diversity and Dr. Underwood very seriously. She has the ear of the governor," he added.

In February, the Governor and Underwood unveiled *ONE Virginia*, a first-in-the-nation statewide strategic plan to advance visible diversity, equity, and inclusion across state government.

The *ONE Virginia* Plan supports more than 100 state agencies in the Commonwealth to create strategies to provide equitable services and cultivate a valued and high-performing workforce, according to information from the governor's office.

"This roadmap will ensure our efforts are accompanied by accountability, measurable results, and sustained impact, and help make Virginia the best place to live, work, visit, and thrive," Northam said at a press conference announcing the plan.

LEGISLATIVE AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

An area where Dr. Akomolafe feels Northam has been effective is criminal justice reform. For instance, he said African American youth are jailed more often than white youth for marijuana possession even though whites consume just



as much. With Northam favoring decriminalizing marijuana, this disparity would end, Akomolafe noted.

Dr. Newby-Alexander pointed out to Northam racist language in laws is still on the books.

"A University of Virginia law professor and the college's law students found over 100 laws still on the books in Virginia that have racist language. Those laws are not enforceable, but they should not be on the books," she said. Northam has been instrumental in removing them, she said.

RECKONING WITH THE PAST

Removing racist symbols has been forefront. Virginia's statue of Robert E. Lee was removed from in the U.S. Capitol's Statutory Hall, in December. It is expected to be replaced by a statue honoring civil rights activist Barbara Johns. He also ordered Confederate President Jefferson Davis' name be removed from an iron archway and memorial park within Fort Monroe.

Northam proposed in his budget \$25 million to transform historical sites. This includes transforming Richmond's Monument Avenue. So far, seven statues have been removed with the Robert E. Lee statue set to be gone in 2021. The funding allows Virginia Museum of Fine Arts to redesign Monument Avenue. He included several other historical projects.

Close to Norfolk State, enslaved Africans who landed at Fort Monroe will soon be honored with a public art memorial because in 2019, Northam proposed, and the General Assembly agreed to allocate \$500,000 toward the African Landing Memorial project.

These actions, taken in their totality, make Dr. Newby-Alexander take notice of Northam's heightened understanding of African Americans.

"I've noticed his understanding deepen. I tell him that is powerful. His response is, 'I am still learning.'" **B**





BEHOLD Q&A—DR. J

Q: What effect has the pandemic and the marches for racial justice had on Historically Black Colleges and Universities in terms of their visibility?

A: This time in history has been a tough one, but it has been a time that has cast a bright light on needs of this country and the shortcomings regarding racial justice and equality. Simultaneously, a bright light has been cast on these individual bright stars and where the country is making progress and a cadre of heroes and change agents. Where you can find many of these bright stars is on the many HBCU campuses around the country including our own. In a time where the nation is struggling to right itself around issues of race and equity and moving beyond disparities, people can look to HBCUs that have had a long history of overproducing excellence with minimal support. And now across the country, organizations, and the federal government, have been forced to look at why they have not supported HBCUs in the ways they should have, and we can see much is starting to be done to rectify historical neglect. People are looking at NSU and saying this is a place I want to invest in because this is a place that makes a difference in the lives of young people and that they have access to an education which will help them to achieve a better chance in life.

Q: In what ways have those calls for racial equity and justice possibly caused corporations and companies to look at themselves and their diversity and/or recruitment to improve their efforts?

A: There are many specific ways in which corporations are making changes and reaching out to NSU and other HBCUs to partner with us to create the pipeline that has not been there in the past. For example, with Netflix and 2U, a boot camp for our students and our faculty are engaged in the partnership. The students are also highly engaged in the partnership and they are learning the things that they need to know to be prepared for employment at Netflix, IBM, or another corporation. Coding and other activities that they are learning provides them with the tools that really changes their trajectory in life, and equally important is that our students are making real connections with others through these opportunities. There are so many other entities that have appeared and stepped forward to say we want to be your partner, we want to engage with NSU, and engage with your students. And we also want to share what many other students in other institutions receive because they are always engaged with those organizations. The opportunity to be identified by MacKenzie Scott as an institution that

had the leadership that she felt could be trusted to create transformational opportunities with a major gift of \$40 million speaks volumes to who we are at Norfolk State University.

Q: Norfolk State University has entered a number of partnerships over the past several months. What are the advantages for our students, faculty, and the corporations?

A: We've had \$5.8 million in partnerships: Apple, Netflix, 2U, Microsoft, IBM, Dominion Energy, Virginia Natural Gas, Diageo, Sandia National Labs, United Negro College Fund, etc. What they do is they transform the experiences of our students through financial assistance or experiential learning; that is really important and substantive. These organizations are helping to open doors that otherwise would not be available. If you are new to a system, new to higher education, or may be first generation, you need to know some things that others who have had continued experiences already know. Sometimes, students do not know how or what questions to ask because they have not had those experiences. Our responsibility is to ensure that our students have the access and the tools so that they know what questions to ask, but also what ways to demonstrate that they have had experiences outside of these walls and have experienced the real world and are a top candidate for whatever they want to accomplish next in their lives. To me it makes sense that corporate America is starting to recognize the challenge – that a significant segment of our population does not have the opportunity to demonstrate how they can contribute and that this can hurt corporations unless they take an active posture in helping students to be career ready in the occupations needed. Corporations must invest in the talent and there is no place better to do that than HBCUs.

Q: How can Norfolk State University continue to maintain as well as expand its visibility among corporations as time goes on?

A: One thing that I know for sure is that corporations are always looking at is return on investment. So, we must maintain a standard of excellence and we must support our students in their excellence because they are going to be our product. They are going to be visible representatives and representations of what NSU can and is producing. That representation will be a large part of the success of these programs which will only compel these corporations to keep coming back to NSU and the NSU pipeline of talented students.

As we continue to develop and support our brand and highlight the strengths of NSU, our excellence, the programs that we have, the students that we have, the faculty that we have, the staff that we have, then we will be identified as an institution that is on the move. When Pharrell Williams comes and says I am getting ready to implement the Black Ambition initiative, that is important for us because that tells people that NSU is a place you might want to look at. We have many new things on our horizon, new opportunities, and new ways of being. We're leveraging our contacts all the time. The more corporate partners we have, the bigger our portfolio of opportunities and development. That is how we frame the hard transformation work that we do every day.

Dr. Adams-Gaston's thoughts on the \$40 million gift from MacKenzie Scott

The first gift from MacKenzie Scott started with conversations with her representatives. We talked about who we are and what we are about. They were looking at 6200 organizations of which 340 actually received funding, so it was not just happenstance. I loved that she looked broadly at the HBCU world. For us, this was a pivotal event because it showcased the type of higher education organization that we are. As a result, you saw the interest, care, and the investment into this institution and all that we are doing to support student success. Equally important is you saw their belief in us that we will be the greatest stewards of these funds and use them to support our students' academic and professional endeavors.

It is an important time in the life of Norfolk State University, to be one of those institutions selected, and to be recognized as having the ability to have the tools and effort to move the University forward. Ultimately, I want for our students to get the most out of their own investment of money and time. I want their tuition to ensure that they had a successful experience at this institution and that they are prepared for whatever they are going to do next be it graduate or professional school or a job. And if a job is the next step, I want to ensure that they are first-day ready when they walk in the door – and they need to be ready. We want our students to have internships to help them to be first day ready. No student should leave NSU without an internship or an international experience which adds significant value to a college experience. It does not have to be a full semester abroad as there are many ways to have quality international experiences that are life altering but something that exposes them to other cultures and systems. Such experiences widen their gaze and vantage point. We are looking at the ways we can transform the experience of students so that they are competitive, that they are excellent, and that they are exposed as they go to the next step. That is our underlying mission at NSU. **B**



A 'RECKONING'
AND AN 'AWAKENING'



Photos courtesy of City of Norfolk



STREET MURAL

Conveys Message of Togetherness and Cooperation for Norfolk Neighborhood

By SUSAN SMIGIELSKI ACKER

After months of lockdowns induced by the COVID-19 pandemic and amid calls for social justice and police reform across the country, a Norfolk, Virginia, community came together over art. *Gather in Abundance*, a 2000-square-foot street mural in the Norview neighborhood near the Five Points intersection, brought together a total of 55 people over two days last October.

Mensah Bey (MFA'18), an artist and NSU adjunct professor, created the artwork to help serve that purpose. Area residents, Norfolk police officers and the Boys and Girls Club, worked in groups of 12 painting the mural.

"So much of 2020 was about isolation because of COVID," Bey said. "I wanted to bring something big that shows we are getting through it and it will be over."

Bey, a Richmond native, was inspired from the West African Adinkra symbolism of unity. The vibrant colors of different shades of blue, along with a bold red, engage the community and bring life to an area that needs improvement.

Jackie Rochelle, president of the Greenwood/Elmhurst/Norview Heights Civic League, agrees with the sentiment of the piece. "The artwork conveys a clear message of unity, understanding and communication."

"Five Points is a diverse community by its nature. There are people from all walks of life," Rochelle added. "I feel this artwork brings that home."

The piece was commissioned by the city and was paid for with a grant from Bloomberg Philanthropies. The grant specifically called for asphalt art, which it defined as visual interventions on roadways such as

intersections, crosswalks, plazas and sidewalks. It also includes utility boxes, traffic barriers and underpasses. Norfolk was one of 16 cities in the country to receive the funding.

The Asphalt Art Initiative responds to the growing number of cities around the world embracing art as an effective and relatively low-cost strategy to activate their streets.

The area was chosen based on neighborhood diversity, traffic safety, police data, pavement conditions, and resident interest, according to Karen Rudd, manager in the Norfolk Office of Communications.

It was important to Bey that the artwork not be in a designated arts district, but rather in a regular neighborhood. According to the artist, everyone and every community deserves art.

Engaging the community was a high priority for him. Because of the pandemic and racial unrest, he wanted to give a sense of normalcy to participants.

When creating the design, he had to keep in mind social distancing rules so the public could easily paint it. The design has flower symbols spaced 10 feet apart to show where individuals could safely stand during choreographed activities.

On average, about a dozen people worked on it at a time. In all, 55 people, of various ages, participated to complete the artwork in two days.

Police officers painted in an effort to increase police-community trust. "We have a good relationship with law enforcement," said Rochelle, who was part of the selection committee, "and people that were painting alongside them were able to hold a conversation with them."

Bey truly believes art should be available to all. Having area residents involved provides them a sense of ownership for the art and the neighborhood.

"I want people to think twice," he said, "before maybe they throw trash on the ground when they see this work that the community created."

Bey's next project is creating art work on utility boxes in San Diego where he currently resides. **B**

KAMALA HARRIS

VP election focuses attention on AKA sisterhood and pearls

By GAIL KENT

Kamala Harris, the country's first female and woman-of-color vice president, became known on the campaign trail for wearing her iconic "Chucks and pearls." The casual, classic and comfortable "Chucks," or Converse All-Stars, made dashing from one event to another easier on her feet than would heels.

The strand of pearls is a reminder and recognition of a deep and proud legacy. "When Kamala wears them, it's indicative of her membership in Alpha Kappa Alpha (AKA) sorority," says sorority sister Aurelia Williams, Ph.D., NSU Interim Vice Provost for Academic Administration. She says members wear pearls as a tribute to AKA's 16 founders and four incorporators. "Sometimes you'll hear us say, 'Pretty girls wear 20 pearls.'" The members themselves are also known as pearls.

The first Black Greek-letter sorority, AKA was established in 1908 at Howard University, where Harris attended college and became a member in 1986. The sorority, founded to support and uplift women and girls and to serve the community, has grown to more than 290,000 collegiate members and alumnae with 1,007 chapters worldwide.

Williams, who served as president of Norfolk State's AKA chapter, Delta Epsilon, when she was an undergraduate in the '90s, is celebrating her 30th year of sorority membership. While most people join a Greek organization during undergraduate college years, some join while in graduate school.

AKA membership, as with other sororities and fraternities, lasts a lifetime, and members are expected to continue participating in service work such as raising money for HBCUs, donating clothing to orphans in Africa, working in foodbanks and organizing blood drives.

"Sisterhood is about uplifting each other and motivating each other toward common goals," says Faith Fitzgerald, Ed.D., executive director of NSU's Housing and Residence Life, who joined AKA more than 20 years ago while in graduate school. She served as graduate advisor for the NSU chapter for many years. "I loved what Alpha Kappa Alpha women represented and some of the things they were doing in the community. I was excited to join."

One of AKA's top initiatives is grooming women for leadership through conferences and special programs. Witnessing Kamala Harris's rise as a leader has been a point of pride.

"She's a woman of AKA who has made huge, huge strides," says Rhonda Fitzgerald, Ph.D., associate professor of mathematics. "She's not just my sorority sister, she's a member of a Black Greek organization, and we all came together to support her. This is a huge point in our history."

AKA is one of the "Divine Nine" historically Black Greek-letter organizations, both sororities and fraternities, comprising the National Pan-Hellenic Council.

Harris's election is also personal to Fitzgerald. "When Barack Obama was



Photos courtesy of THE WHITE HOUSE

elected as president, so many people of color saw themselves, and now we're drilling down even deeper with Kamala. Her story is my story, and her experience is my experience. It's very powerful."

Fitzgerald notes that she was touched by photos on social media of little girls watching Harris' inauguration on TV. "I'm in awe of so many people posting pictures of their daughters watching her. They're thinking, 'I can do that. I can be her.'"

Dr. Faith Fitzgerald, whose two daughters are also AKA members, agrees. "It's a phenomenal, heartwarming experience. For those of us who have daughters or granddaughters, it's really about our legacy and wanting them to be a part of it."

The fact of Harris' multicultural background is also significant. "I have a multicultural family and multicultural granddaughters, so for them to be able to see Harris become vice president is great. They know that they, too, can aspire. That means a lot to me."

The women give the Biden-Harris team a passing grade for their performance early in the term, but believe Democrats should push harder to get their agendas passed.

"My concern is that when Republicans have control over the House, Senate and presidency, they do whatever they want," says Williams. "But Democrats want to play nice. I just wish they would do what needs to be done."

All three women expressed support for the possibility that Harris might someday ascend to the presidency.

"I think she's ready, whether the country is ready or not," says Dr. Rhonda Fitzgerald. "She can do it, so why not?" **B**



ALUMNUS CREDITS NSU EXPERIENCE

WITH ACQUIRING
POSITION WITH

NETFLIX

By SHARON RIDDICK HOGGARD (M.A.'04)

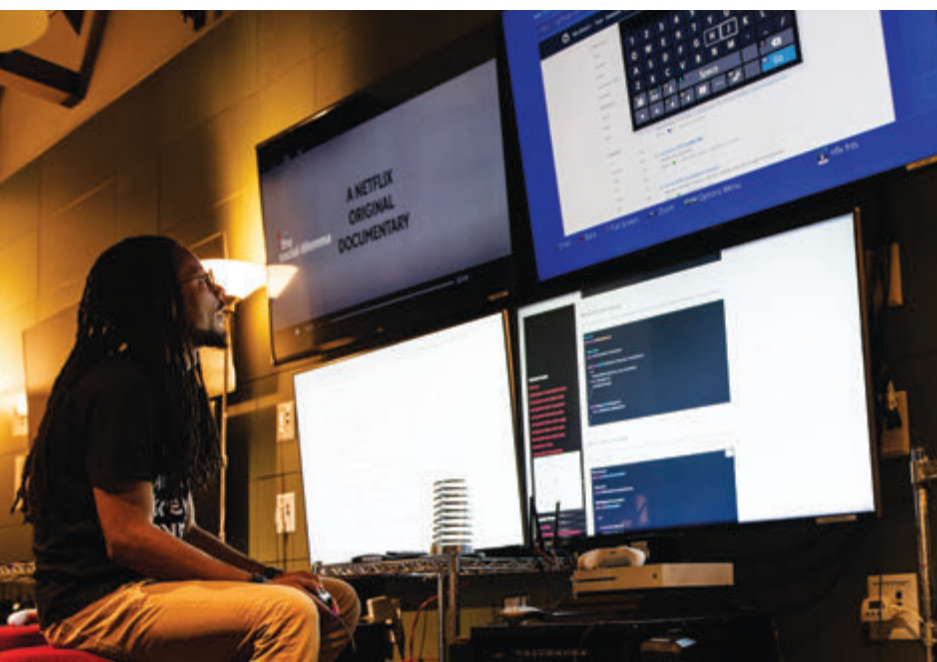
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BEHOLD



NOW HE IS HELPING THE NEXT GENERATION OF SPARTANS TO GRAB OPPORTUNITIES IN SILICON VALLEY

Photos by Dominique Calder of EXPSD CREATIVE



Ask Michael Chase, senior engineer at Netflix and 2012 graduate of NSU, what Norfolk State means to him, and he will tell you that the University faculty instilled in him confidence. “NSU gave me a lot of confidence in the ways I didn’t know I needed,” Chase said. “Confidence is key. It allows you to speak eloquently when you are speaking about your skills.”

That confidence played an important role in a journey that allowed him to take internships and positions from government to large corporations, to traditional industries in the world of finance to high-tech firms willing to carve out new frontiers. At Netflix Inc., the world’s leading entertainment streaming service company with 204 million paid memberships in over 190 countries, Chase explained his role as an engineer by saying he unravels challenges and creates solutions. “We solve issues that usually affect large numbers of customers, or partners and solving them with code — just trying to piece together how data flows from our system that ends up with a video playing on your screen or device.”

A DNIMAS (Dozoretz National Institute for Mathematics and Applied Sciences) scholar and computer science major, with a concentration in computer engineering, Chase began forming his confidence by working on projects in labs at Norfolk State. “I worked in the gaming lab with Dr. Rasha Morsi and served as a tutor in the STARS program,” he recalls. “Dr. Morsi is a leader in creative gaming. She really believed in me. She involved me in million dollar contracts and gave me credit for the work. She gave an incredible amount of freedom and trust that I would deliver.”

Chase continued to hone his programming skills by also participating in coding and robotics competitions. “Michael liked to program and was adept at it,” remembers Dr. Thorna Humphries, graduate program director and associate professor of computer science, who had Chase as a student in software engineering and operating systems. “He also participated in ARTSI, a collaborative robotics initiative,” she said. “He liked problems that challenged him in respect to programming. He took pride in the software products that he developed, in particular the one for his senior project. I knew that he would work diligently to become successful in the industry.”

Chase credits these opportunities, internships, faculty and others for helping him to get employment at Netflix. His internships, while at NSU, included two stints at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) in the Department of Commerce where he worked at the IT Help Desk assisting employees with computer issues. Working through the University’s Career Services Center, Chase received assistance in putting together his resume and got wind of an internship opportunity at

JP Morgan Chase, the multinational investment bank and financial services holding company based in New York City. He snapped up the internship and worked with databases in the New Jersey office. Chase's journey, impacted partly by NSU's Career Services and his internship at JP Morgan Chase, taught him the necessity of giving back.

"My experience with the Career Center and JP Morgan taught me about reaching back, building those bridges so that there is that open communication. After I graduated, and whenever I found opportunities, I made it a point to reach out to Norfolk State however I could. I like to connect students with opportunities to advance their academic success and professional lives." Discussing his belief in reaching back to help others, Chase mentioned his role in helping to bring the Netflix Boot Camp to NSU. He said he simply spoke up in a meeting of Netflix executives planning a trip to Washington, D.C. and suggested they visit NSU. "NSU showed up extremely well. The company was convinced that the University would be a great partner because the faculty and students exhibited knowledge and skills. It left an impression."

Dr. Aurelia Williams, Interim Vice Provost for Academic Administration, sought out Chase to participate in the computer science department's

CHASE BELIEVES THAT COMPANIES LIKE NETFLIX WHOLLY EMBRACE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION BECAUSE THEY RECOGNIZE THAT THEIR CUSTOMERS WANT TO SEE STORIES THAT THEY CAN BETTER IDENTIFY WITH.

Computer Science External Advisory Board. He grabbed the chance not really knowing initially how he could help. "I saw it as an opportunity to make things happen like the Netflix boot camp. I thought if we could just get NSU exposure to the west coast and Silicon Valley, it would be an immediate match or connection." Chase served as head of the external advisory board from 2014-2020 and is still a board member. "His role on the board," said Dr. Claude Turner, professor and computer science department chair, "was instrumental in bringing the Netflix initiative to NSU."

Chase believes that companies like Netflix wholly embrace diversity and inclusion because they recognize that their customers want to see stories that they can better identify with. "We want to tell stories that entertain the world so people see themselves in these stories. We have to have diversity in the writing room, diversity in the greenlighting room, and diversity in production," said Chase. "That trickle-down effect is the power of diversity at the company and throughout all levels in the organization. It's important to make sure that you have a wide array of voices as you're solving these challenges that affect people all around the world."

"Morally, it's the right thing to do. Companies that are more diverse deliver higher revenue and better products." **B**





Photo courtesy of Netflix

Shelby Sturgis, a Senior Data Visualization Engineer at Netflix, talking with an NSU student.

NETFLIX PARTNERSHIP

Seen as Helping to Build Black Talent Pipeline to High-Tech

By SHARON RIDDICK HOGGARD (M.A.'04)

In October 2020, Norfolk State University announced a partnership with Netflix Inc., the world's leading entertainment streaming service with 204 million paid memberships in over 190 countries, and 2U, a global leader in technology education, to create the Netflix HBCU Boot Camp. The program offers students the chance to gain market-driven skills in advanced Java programming, applied data science and UX/UI (user interface/user interface engineering) through the pioneering curricula developed by industry experts and Netflix professionals. Accepted students receive a Netflix scholarship to cover the cost of attendance. The boot camp, championed by NSU alumnus and Netflix senior engineer Michael Chase, is the first at an HBCU and is expected to serve as a model.

"If we really hope to increase Black representation in the tech industry, we need to address our current gaps while expanding access to Black students," said Kabi Gishuru, director of inclusion recruiting programs at Netflix. "This starts with being intentional about building future talent pipelines. These boot camps are just one step in that direction, but we can't do it alone. We hope more companies will invest in technical training for Black talent at the college level, contributing to a necessary shift in the future of our industry."

Dr. Claude Turner, professor and chair of the Department of Computer Science, says the Netflix partnership benefits the University in several ways including:

- offering industry-specific training in three areas of need in the private and public sectors: applied data science, Java and UI/UX.
- providing scholarships for students,
- furnishing financial support for student-related activities.

The inaugural virtual boot camp began in January 2021. Eighty students have enrolled, mostly from the sciences and tech areas, but 17 students are from "other than" science fields. According to the Netflix HBCU Boot Camp website, any major is welcome to apply and participate in the program. Through this partnership, the Netflix HBCU Boot Camp offers cutting-edge programs that allow students and alumni to participate in a 16-week course. This next crop of students will gain real-world training applicable to the tech industry and, in the process, students will also create that all-important professional portfolio that showcases their knowledge. Additionally, students will establish one-to-one mentorship with seasoned Netflix employees, ideally creating long-term network relationships.

According to Vernā Meyers, Vice President of Inclusion Strategy at Netflix, "The most important thing we've learned is that when you pair Netflix's culture with diversity and inclusion – it unlocks our ability to innovate, to be creative, and to solve problems. It breaks up group think. It brings different lived experiences and perspectives to a problem, so that we're no longer solving them in old ways. And, we're able to better entertain our current and future members."

Chase is expecting that the boot camp has at least two favorable outcomes. "I hope that we get more NSU representation at Netflix. Exposing students and graduates to these high-tech roles is expanding our representation," he said. "It's our responsibility to think about a long-term pipeline." Chase views the partnership as a way to get high-tech companies to seek out NSU students, and as a way for students to gain the needed skills and obtain jobs at high-tech firms. Because as Chase sees it, "It's good business to have diverse people throughout a business." **B**

For 150 years, Historically Black Colleges and Universities have educated countless African Americans. Many of those graduates went on to be considered the greats in their fields while numerous others with outstanding contributions remained hidden figures. According to UNCF, HBCUs make up just 3% of the country's higher education institutions, enroll 10% of all African American students and produce nearly 20% of all African American graduates. Yet for most of their existence, HBCUs have been grossly underfunded and often unseen. However, 2020 brought the intersection of the COVID-19 pandemic, the killing of George Floyd with the resulting calls for racial justice and the election of the 1st black woman, an HBCU graduate, as the nation's vice president. This brought an unprecedented amount of attention and donations to HBCUs, including Norfolk State University, which received a total of \$45.8 million in pledges, partnerships and donations from corporations, philanthropists and high-tech firms.

By SHARON RIDDICK HOGGARD (M.A.'04)

U.S. TECH FIRMS

Connect with HBCUs to Close Diversity Talent Gap

Facebook users – did you know that Facebook Inc.'s U.S. workforce employs just 3% Black workers? And, that's up from 2% back in 2014. Similarly, only 2% of Google's workforce is Black. Talk about a diversity talent gap. According to Fortune.com business magazine, among the country's eight largest tech companies, the portion of Black workers in technical jobs rose to 3.1% in 2017, from 2.5% in 2014, according to stats compiled by Bloomberg News. The latest data from the U.S. government, which was released in 2016, reported that Blacks made up just 7% of the U.S. high-tech workforce and only 3% of the total Silicon Valley workforce.

The tech giants are quite aware of the lack of racial diversity within its industry, and for an industry that prides itself on pivoting on a dime, tech

companies have been slow to improve the situation. The industry remains dominated by White and Asian men. "It's a systemic problem that's been around for a very long time," said Dr. Aurelia Williams, NSU interim vice provost for academic administration. She believes the diversity talent gap has been around for at least 20 years or more. Williams, NSU's Computer Science Department, internal boards, and other STEM counterparts, are all working to ensure students are trained and ready to meet the demands of the ever-evolving high-tech industry.

Williams is also working with CEBOT – the Council Exchange Board of Trade. CEBOT is comprised of 65,000 U.S. minority tech companies whose mission is to build relationships with the government and communities. CEBOT leverages its members' capabilities with its stakeholders' access

CONTINUED ON PG. 22

in an effort to bring prosperity to communities. Williams hopes to forge an HBCU Consortium, aligned with minority tech companies, and offer a different capability statement to the federal government. If all goes as planned, NSU will lead an organization that competes with the high-tech giants, because the consortium will have minority representation to do the work that competes with the offerings of the bigger tech companies.

Tech firms are now engaging to partner with HBCUs at record levels. “The diversity talent gap . . . it’s just been amplified now due to current social justice crises we have going on,” said Williams. She expressed that these companies don’t want to go down in history as being on the wrong side of the story. “They don’t want to be seen as contributing to anything that shows there are the two different societies in U.S. and that Black persons are treated differently. There have always been initiatives and programs designed to hire underrepresented students with STEM degrees into these companies. Some of these companies have successful programs that have worked.” Dr. Williams noted that the tech companies’ issue of closing the tech diversity talent gap is two-fold. “They have the challenge of keeping these underrepresented persons in these positions, and secondly the environment is not always conducive to retention of these employees. So the problem is two-fold; first you’ve got to find out where these students are, and then you have to figure out how to keep them.” Williams added, “A lot of these companies have affinity groups. Google does this. Diverse employees can congregate and share their experiences without being judged. People are more likely to stay where they feel comfortable. Companies can then use those persons to help recruit.”

The university’s networks, its outreach efforts, and solid connections in the tech industry are paying dividends as several major U.S. tech companies are meeting the challenge to form a diverse talent pipeline. IBM announced a \$100 million HBCU partnership to increase recognition, achievement, and hiring of Black talent through the IBM Skills Academy. A comprehensive training program designed to empower students of diverse backgrounds, the skills academy includes workshops and intensive hands-on experiences using industry solutions. Through the skills academy, IBM is donating assets that include guest lectures, curriculum content, digital badges, software and faculty training. Other HBCUs also involved in the skills academy include Fayetteville State University, Grambling State University, Johnson C. Smith University, North Carolina Central University, Stillman University, Virginia State and Western Virginia State universities. Ultimately, this initiative will help prepare NSU students for the digital age, enabling them to embrace a range of technologies from artificial intelligence (AI) to cloud, data analytics and quantum. Williams believes these kinds of partnerships are critical for HBCUs. “If we don’t have people that look like us in big tech to advocate for us, we’re not going to get hired.”

Diageo North America, a global premium drinks company, has pledged \$10 million to support 25 HBCUs including Norfolk State. Additionally, Diageo is creating endowed funds to provide continuing financial aid and grants for students in the coming years. Funds are available for HBCU students across different disciplines and majors, and distributed according to

each institution’s financial aid process. “Norfolk State University is pleased to be a part of the inaugural class of Diageo HBCU endowment recipients,” stated Clifford Porter Jr., NSU vice president for university advancement. Porter added, “This fund will have a preference for students in engineering, chemistry, marketing, and communications, but is open to all students.”

MITRE Corporation, founded in 1958 as a private, not-for-profit company to provide engineering and technical guidance for the federal government, has established a relationship with two HBCUs—Norfolk State and Alabama A&M. Through MITRE’s partnership with AMIE, (Advancing Minorities’ Interest in Engineering), MITRE is building a pipeline of next generation technical experts by implementing support programs that attract, educate, graduate and place underrepresented students in engineering and computer science careers. Nearly a dozen Norfolk State graduates now work for the MITRE Corporation. Dr. Williams’ goal with this partnership is to forge business partnerships that actually compete with the big tech companies.

NSU has scored another business venture by securing a Microsoft Impact Grant, a \$200,000 grant that will be used to help advance the cause of social justice and equality through the development of technology tools that will raise awareness of voting and civic engagement all in advance of the 2024 election. This is a big deal. Microsoft has taken a leadership role in this effort, since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, providing funds to nonprofits around the globe for employment training for those who lost jobs. The company’s specific interest is working with groups that are underrepresented in the tech business. NSU’s impact grant project is being directed by faculty in the departments of Computer Science and Engineering. The technology deliverables are not the only result of this program. The project is also designed to provide students with exposure to the theoretical and practical skills to excel in the tech business sector.

Research clearly demonstrates that companies that embrace diversity in leadership and throughout the ranks are more likely to be quite profitable. Norfolk State University continues to take aggressive and bold measures to ensure that tech diversity talent gap is slowly and deliberately closing. **B**



By SHARON RIDDICK HOGGARD (M.A.'04)

REGIONAL CORPORATIONS

Make Financial Commitments

Norfolk State University's latest fundraising efforts have paid off. The University has been the recipient of several large financial gifts from state and regional corporations. "The University has actively sought out new funding opportunities with local, regional and national agencies. Members of the faculty and the advancement office have partnered to submit proposals that have been approved for funding by several new agencies," stated Clifford Porter, vice president for university advancement.

SENTARA HEALTHCARE AND SENTARA HEALTH PLANS

One of the most significant revelations of the COVID-19 pandemic has been the disparities in health care in minority and other underserved communities. Sentara Healthcare, a not-for-profit health care organization that serves Virginia and northeastern North Carolina, has stepped up its efforts to improve the health and well-being of these communities. Sentara Healthcare and Sentara Health Plans announced a \$10 million investment earlier in 2021, called The Sentara Healthier Communities Fund. The funds will be used to bolster public health for underserved communities and support healthcare education. NSU, as one of the benefactors of this regional investment, received a \$2 million grant from Sentara Healthcare & Sentara Health Plans, which will be used to further the development of a joint School of Public Health, a collaboration between NSU and Old Dominion University (ODU). The grant also provides \$2 million to ODU. Ultimately, this grant will enable NSU to proactively address the health inequities that impact Norfolk and the greater Hampton Roads Community. Health experts, epidemiologists and virologists alike believe that COVID-19 is going to be with us for a while serving to further expose community health issues. During a time of national and international concern for the health of all people, the Sentara Healthcare grant will allow NSU to be part of the solutions to public health inequities and challenges through the university's health-related academic programs and civic engagement.

DOMINION ENERGY INC. — HBCU PROMISE GRANT

Dominion Energy Inc., headquartered in Richmond, historically has been a corporate partner in a host of diverse programs and charities in the states it conducts business. Through its Dominion Energy Six-Year HBCU Promise Grant, Norfolk State University is one of 11 HBCUs to benefit. The program supports endowments, capital projects, operating expenses and educational programs in clean energy at HBCUs in Virginia, Ohio, North Carolina, and South Carolina. Dominion has committed \$25 million to the grant, of which NSU will receive

\$2.7 million to support student retention and graduation, as well as enhance the University's impact as a leader in public policy and social justice. Additionally, the funding will be used to increase minority representation in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) careers. "The funding from these entities will impact several initiatives on campus including scholarships, advising and retention programs, and community health initiatives," Porter reiterated.

VIRGINIA NATURAL GAS AND SOUTHERN COMPANY

Virginia Natural Gas and its parent company, Southern Company, have awarded NSU with a \$220,000 award to support student career readiness. According to a news release on the Virginia Natural Gas website, Virginia Natural Gas and Southern Company continue to be committed to the success of HBCUs and fostering greater diversity and inclusion across the communities they serve. NSU's grant will be used for scholarships, internships, leadership development, access to technology and innovation.

BLACK AMBITION HBCU PRIZE

Virginia Beach native, music icon, and creator of the *Something In The Water* concert festival, Pharrell Williams launched the Black Ambition HBCU Prize, which has the potential to build future business endeavors. The main goal of the project is to level the playing field and foster the ingenuity, determination, and resilience of underrepresented entrepreneurs. Williams has partnered with companies and organizations that include Adidas, Chanel, the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, The Rockefeller Foundation, Tony's Chocolonely and the Visa Foundation. The grand prize winner will receive \$250,000 and nine other teams will receive smaller awards. Williams believes that minorities need more business ownership and that the most fertile ground for business ideas is among the country's HBCUs. The Black Ambition HBCU Prize will offer prizes and mentorship for current and former students at HBCUs as they develop seed or early-stage ideas and launch companies in tech, design, healthcare, and consumer products and services.

"Typically, HBCUs don't have very large endowments like our PWI peers," said Dr. Aurelia Williams, interim vice provost for academic administration, assessing various corporations' new interest in creating relationships with HBCUs. Williams also noted, "These investments fund scholarships, training, and create a pipeline that will continually funnel minorities into high tech positions." Porter added, "These partnerships are essential to helping Norfolk State in accomplishing its mission of educating students and making sure that they are first-day ready upon graduation." **B**



NSU RECEIVES

Transformational and Historical \$40 Million Gift

By GAIL KENT

Norfolk State has received a \$40 million gift, the largest single-donor gift in its 85-year history, from MacKenzie Scott, philanthropist and novelist.

The reaction at NSU has been jubilation, says Vice President of University Advancement Clifford Porter. “Everyone has been extremely excited. It’s a testament to the work that has been done at Norfolk State and a signal that we’re moving in the right direction.”

He says receiving a gift this size with no restrictions on its use is a “seal of approval that Norfolk State is not just a great HBCU, but that it’s a great institution and has been run properly.”

The gift will be a catalyst for future fundraising, too, he says. “When you get a gift like this, it brings attention to you. We’re going to be announcing other seven-figure gifts soon.”

“We are pleased to receive this level of support for transforming the curious thoughts of our students into the brightest minds of our world,” says NSU President Javaune Adams-Gaston.

All of the gift, either directly or indirectly, will benefit students. About \$15 million will bolster the University’s relatively small, \$39 million endowment to support scholarships. “One of our major challenges is not that our students don’t achieve academically, it’s that they cannot afford to go to the institution, so a lot of our numbers have been impacted by the inability to pay,” Porter says.

“We will put this money in a special scholarship endowment, and it will be spread out among several different programs, including need-based scholarships.”

Other uses for the gift include expanding the campus, creating an Institutional Excellence Fund to help faculty and staff acquire grants requiring matching funds from the University, and supporting

economic development opportunities.

These will include public/private ventures supported by faculty research, such as the McDemmond Center for Applied Research, a 136,000-square-foot facility that houses advanced research in computational science, engineering, information assurance and materials science. The center is home to one of the highest rated “clean room” research facilities on the Eastern Seaboard.

Before the donation, Scott, the wealthiest woman in the country and the 12th wealthiest in the world, evaluated a list of several thousand charities across the country. Porter says Norfolk State officials knew NSU was under consideration when Scott’s team contacted them asking a series of questions. The team contacted the University about a month later in December with the good news.

“We didn’t know at the time how much the gift would be, and when we found out, the president and I were trying to decide who was going to pass out first,” Porter says with a laugh.

Scott gave gifts totaling \$410 million to HBCUs across the country in December alone, adding to the nearly \$6 billion she gave away in all of 2020, all of it without strings attached. Scott has become one of the most generous philanthropists in the country.

The gift is helping prepare Norfolk State for an upcoming capitol campaign, says Porter, who assumed his position less than a year ago. “The University has only had one capital campaign and that was almost 30 years ago. As I was coming in the door, the president asked me to consider doing a capital campaign and how to structure it.”

The main purposes of the campaign will be to build the endowment so that it will yield enough to fund every scholarship the University gives and to provide funds to offset emergencies, such as the impact COVID-19 has had on campus. **B**



STUDENT-ATHLETES UNITE

AROUND CIVIC AND SOCIAL JUSTICE CAUSES

By Siera Jones



In the summer of 2020, while repeated instances of police brutality against the Black community inflicted pain and uncertainty across the United States, NSU's SAAC partnered with other SAAC organizations across Hampton Roads to create the "757 Student-Athlete Coalition for Social Change." This coalition included student-athletes and athletic administrators from Hampton University, Old Dominion University, The College of William and Mary, Virginia Wesleyan University and Christopher Newport University. The march began on Norfolk State's campus and ended in downtown Norfolk at the site where a Confederate statue once stood.

The coalition organized a march on July 18, 2020 to unite the community to stand against racial discrimination, police brutality and social injustice. NSU SAAC president and women's basketball senior Armani Franklin was among those who organized and participated in the unity walk.

"Being a student-athlete, you are already faced with so many challenges of your own," Franklin said. "But to be able to raise awareness for a cause that is important to us and affects so many of the lives of people who we can relate to, or consider friends and family, was just an amazing experience that I was blessed to be a part of."

As the academic year progressed, and the 2020 presidential election approached, NSU's student-athletes created an initiative geared toward reaching 100% voter registration across all athletic teams. Leading the charge was SAAC civic engagement chair and women's volleyball player Symone Thomas.

Thomas organized a partnership between NSU Athletics, Campus Vote Project and NSU Young Democrats to create the "Spartans Vote" Campaign. Despite limitations caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the SAAC board worked to host virtual information sessions for student-athletes and launch social media campaigns to educate the athletic community. These efforts informed athletes how to register to vote in their respective states and request absentee ballots for the upcoming election. Their efforts allowed NSU athletics to reach a record-breaking percentage of registered voters.

"I wanted the athletes to know that they were more than the sports they were playing," Thomas said. "Letting athletes know that they are more than just athletes on campus, and that they actually have a voice and the power to do something meant a lot to me."

The efforts of NSU's SAAC have allowed student-athletes to find their voices and strive for social change despite the many challenges facing them. The change that they achieved has benefited the campus community and set a precedent for social activism that will continue to impact the NSU community for years to come. **B**

In a year marked by the United States' desperate need for social change, social activists have arisen from various athletic communities. With instances of police brutality shaking the nation, and a pivotal election approaching, the student-athletes of Norfolk State fought together for social justice in their communities.

NSU's Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC) has been at the forefront of organizing events to raise awareness among student-athletes, and encourage the entire campus community to use their voices to create change. Two primary efforts included the NSU Unity Walk and the Spartans Vote initiative.

MARCH WAS FULL OF MADNESS AT NORFOLK STATE UNIVERSITY THIS YEAR.

By Matt Michalec



For just the second time in its history—and first since 2012—the Spartan men’s basketball team won the MEAC Tournament championship, topping Morgan State 71-63 in the final round. And just like that legendary 2012 team, this year’s Spartans made a name for themselves in the NCAA Tournament, knocking off Appalachian State in a First Four game on national television. The team showcased its trademark grit, seeing its 19-point lead turn into a six-point deficit late in the game, only to rally for the win in the closing seconds thanks to two Devante Carter free throws.

Though the Spartans fell to top-ranked Gonzaga in the next round, more history had been made. NSU is the only MEAC school with two NCAA Tournament victories in its history. And the feat has been accomplished in just two trips to the Big Dance.

That the Spartans reached that point was notable in itself, as teams nationwide faced challenges all year related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Fan attendance was limited to player families for much of the year. The schedule was in constant flux due to virus protocols with other programs, and players did not have as much contact with the outside world as they would in a normal

school year. Many programs across the country did not complete their seasons due to COVID-19 challenges.

Despite all of this, NSU persevered, winning 17 of its 25 games and once again putting the program in the national spotlight. Along with its stellar showing inside the conference, the Spartans notched non-conference wins over James Madison, Radford, George Mason and Hampton along with its post-season victory against Appalachian State, the Sun Belt Conference champions.

This year’s Spartans also became the first team in program history to win both a regular-season MEAC title, tying for the top spot in the conference’s Northern Division, and win the MEAC Tournament. Not even the 2012 team that shocked No. 2 seed Missouri can say that.

“I told them (after the Gonzaga game): No tears out here,” said head coach Robert Jones, who was a finalist for three national awards. “You should lift your heads up, because you’ve done something that no other team in Norfolk State’s Division I history has done.

“With us having quality non-conference wins, we showed we can compete with anybody mid-major in the country.” **B**

Just days after the video of the murder of George Floyd surfaced, shocked Americans took to the streets in protest of his death and to call for racial and social justice everywhere. By mid-June, four polls showed that between 15 million and 26 million said they had protested the killing and racial injustice. Corporations also quickly stepped forward to condemn racism and made commitments to their employees to take action. Two NSU alumnae have played and continue to play important roles in helping their companies shape and carry out those policies and commitments. Read their stories below.

LIVING DIVERSITY & INCLUSION



During her nearly two decades at Dow, Alveda J. Williams Ph.D. (B.S.'97) has held numerous positions in research and development, contributing to highly successful projects involving technology development for the food packaging, electronics and automotive industries. Williams, a chemistry major and DNIMAS scholar, also served in technical leadership, recruitment and human resources positions at the global materials science company. That experience has placed her in the right place at the right time at the right company.

Currently, Dr. Williams is the corporate director of inclusion, a position she has held since 2017. "In my role as corporate director of inclusion, I am responsible for defining and implementing a global strategy that allows the Company to achieve its ambition which is "to become the most innovative, customer-centric, inclusive and sustainable material science company in the world."

Williams also leads the Global Center of Expertise for Talent Acquisition which sets best practices and governance for sourcing, recruiting, and hiring talent. "While the outcomes are focused on building a more diverse workforce and supply chain," Williams said, "the work is about ensuring equity and fairness in our processes, and cultivating a culture where 100% of the more than 36,000 employees at Dow can bring 100% of themselves to work 100% of the time."

During the protests in the wake of the killing of George Floyd, Dow was out front denouncing racial and social injustice and making a corporate commitment to help be part of the solution.

"It's not just up to the African American community to fight the racism these incidents reflect. It's up to all of us, especially those of us who would likely never personally experience a situation like this," Jim Fitterling, Dow chairman and chief executive officer, wrote in Dow's Seek Together Blog in May 2020.

By mid-June, Dow had developed Dow ACTs, a

holistic plan to address systemic racism, inequality and injustice through the three pillars of advocacy, community and talent by listening to its employees and partners.

Because of the Company's leadership on these issues, As You Sow, a nonprofit foundation that promotes corporate social responsibility through shareholder advocacy, named Dow as one of a few companies that provide a strong example of how companies should address racial injustice.

"Dow has a long history in the diversity and inclusion space and in 2017, we reignited our journey to be even more deliberate and intentional," said Dr. Williams. "However, in 2020, in the middle of the global COVID-19 pandemic, our country experienced yet another crisis – a long overdue national reckoning on race after the murder of George Floyd. Like so many other companies, Dow responded by visibly leading on topics of social justice and racial equity through a holistic strategy, commitments, and actions. While no company is perfect, at Dow we know where we are headed and we are constantly working to do better."

One of the initiatives that Dow has undertaken expands its existing recruitment partnerships with five HBCUs, who offer Bachelor of Science degrees in chemical or mechanical engineering. Last fall, under Dow ACTs, the company announced a \$5 million investment to Florida A&M, Howard, North Carolina A&T, Prairie View A&M and Southern universities through 2024. The goal is to enhance the Black STEM pipeline. "This includes support for development of teachers and students, undergraduate and graduate research programs, and underwriting the education for 10 students per year pursuing STEM degrees at HBCUs through the Future of STEM Scholars Initiative (FOSSI)," said Williams.

Dr. Williams has advice for students about working for a global corporation like Dow.

"Know that your HBCU education prepares you, but what will differentiate you from other students is demonstrated leadership, agility, problem solving, teamwork, project management, communication skills, and business acumen." She said that since past performance is the greatest predictor of future success that working to develop and refine these skills now is critical. **B**

ADVOCATING

For Black Employees

Last June, Alisia Smith-Rucker '94, could feel that the right time had come. In the wake of the killing of George Floyd and calls for social justice, Mars, her employer's parent company, had tweeted the following on June 1: "We're deeply saddened by the recent tragic events in the US that have once again highlighted the pervasiveness of discrimination. We need to come together around the world to eliminate racism. We remain committed to inclusion, equality & justice for everyone." #TomorrowStartsToday. The graphic below was posted as part of the tweet:

Racism has no place in society.

We stand in solidarity with the Black community, our Associates and our partners in the fight for social justice.

We know to make the systemic change needed, it's going to take a collective effort from all of us - individuals, communities and organizations of all sizes around the world.

MARS

Smith-Rucker, who was at the time Royal Canin's Veterinary District Manager for Veterinary hospitals in Northern VA and Washington DC, proposed forming a Black Advisory Council (BAC) at Royal Canin. "The unfortunate 2020

public murder of George Floyd, coupled with the social climate of the country made it more than the right moment to launch the Black Advisory Council," she said. "It made it necessary to take a stand for something greater than myself that would make a significant impact in my company's culture as well as throughout the communities Royal Canin serves."

Later that month, Smith-Rucker became the founder and co-chair of the Royal Canin Black Advisory Council (BAC) Associate Relations Group.

"BAC was formed to drive sustainable change where every Associate has the opportunity to succeed regardless of race or color, in support of the Mars North America Equity, Inclusion and Diversity strategies which focus on gender balance, inclusion and workforce representation," she said. "Our initiatives promote an inclusive, psychologically safe workplace that encourages recruitment, development, retention and advancement of Black talent."

For several years, Mars, a family-owned global company that may be best known for its candy products such as M&M's, Snickers and Skittles, has been at the forefront of inclusion

and diversity workplace initiatives and sustainability issues and has used the hashtag #TomorrowStartsToday as a way of conveying that change must start today and must start with the company.

"BAC is a core contributor to Royal Canin being inclusive, courageous and accountable for inclusion and diversity (I&D), ensuring talent is diverse and representative at every level in the company," Smith-Rucker said. The Black Advisory Council has also worked to get Royal Canin to invest in recruiting candidates from Historically Black Colleges and Universities, ensuring that the company's talent is diverse and representative at every level from internships to experienced hires. The BAC has also forged relationships with community organizations such as the Annie Malone Children and Family Services Center in St. Louis, where Royal Canin is headquartered; has also begun providing support to the Emerson Academy Therapeutic School, Girls at Risk and Girls Clubs of America. BAC also serves as an engagement partner with the NAACP Legal Defense Fund and the Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change in Atlanta.

"The Black Advisory Council's initiatives and mission of ensuring Black talent is not overlooked at Royal Canin USA will live in perpetuity, while driving brand recognition and delivering education on animal health and nutrition in Black communities from K-12 and at HBCUs," she said.

Smith-Rucker is an exemplar. She is a high-achiever at Royal Canin, which has recognized her with its Red Club award for reaching 175% of her goals. The company has also honored her achievements by selecting her as the 2019 District Manager of the Year for achieving the highest sales numbers among the company's 500 sales associates nationwide, exceeding all key performance indicators and going out of her way to share best practices with colleagues across the country. After six years of hard work as District Manager, last October, Smith-Rucker became the first Black female Veterinary Regional Manager at the company. She is now responsible for managing a team of District Managers aligned to over 2000 Veterinary clinics and hospitals in Central and Southern Virginia, West Virginia, Tennessee, Kentucky and Indiana.

"Large corporations build effective teams by hiring people from diverse backgrounds, cultural experiences and thought leaders to achieve their goals," said Smith-Rucker. She encourages students to think about the following when they work for a large corporation that may have subsidiaries, "have an open mind, a desire to learn and display flexibility with their skillsets as well as have the ability to pull from global awareness." Finally, she advises, "In your life and career, you will have victories as well as moments that challenge you mentally and physically. In these moments, your strategic agility, decision quality and problem solving will help you quickly pivot. Shine as your authentic self, always drawing on the fundamentals you gained at Norfolk State University." **B**





NSUAA HONORS

Recognizing the Achievements of our Members


On Saturday, March 6, 2021 the NSU Alumni Association, Inc., virtually honored its members and chapters for their outstanding contributions to the NSUAA. The association also welcomed 98 new life members.

Tracy D. Boone '88 & '12 received the NSUAA's Alumnus of the Year Award. While Coletta Bey '85, Shalym Benyahu '96, Christine Booth '78, Phillip Hawkins '94 & '05, Lawrence Hillian '75, Tressa Hundley '07, Jacqueline Milteer '98, Valerie Perkins '78, Sandra Pitchford '70, and

Kimberly Roberts '93 each received the Chapter Service Award.

The NSUAA also honored two regional groups with its Chapter of the Year Award. The recipients have consistently supported the mission and goals of the alumni association and donated their time and treasure to Norfolk State University. The Central Virginia Alumni Chapter received the 2020 Chapter of the Year Award for the 35 and under membership category. While the Greater Northern Virginia Alumni Chapter received the award for 36+ membership category. **B**




CHAPTER
OF THE YEAR
AWARD
RECIPIENT
Membership Size (10-35)

Central Virginia Chapter




CHAPTER
OF THE YEAR
AWARD
RECIPIENT
Membership Size (36+)

Greater Northern Virginia Chapter



Tracy D. Boone
'88 & '12


ALUMNUS
OF THE YEAR
AWARD
RECIPIENT

NSUAA PRESIDENT

Believes in Power of Connections

Antonio L. Harrison '92 is putting into practice many of the lessons that he learned as a student at Norfolk State. From the beginning, his journey has been about connections. Those connections have proved to be a positive force in his life.

"One of my best friends was a student here," said Harrison as he spoke from the Division of University Advancement conference room in Harrison B. Wilson Hall. "He invited me here for homecoming. I came and got to see the campus." But there was one more connection Harrison had that also played an important role in his decision to attend. "Back then, my vice principal was Dr. James Crawley '61, who was the first NSUAA president. He recruited a lot of students to Norfolk State, so that's how a big group of us ended up here."

While at NSU, Harrison, a (Mechanical) Design Technology major, began to learn the importance of connections. "The deans, they pushed you to become not just another student sitting in the seat," he said. "As a work study student, I was able to help configure the first Local Area Network in the School of Technology—pre-Internet. I was given the opportunity to become a leader in an organization. I was student president of the Society of Manufacturing Engineers. I was able to travel with my dean." As president of the group, Harrison explained that it helped him grow into a leader. "We would go to Hampton to meet with professional engineers—Newport News Shipbuilding—and to talk with them. Just being able to get in front of a group of professionals and to talk about the University and the program provided growth and exposure," he said. "Later in life that just prepared you for when you got on the job to be ready for any situation."

Harrison took that experience, and many more like it, into his professional life and has made it somewhat of a philosophy. "I think what I learned is that if you're willing to be a part of an organization, then you should be willing to lead that organization," said Harrison. "I often tell that to students. I tell them just don't be a part of a club in high school, aspire to lead that club."

Now after six years as president of the Greater Northern Virginia Chapter-NSUAA, Harrison has taken up the mantle of his former vice principal as president of NSUAA.

He wants to continue bringing prospective students to campus, to continue mentoring students who are already enrolled and to help them make connections with NSU alumni. "The first job I had in technology was with a Norfolk State alumnus that had his own company," Harrison said. "You don't know where life is going to take you, so when that door opens, just be prepared to walk through that door and take advantage of it." **B**



During his three-year term, Harrison has set several broad goals:

- Increase NSUAA membership
- Raise funds in support of the University
- Provide a professional network for alumni to help them excel in their professions
- Recruit and mentor outstanding students to Norfolk State

NSU ALUMNI MOVERS AND SHAKERS

Dr. Felicia L. Ganther '92

was selected as the next president of Bucks County Community College, becoming the first African American woman to lead the public institution. Ganther will replace retiring president Stephanie Shanblatt and will work with her on the transition over the next few months. Ganther will be the fifth president in the college's 57-year history, bringing 25 years of education and a law degree to the position. She has experience in Student Affairs, Auxiliary Services and College Retention Services.

Her work in developing programs to support the recruitment and retention of African American, Latino, Native and underserved students has been highlighted by national organizations.



Dr. Patricia Ramsey (B.S. '71)

became the first woman and sixth president of Medgar Evers College in Brooklyn. This CUNY senior college, a Predominantly Black Institution, and an Emerging Hispanic-Serving Institution, was created in response to community advocacy in 1970 and named for the iconic civil rights leader slain seven years earlier. Dr. Ramsey brings more than three decades of wide-ranging experience as an educator, educational administrator, scientist, scholar and student-focused leader at universities in Maryland, Virginia and North Carolina. She most recently served as a senior executive fellow at the Thurgood Marshall College Fund in Washington, D.C., and as provost and vice president for academic affairs at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, the oldest degree-granting HBCU in the nation. A seasoned strategist and action-oriented leader, Dr. Ramsey has implemented initiatives that yield positive outcomes such as the \$1.3 million award she negotiated in her first three months as a fundraising officer at Norfolk State University, where she earned her Bachelor of Science in Biology Education.



While spending her summers in Ohio, **Evita Perkins '12** would spend a lot of time with her grandmother, Bettie Broadnax, watching her get ready every day. In which, her grandmother became her inspiration for her brand since her initials began with a 'B' which turned into a bee theme. Perkins started with making two to three fragrances and sent them out to close friends and family members to get their feedback. After receiving positive feedback, Butta Bee's officially launched. She felt that it was extremely important for African Americans to have their own products that caters to their skin. Perkins participated in the 2021 Black History Makers Market where, unbeknownst to her, she won the Black History Maker of the Year Award – Tampa. You can find more information on her business on Instagram at @butta.bees.



Kenneth L. Pritchett '16 & '19,

Petersburg City Public Schools Board Chair, was recently recognized as a leader in modern governance. The Diligent Corporation honored Pritchett as part of its Inaugural Modern Governance 100 Community Boards program, which is dedicated to the recognition of community governance leaders who are committed to driving positive organizational change. It shines a light on publicly elected boards and councils as well as the professionals that support them. Over the last year, governance leaders faced an array of new challenges, from the COVID-19 pandemic to civil unrest to shifting to work from home offices. In the face of these changes, governance experts redefined their roles and helped to ensure service continuity and long-term organizational success. The professionals recognized by the Modern Governance 100 Community Boards program demonstrated exceptional work throughout the year, with a consistent focus on communication, collaboration, and community.





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NSU extends its most heartfelt congratulations to the Graduating Classes of 2020 and 2021!