

Spring 2022

Flight Magazine, Spring 2022

Wright State Student Body

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A woman wearing a vibrant, multi-colored patterned dress and several pearl bracelets is captured in the act of cutting a bright green ribbon with large gold-handled scissors. The background shows other people, including a man in a black t-shirt. The overall scene suggests a formal ribbon-cutting ceremony.

flight

MAGAZINE

Advocate

Historic NPHC Plots leave a legacy

The Wright State Guardian

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flight

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EDITOR'S LETTER

In the days leading up to choosing a theme for this year's magazine, I wanted to focus on positive outcomes from 2021 in the Wright State community. Higher education, in general, has had a rough few years, but that does not mean the celebration of triumphs should cease.

The ribbon-cutting of the historical NPHC plots is just one example. The plots inspired the cover story and theme of this year's compilation of stories: *Advocate*.

But you cannot advocate without leading and inspiring. We chose present-tense action verbs to emphasize the importance of confident action.

Wright State does a lot of talking, but I wanted to use this year's magazine as an opportunity to celebrate the action behind these words. I also wanted to *advocate* for some issues in need of attention.

I genuinely believe that everything rises and falls with leadership, and university leadership comes from all areas—from President Sue

Edwards to an ordinary student leader.

After several conversations and reflecting on my own experiences as a student leader, I came to realize that student leaders were feeling overworked and underappreciated and experiencing burnout in record numbers.

You can read more about these conversations along with stories about the Gem City Market, international students' journey to fit in and more in the pages to come.

As leaders, we all have the opportunity and responsibility to make an impact. To speak up.

To *advocate*.
To *inspire*.

That is what I hope you will take away from this year's magazine.

Leadership is hard. Some student leaders question whether it is worth the time, effort and sacrifice. And as the university goes through faculty cuts and reorganization, many others may do the same.



However, as leaders, we cannot be complacent. Leadership is not a finished product; it's an ever-changing process—a journey.

A very-rewarding, fruitful journey.

As I address you as editor-in-chief for the final time, I thank the community and the staff at *Flight Magazine* and The Wright State Guardian Media Group. We would not be where we are today without all of your support. With a bittersweet goodbye, I invite you to ponder how you yourself can inspire, lead or advocate in your community.

Leadership is not a title, it's a way of life, and we all have the potential to make a difference.

Makenzie Hoeflerlin
Editor-in-chief



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Inspire

verb

To fill someone with the urge or ability to do or feel something, especially something creative



A Diamond in the Rough

Gem City Market

reSTORES West Dayton

By Alexis Wisler

Gem City Market opened in May of 2021 after six years of planning, giving the community of West Dayton a new hope.

“The people were ready,” Amaha Sellassie, Gem City Market President, said.

FROM IDEA TO REALITY

Sellassie, a Wright State University and Sinclair graduate, first had the idea for Gem City Market in 2015. He realized the market was necessary to fill the need for a proper grocery store in the area.

“People had to either take two busses, one bus downtown and one to

Kroger, or they had to go to the corner stores and dollar stores,” Sellassie said.

West Dayton is known as a food desert, meaning affordable and healthy food is hard to access. However, Sellassie favors using the word apartheid

instead, which is a policy of discrimination.

“The reason why is that food apartheid identifies that there’s a structural mechanism that was man-made. When we say ‘desert’ it implies a natural phenomenon, but we want to show that it was the direct result of public policy and the result of redlining,” Sellassie said.

The term “redlining” dates back to the 1930s when President Franklin D. Roosevelt implemented the New Deal to aid the American economy after the Great Depression and help citizens—white citizens—buy homes through mortgage loans.



Maps were marked in red to indicate predominantly Black areas to show banks and insurance companies the “risky” areas to loan money to, effectively keeping Black Americans from buying homes.

Today, redlining is when services and resources are withheld from predominantly Black or low-income areas. West Dayton continues to deal with the implications of this discrimination.

The market took six years to become a reality, opening in May of 2021. Sellassie said that he and his team learned what it meant to run a grocery store, teaching themselves as they went.

The time invested in opening the market was well worth it, as Sellassie recalled that people were overwhelmed with joy at the grand opening.

“When we opened a lot of people were crying. I don’t fully understand it, but a lot of people cried,” Sellassie said.

FOR THE COMMUNITY, BY THE COMMUNITY

Gem City Market is a place “for the community, by the community” according to Sellassie and he hopes that it will give power back to the people in that area.

One way Gem City Market hopes to give power to the people is through its member-owner program. By becoming a member-owner, members of the community can vote on issues regarding the market at annual member meetings and can run for a position with the board of directors.

A long-time volunteer for Gem City Market, Corrine Sanders, bought her membership in 2018 after the first market meeting she attended and recently became a part of the board of directors.

“My favorite part is that I get to meet a lot of different people and it makes me feel warm to see how people come together for the market and to serve the community,” Sanders said.



According to Sellassie, the community was involved in all stages of the market including naming, creating the mission statement and even designing the building.

“We’re more than a market, we’re a movement. We’re trying to meet the needs of the community and be rooted in the community,” Sellassie said.

Gem City Market is invested in the people it serves, setting it apart from chain grocery stores.

“Because we are rooted in the community, we’re going to be there as long as the community wants us there,” Sellassie said.

“ Gem City Market is invested in the people it serves, setting it apart from chain grocery stores.”

ROOM FOR IMPROVEMENT

As the market approaches its one-year anniversary, community members recognize ways for it to improve.

Some members of the community feel that the cost of food is too high for what those in West Dayton can afford.

Right now the market has a three-tier pricing system that accommodates different income levels and “produce perks” where shoppers get a dollar of free produce for every dollar of produce they spend. However, Sellassie and employees recognize that there is still a pricing issue that needs to be fixed.

Butcher Adrian Harris explained that the manager is currently working with the board to reduce prices in the store and expects that prices will change by April to better accommodate the needs of those in the area.

“It’s something that we’ve heard a lot and we do talk to a lot of people. Especially since I’m in the meat department, I literally talk to every person that comes through here,” Harris said in regards to pricing.

Another way shoppers suggest the market improve is by adding more options for different dietary restrictions.

“I have some specific things like celiac so I need gluten-free stuff and they don’t necessarily have the most selection. But it’s right around the corner and I love coming here for things like eggs and stuff,” Dayton resident Sam Robinson said.

Robinson shared that he has to go to Kroger, which he comments is “a little ways away,” for most of his grocery shopping because he cannot

find what he needs at Gem City Market.

NOT JUST A MARKET

The market also has a teaching kitchen with nutrition classes, a health clinic, a community room and a coffeehouse. Local chefs hold cooking classes at the teaching kitchen, giving members of the community the tools and knowledge they need to cook nutritious food for themselves.

“We’re big on not food shaming, we let people eat what they eat. We’ll show healthy alternatives, but we’re not shaming anybody,” Sellassie said.

The kitchen, clinic and community room take Gem City Market from just a grocery store to a place for the community to come together and support and

care for one another.

“People are caring more for each other and are concerned more for each other,” Sanders said.

Sellassie and Sanders want people to realize that change is possible as long as people help and support one another.

“As a community, we’re not going to survive without helping each other out,” Sanders said.

Gem City Market not only helps the community by providing a market, clinic and other amenities, but it also gives them a sense of hope and pride.

“Another world is possible and change is possible. I always believed it, but I didn’t know it. But now I know and nobody can tell me otherwise,” Sellassie said.

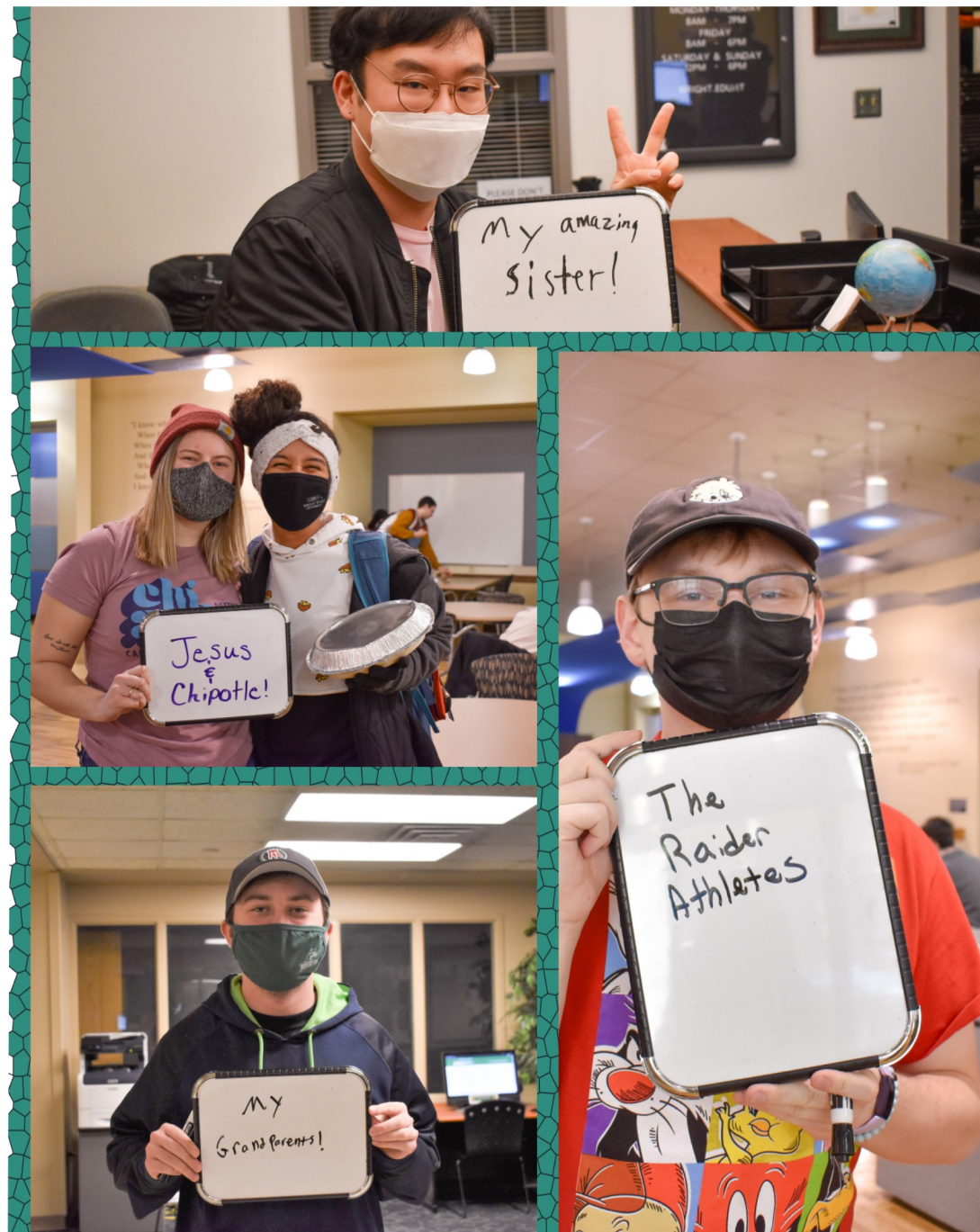


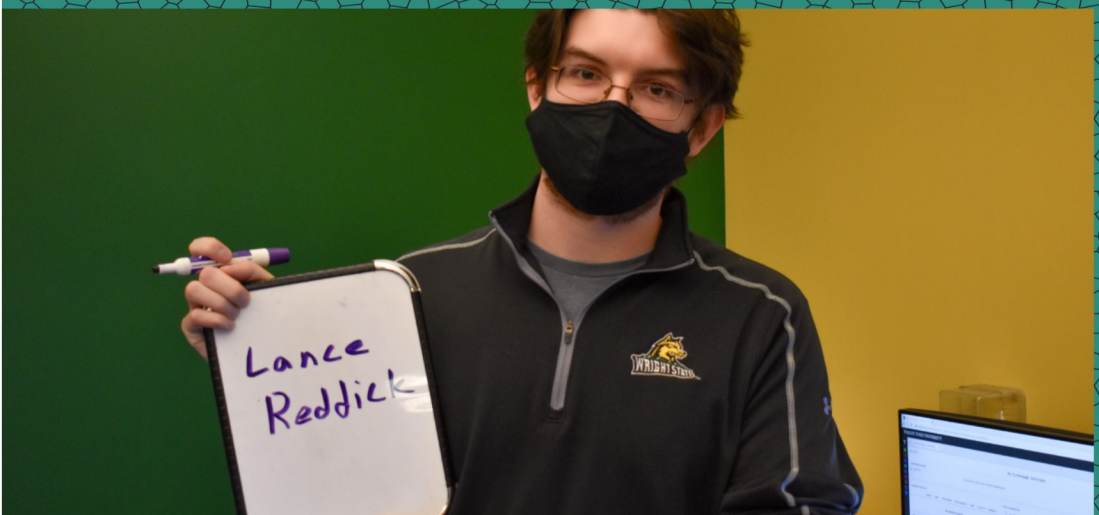
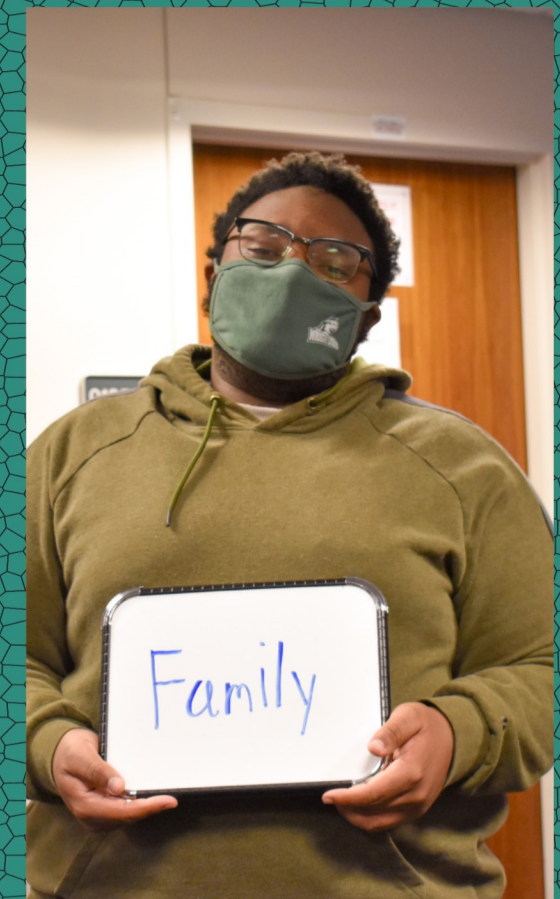
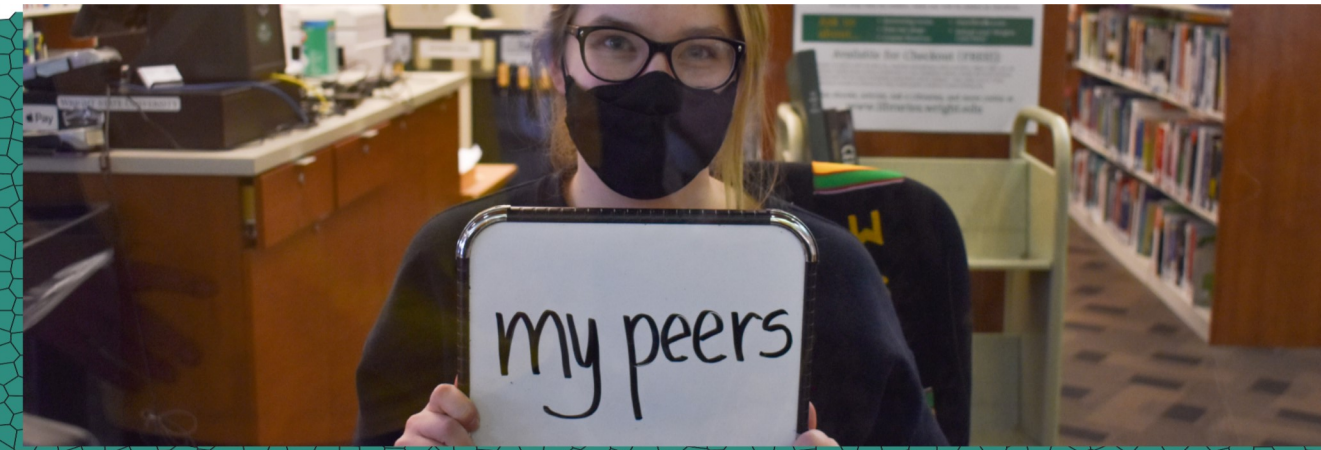
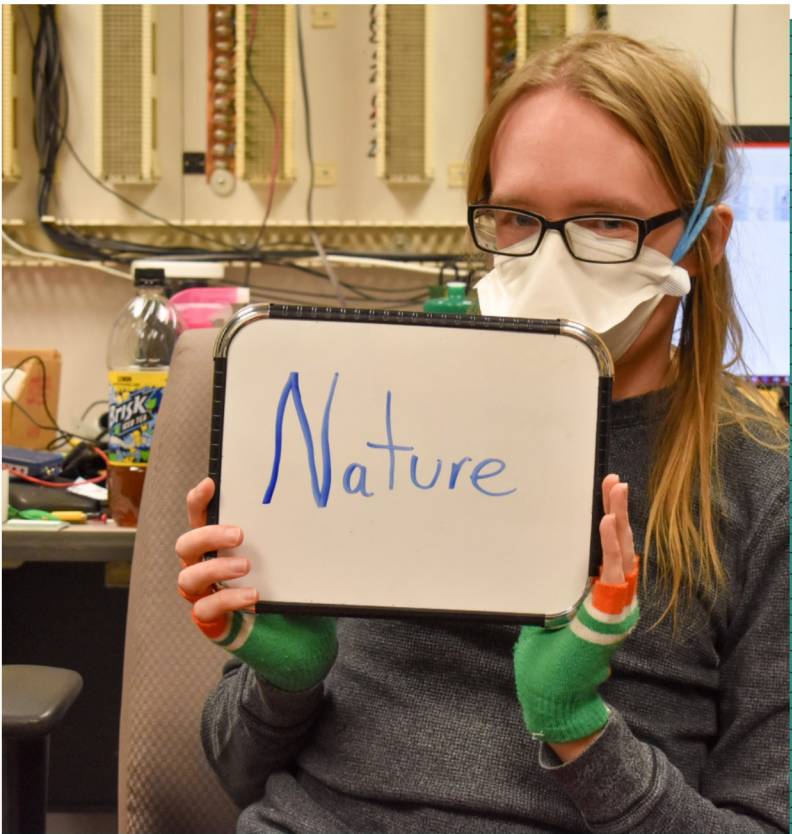
What inspires *you?*




Flight Magazine walked around campus and asked students to share a word or two about what inspires them. This is what they wrote.

Share what inspires you on social media with [#FlightInspires](#).







On a stressful February day in 2021, the university administration made a decision that would affect the fabric of Wright State and put into perspective the work professors and faculty do for students.

The Wright State Board of Trustees approved eliminating 113 faculty members, affecting both the faculty and their students.

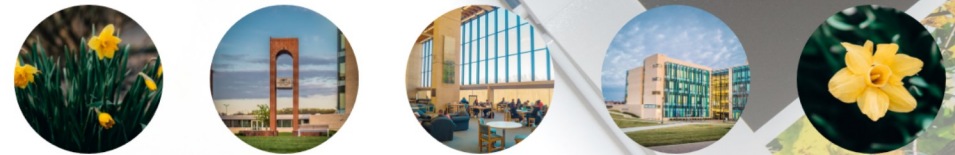
RETRENCHMENT'S IMPACT

Due to declining enrollment, financial hardship and unrest among faculty and university administration, the university decided to begin downsizing, or 'Wright Sizing,' the university.

Another key component of the downsizing plan offered certain faculty voluntary separation agreements or early retirement offers with added bonuses. These efforts combined with natural retirements significantly decreased the faculty population across campus.

As faculty leave the university, students reflect on how their professors and faculty members helped them through college, life and a global pandemic.

Editor's note: Flight Magazine reached out to multiple faculty members about their retrenchment. Many professors did not wish to disclose their retrenchment openly. We have opted to share stories of impactful professors. Professors mentioned are not necessarily retrenched or retired, but faculty that greatly impacted their students.



AN ODE TO IMPACTFUL PROFESSORS: THEIR VALUE IN A TIME OF CRISIS

BY JAMIE NAYLOR



Josiah Pugh & Lindsey Shaffer



Josiah Pugh & Lindsey Shaffer

Josiah Pugh began at Wright State as a biology major. Struggling with the course material of biology but still interested in the sciences, Pugh decided to take an introductory psychology course with Patricia Schimi in the spring of 2020.

According to Pugh, this class and Schimi's passion for the subject inspired him to continue psychology and neuroscience. The ambitious student went on to take a position in Schimi's research lab and is currently applying for doctoral programs.

"I would not be at this place [in life] if it weren't for her," Pugh said.

Junior psychology major Lindsey Shaffer's experience with Schimi also began in spring 2020.

Shaffer was also captivated by Schimi's teaching style and overall humility.

"To me, Dr. Schimi was somebody I felt like I could trust," Shaffer said. "Her positive energy and her absolute kindness for everyone has made me realize that there's so much more to what a student-professor relationship can be."



IMPACT BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Academic advisors also play a crucial role in the life of students. Kirsten Spires, a senior statistics major, sought out her faculty advisor, Julian Al-Yassin while struggling through the global COVID-19 pandemic and her most challenging semester.

Like many other students, Spires struggled during spring 2020, the first semester of the pandemic. The online format of classes became so difficult that Spires was considering dropping out of college.

"I was very seriously considering dropping out, at least until it became normal again, but when she was talking to me and going through all my options [they] convinced me actually to stay in school," Spires said.

Spires reflected on how Al-Yassin talked through options, helped her retain her scholarship and was a key supporter of her college career.

INSPIRATION FOR FURTHER EDUCATION

Samantha Johnson is a master's student in the Raj Soin College of Business. Johnson transferred to Wright State while pursuing her undergraduate degree.

Johnson took organizational leadership with Jung-Soo Yi as one of her first classes at Wright State.

According to Johnson, Yi led this class with enthusiasm, inspiring her to continue her studies.

"He goes above and beyond for students and just really knows this s—. And is very proud to say he teaches at Wright State," Johnson said.

MAKING WRIGHT STATE HOME

Due to past negative experiences, senior Ashley Cheak was concerned that higher education was not for her.

After meeting with her French instructor, Karine Ould-Daddah, Cheak became more confident in her studies and French minor.

"I really felt like she valued me as a student even though she [did not] know me," Cheak said.

PROFESSORS: THE VERY FABRIC OF THE UNIVERSITY

Professors are not just information machines; they are also leaders and mentors who can impact a student's life beyond the classroom.

As professors leave due to retrenchment, they leave behind a legacy of inspiration and success through their work and their students.





Advocate

verb

To publicly recommend or
support



ADVOCATE: HISTORIC NPHC PLOTS LEAVE A LEGACY

BY JAMIE NAYLOR

The emotion was just as palpable as the coming rain during the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) memorial plots ribbon-cutting ceremony. Despite the dreary weather, the Wright State community gathered to celebrate a historical moment and landmark of racial progress in the Dayton region.

GROUNDBREAKING OF THE HISTORIC PLOT PROJECT

“These plots represent the history that created us and will become the legacy that is all of us,” Arionna Wooden, secretary for NPHC and member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., said.

The NPHC plots are a memorial garden representing the Divine 9 organizations and serving as a safe space for minority students.

The plots officially began construction in May of 2021 and finished in October of that same year. However, the idea of a plot structure began well before that time. Some even claim the idea was dreamt up decades ago, only coming to fruition recently.

The project attracted the fifty-fourth Student Government Association (SGA) president Adrian Williams. He made the initiative a cornerstone of his administration.

Williams is also a member of

Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc.

“This project is a culmination of over a decade of hard work and is a testament to the tradition of excellence and achievement of our organizations,” Williams said during the ceremony. “This project was my proudest moment as student body president.”

SGA passed resolution 21-05 on January 26, 2021, encouraging the plots to be built on campus.

MINORITY REPRESENTATION IN GREEK LIFE

The Divine 9 are nine historically Black fraternities and sororities belonging to the NPHC.

Wright State is host to five of these organizations and shares the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. Epsilon Chi chapter with the nearby University of Dayton. These organizations hold a history in advocating and advancing Black and Brown communities.

COMMUNITY VOICES

The plot is constructed of concrete and brick, but to student leaders and those in communities of color, the plot is made up of so much more.

The existence of the plots shows recognition of the African American communities and the student leaders that are a part of them.

“For me, it comes down to acknowledgment,” Wooden said. “We needed people to keep striving on campus; we need students to keep speaking up on campus; we need students to keep the leaders on campus.”

The young leader began her advocacy journey in 2019 when she joined the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. She has since worked her way up to the leadership level. She uses her platform to advocate for the historically Black Greek community and inspire others to create active change.

One of the ways she showed her advocacy was through her involvement in building the NPHC Memorial Plots.

While Wooden advocated for acknowledgment of Black history and struggles, others like Natalie Smith, president of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. and Shaquille Armstrong, president of NPHC, saw these plots as an educational opportunity for the community,

“I feel like this can inspire other people to speak, to use their voice to feel heard. [It is] one thing to just say that you can hear or understand someone, but actually showing the actions [is different],” Smith said.

Educational opportunities to teach the community about the struggles of the African American community and Greek life inspired and motivated many involved in NPHC to contribute to the project, including Armstrong. He saw an opportunity in leadership and the plots.

He considers the plots as a way the minorities on campus can educate the campus community about racial issues, history and Greek Life.

“
THIS PROJECT WAS MY
PROUDEST MOMENT
AS STUDENT BODY
PRESIDENT.”





“When we are teaching these things to other students that are not of African American descent, and then they’re interested in that... that’s another type of special,” Armstrong said.

Armstrong is also a member of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc.

RACIAL HISTORY IN THE U.S.

The United States, like many Western nations, has continually struggled with racial inequality and racial inequity. Institutions like colleges and universities are not immune to this struggle.

Representation, inclusion and safety of minorities, especially racial minorities, remains a prominent topic on higher education campuses across the nation. Consequently, students and young persons stay some of the most prominent advocates for change in the social-political landscape.

From the Civil Rights movement to the modern Black Lives Matter movement, young people, especially those belonging to minority populations, have made strides to advocate for recognition in their communities and improve their communities’ standing in a predominantly white society.

While not a large university, Wright State and its students have taken these struggles and ideals in stride. The university is a predominantly white institution (PWI), with only 9.3% of its student population identifying as African American/Black and 21.1% of the population identifying under one or more minority racial identities.

Since the university’s founding, these diverse groups of students have gathered to advocate for inclusivity, visibility and safety on campus. Many of these efforts, such as creating the Culture and Identity Centers, the racial equity task force, student organizations like the Black Student Union and NPHC, were successful.

While great efforts have been made to make WSU a safe and inclusive campus for minority students, racially motivated hate incidents, like the Nov. 29, hate crime involving racial slurs in residential halls, show there are still improvements to be made.

This is why Black student leaders like Armstrong, Smith and Wooden and Black-centered student organizations advocate for visibility and education.

LEGACY OF THE PLOTS

Not only are these leaders hoping to educate and inspire campus community members, they wish to inspire the local Dayton community and other PWI’s in Ohio. With the opening of the plots, Wright State became the first public PWI in Ohio to open a memorial plot dedicated to the Divine 9 and the students these organizations represent.

“It will inspire more people, not just our university but other universities to really dig deeper and represent everyone,” Smith said.

Collin's Law:

Prevention, not Punishment

By Katie Jones & Emily Mancuso

Over 200 hazing deaths have been reported in the United States since 1838, five deaths occurring in 2019 alone. In Ohio, Collin's Law seeks to prevent this.

In 2019, the year after Collin Wiant died from hazing practices, five more deaths were attributed to hazing. In January, Noah Domingo died from alcohol poisoning at the University of California Irvine. In April, Sebastian Serafin-Bazan died of cardiac arrest resulting from forced exercise. In October, Antonio Tsialas died from trauma sustained from falling into a gorge after leaving a fraternity party with alcohol in his system. Dylan Hernandez's death quickly followed on Nov. 10, resulting from a head injury.

Spurred by Wiant's death, the law makes hazing a felony and failure to report it a misdemeanor. Last spring semester, Wright State was among 17 Ohio universities and colleges advocating for Collin's Law through a letter-writing campaign.

The campaign consisted of reaching out to representatives and personal efforts to inform and encourage Ohio Greek life to support the law.

Led by Ohio University, the campaign kicked off on March 29 with a Zoom program. It featured Ohio Sens. Stephanie Kunze and Theresa Gavarone as well as Kathleen Wiant, mother of Collin Wiant, who the law was named after. Collin's law was passed and went into effect on Oct. 7.

Wiant led the discussion by sharing her son's story, an emotional and transformative one.

She shared how her son—a freshman at Ohio University—lost his life by

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inhaling a deadly amount of nitrous oxide. This is known as "Whippits," slang for using nitrous oxide as a recreational inhalant drug.

The young 18 year old passed away early the next day, which could have been easily prevented.

Following his death, Wiant's parents decided to make a change to help prevent hazing.

"They wanted to see what could be done in Ohio to change what was a lousy law into something with some teeth that might actually have some prevention to it," Gina Keucher, fraternity and sorority life program director at Wright State, said.

Keucher, Interfraternity Council president Connor Algren and College Panhellenic Council president Brittany Zazueta all attended the Zoom program.

Wright State students helped create a sample letter to send to their state senators and representatives, encouraging them to vote in favor of Collin's Law. Various students shared this on their social media.

The letter-writing campaign gave students a voice, a way to bring change to not only their campuses, but to Ohio.

For Zazueta, being heard was important.

"We were able to speak at [the conference] and give our viewpoints. That was really important because it lets us know that it's not just them frowning upon us but giving students the voice to say yes—this is something we need on our campuses," Zazueta said.

Algren made his voice heard by participating in the letter-writing campaign. Algren took



what he learned at the Zoom program and reached out to Ohio's senators and representatives.

Many responded and Algren was able to have an in-depth conversation with his senators and representatives.

Algren spoke with WDTN, a Dayton-based news station, about Collin's Law in addition to the letter-writing campaign. He emphasized how hazing goes against Wright State's values and how joining a fraternity or sorority is joining a brotherhood or sisterhood.

For Algren, hazing is the opposite of what Greek life is supposed to be and why he advocated so much for Collin's Law.

"Nobody hazes intending to kill another person. But, you know, the reality is that sometimes that happens when you are hazing someone, and it's preventable. So those are some of the

big reasons that I want to advocate for the law," Algren said.

The law also emphasized prevention through education, something Keucher, Algren and Zazueta find essential. For WSU, pushing for Collin's Law was more than advocating for a law punishing hazing; it advocated for student safety and hazing prevention.

Now that the law is in effect, Wright State's advocacy for student safety takes the form of hazing prevention education.

"I think that the education piece of the law especially is important. Education is the most powerful tool you have at combating a lot of those types of issues. More so than punishment, right? We'd rather stop the problem before it happens than have a problem," Algren said.

According to Keucher, education was implemented as of January 2022, as required by Collin's Law. One of such educational programs is the monthly Fraternity and Sorority Brown Bag Chat, where fraternities and sororities are invited to attend to learn more about proper leadership procedures and how to prevent hazing.

Keucher says there is difficulty in getting people to be as invested in hazing education because there are relatively few hazing incidents, with only two confirmed incidents of hazing on WSU's campus within the past five years.

Keucher believes it is important to continuously advocate for Wright State's campus to be

educated and follow Collin's Law and student safety.

"When we train about hazing, it won't just be the law because the law is a very specific, huge harm. For us, it is about respect. It is about the expectation that members of the Wright State community are treated with respect and care," Keucher said. "Hazing for us and for our policy is a little bit more expansive than what would be criminal hazing."

Collin's Law and the educational programs to follow will help prevent hazing on campus and educate students on correct practices in their student organizations.



International Students Find Their Voice in Leadership and Advocation

By Olha Zuban



Wright State welcomed 550 new international students for the fall 2021 semester from 50 different countries, compared to 39 countries in fall of 2020.

In addition to the struggles international students face before landing on U.S. soil, they also have to fight to make their voices heard amidst fears of being left out.

According to several international students, the best place to find their voice is in student organizations and getting involved on campus.

The combination of university resources, activities from the University's Center for International Education (UCIE) and on or off-campus student organizations help international students advocate for themselves and make their adaptation to the new environment smoother.

CHALLENGES AND ADVOCATING

The first months of living in another country are the most difficult for international students. Adjusting to living standards in an unknown country, culture shock and navigating a language barrier contribute to the initial challenges.

During this time, many international students are overwhelmed by adjusting to changes while worrying about missing important information about classes, housing or involvement opportunities.

"In the first two weeks, I was a little bit homesick, and it took some time to adjust. But then I started interacting with the right people, and it gave me the energy to focus on my studies," K M Tawsik Jawad said, an international student from Bangladesh who is getting his Ph.D. in computer science.

Mashuj Alshammari, a junior international student from Saudi Arabia, majoring in mechanical engineering,

started his journey at Wright State with the Learning English for Academic and Professional Purposes (LEAP) program to improve his English skills.

"Although I am the kind of man who likes to talk, I had a hard time interacting with people during the first two months. I didn't talk to anyone because I was afraid to make a mistake," Alshammari said.

Many international students face the same language barrier struggle.

"International students helped me to start communicating with other people because I assume they have the same problem as me.





They are also from different countries and societies,” Alshammari said.

FEAR OF BEING LEFT OUT

After moving to an unknown country, international students are often afraid of being left out. First-year graduate computer science student Nikhil Surabhi is from India. He highlighted that it is easy to notice whether the new country is welcoming or if it just adds to the challenges of missing their country, family and friends.

“The more students are involved, the less pressure they have inside their head and the more focused they will be in the prime objective, which is studying. One thing they want is someone who they can talk to and get to know people around,” Surabhi said.

ADVOCATING THROUGH INVOLVEMENT

“You will miss a lot of opportunities if you wait for someone to go together with you to events or interesting places on campus. A lot of the events I went to were by myself. I did not have a friend to come with,” Carlos Sosa said, an international student from Guatemala.

Sosa mentioned he was uninvolved in campus life during his undergraduate studies, which led him to have difficulty landing a job after graduation. Once he started his master’s program in marketing analytics and insights in the fall 2021 semester, he decided to choose a different approach.

During the first few months of his master’s, Sosa got an on-campus job and simultaneously started to attend various events to meet new people and learn about all the opportunities on campus.

“You will finally find people who accept you, and if they won’t, you go to another group of people. It is better to risk it than never do it,” Sosa said.



JOINING A STUDENT ORGANIZATION

It is much easier for students to feel included when they are around people who share the same interests and passions—all student organizations at Wright State welcome international students.

“I knew that I didn’t want to be around international students all the time,” Sosa said. “I became quickly involved in International Friendships Inc. in Dayton, Miracle Makers and the Entrepreneurship Club on campus.”

“When there is less pressure in studies or a gap between assignments, then I try to attend such meetings. This is a good way of meeting and interacting with other people who have the same interests,” Jawad said.

Leading an organization can help too.

After the Saudi Student Organization was not active for six months, Alshammari decided to take its presidency and run the organization.

“When I was planning to come to Wright State, I talked to the former president of the Saudi Student Organization a month before I got here. He told me about local restaurants, the cost of living and helped me find housing. He was taking care of everything,” Alshammari said.

Inspired by his experience with the organization, Alshammari plans to continue supporting Saudi students and sharing the Saudi culture with domestic and international students alike.

“We are taking care of other students and we are doing what families usually do,” Alshammari said.

International students are not afraid to make their preferences heard.

For instance, some students highlighted that organized holiday traveling tours could help them to learn more about the U.S.

Others said that sports play a huge part in their life, and having more physical activity would motivate them to come out of their rooms.

The UCIE office supports upcoming students before they settle in the U.S. and those who continue their studies at Wright State.

Lead

verb

The initiative in an action; an example for others to follow



III DRAWING THE LINE

STUDENT LEADERS STRUGGLE TO CARRY THE WEIGHT

By Makenzie Hoeflerlin

*"I THINK THAT'S WHAT PEOPLE DON'T UNDERSTAND, THE LONG HOURS—IN ALL ORGANIZATIONS—THE COMMITMENT THAT IT TAKES TO BE AN ORG LEADER."
- PARKER TESTA*

Wright State is suffering from a culture of burnout.

Some of the most impactful members of the Wright State community don't even have a college degree. Yet, they carry the burden of planning and staffing massive student engagement events, driving the administration to make better decisions and performing up to insurmountable expectations.

"Student organizations as a whole, but especially student leaders, I truly believe that they're the heart and soul of the university," Jeremy Keller, leadership program manager in the Office of Student Involvement and Leadership, said.

Student leaders define the culture and atmosphere of the university.

"Without these student leaders, it would be: come to school, go home, come to school, go home. There would be nothing in between," Gina Keucher, fraternity and sorority life program director, said.

Students step into leadership roles because they enjoy the work and feel a sense of responsibility for their specific organization. However, they can be overwhelmed by the sheer workload and pressure of what is expected of them. After all, student leaders are students, and many of them have to carry the duties of living independently and going to college full time.

"We do what we do because we love it," Parker Testa, sports director at WWSU 106.9 FM, the university's student-run radio station, said. "If there was no class required to be here, I would still be here the same amount of time I am now because I really just enjoy it that much."

Whether students join organizations to meet new people, gain resume experience or build their confidence, each student chooses to be a part of something bigger than themselves. That choice does sometimes come with a price.

For Testa, being a leader at the radio station does not stop when he leaves the studio. He also worked for Wright State's Office of Admissions and volunteers to help at other university-wide events such as the Halloween Bash.

Multiple student organizations collaborated to organize a six-hour-long Halloween event for students that included glow in the dark mini-golf, a costume contest, live music, a haunted house and more. After calling multiple sports games the week leading up to volunteering for the bash, Testa arrived at WWSU at 9 a.m. Saturday and did not leave campus until after the bash ended at 1 a.m. Sunday.

"I think they look at us, especially in my department, and they think I go to basketball games and go home, and that is all I do, and that's not true," Testa said. "I think that's what people don't understand, the long hours—in all organizations—the commitment that it takes to be an org leader."

The time Testa dedicates to the university and WWSU constantly battles with the 30-plus hours a week he works as a producer at WHIO 1290 AM and 95.7 FM.

Testa is not alone.

Many organization leaders on campus struggle to lead their organization, do well in class and work other jobs on the side to support themselves through school.

Kaci Lovejoy is president of College Panhellenic Council and holds leadership positions within her sorority chapter, Kappa Delta.

*“OUR JOB AS EXECUTIVE MEMBERS IS TO CHECK UP ON EVERYBODY BELOW US, BUT NOBODY EVER COMES BACK TO CHECK UP ON US. JUST BECAUSE I'M GETTING PAID DOESN'T MEAN I'M OK.
- JEFF SHEHEE*

"Even within my own chapter, we have a thing called appointed officer positions. Normally people get like three or four. I have seven," Lovejoy said. On top of her 19-plus credit hours as a vocal performance major and a part-time job outside of school, Lovejoy says it becomes difficult to draw the line between her involvement and her classes.

"I've definitely thought about dropping out of my own chapter, just from everything piling up," Lovejoy said. "It's a lot to take on. It gets to the point where I am so enthralled in what I'm doing as a student leader that I kind of lose sight of my classes."

Student leaders are struggling.

And the struggle becomes increasingly difficult when the same small group of students is taking on all the responsibilities of multiple positions in multiple different organizations.

According to Courtney Laukitis, student organizations program manager, there are currently 130 total student organizations on campus.

These organizations consist of 364 leadership positions filled. These only include the president, vice president, treasurer and secretary.

Of these 364 student leaders, 315 are unique leaders, which means that 49 of these students hold leadership positions in two or more organizations.

Even more shocking, the number of student leaders on campus makes up only 3% of the total student population at the Dayton campus.

And the situation is getting worse, especially since the pandemic started.

“I will tell you that previously, I probably had maybe one student leader a year tell me that they were mentally not OK. This year it is meeting after meeting,” Keucher said. “I’ve seen everything from someone feeling like they need to go to the hospital to someone crying in my office or admitting that they’re not eating or someone saying ‘I just can’t take it anymore,’ and then they go from being a leader to someone who is willing to give that up.”

Many student leaders are drowning, and they don’t see any solutions on the horizon.

“The problem is, you used to have a support system. You used to have five people underneath you who would step in and take some of that load. I think what’s happening with leaders right now is there aren’t that many people stepping up to take the load, right? They feel like, ‘If I don’t do this, nobody will.’ And so instead of saying ‘oh then nobody does it,’ they are putting that on themselves,” Keucher said.

Keucher says she has noticed a weird gap of leaders in the sophomore and junior classes.

Instead of having opportunities to meet mentors and develop friendships, many of these students struggled with online learning and picked up more hours at a job to fill their time.

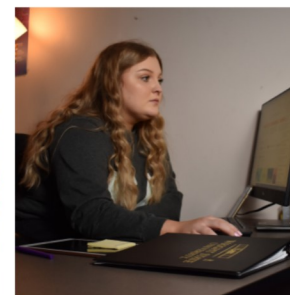
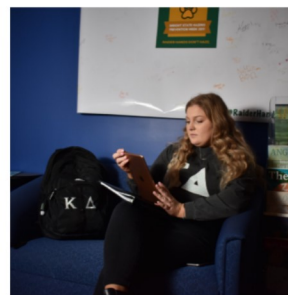
The lack of support from younger students could be due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Many students spent most of their first and second years online, leaving little room to meet current leaders, get involved or develop a desire to step up and lead.

However, ‘Generation Z’ research conducted by professor Corey Seemiller shows this might not be the case.

IT’S OK TO BE OVERWORKED EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE, BUT AFTER YOU SPEND SO LONG FILLING IN EVERYBODY ELSE’S HOLES, YOU’RE JUST USED TO IT.
- JEFF SHEHEE



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Her in-depth research on Gen Z indicates that even before COVID, they were not stepping up into leadership roles as much as previous generations.

According to Seemiller, Gen Z prefers to enjoy general membership but not necessarily lead organizations. They also may be more willing to take on shared leadership roles or leadership positions that do not bind them for long periods.

Some students will not care for the extra work or the extra title.

“With the cost of higher education, it is common for students to work... and for Gen Z, work a lot. Some might simply not have enough time to sacrifice hours at work to take on a leadership role, even if it is paid, likely not what they are making at their jobs. Some may have decided to take more classes than usual to finish their degrees more quickly to save tuition dollars. Some may just not want the extra stress during what is a stressful era of time,” Seemiller said.

Whether the issue is long-term or temporary, caused by COVID-19 or not, some student leaders have come up with a phrase to describe their struggle: overworked, underpaid, underappreciated.

Although blunt, some feel that there is some validity to the statement.

Some students, such as Senior Jeff Shehee, are involved in seven-plus different organizations on campus and hold leadership positions in almost all of them. As a leader, Shehee not only has his responsibilities on a day-to-day basis but takes it upon himself to check up on his other members to make sure they have what they need to thrive.

“Our job as executive members is to check up on everybody below us, but nobody ever comes back to check up on us. Just because I’m getting paid doesn’t mean I’m OK,” Shehee said.



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“I think we overwork ourselves because that is just the norm we are used to at this point,” Shehee

said. “It’s OK to be overworked every once in a while, but after you spend so long filling in everybody else’s holes, you’re just used to it. Your mind and your brain kind of just go numb and there is nothing else for you to do except continue to fill those holes and just hope that something gets better. But I think you officially begin to feel underappreciated after you fill those holes and nobody says thank you or even recognizes that you did anything at all.”

So, where should students draw the line? If everything rises and falls with leadership, where does that put Wright State’s student body? The community?

The burnout issue is a complicated one, with many layers and causes.

Maybe student leaders are short-handed and overwhelmed.

Maybe student leaders put too much pressure on themselves.

Maybe student leaders don’t know how to say no.

Either way, student leaders are struggling with burnout, and they sure as hell are not the only ones.



Leadership Stories from WSU Faculty and Staff

By Makenzie Hoeflerlin

Flight Magazine reached out to several prominent members of the Wright State community in different departments and asked them to share stories of leadership and what they believe makes a great leader. Responses have been edited for clarity and conciseness.



BECCA WEBB
Communication
and Development
Coordinator, College
of Liberal Arts

President Edwards inspires me as a leader because of the way she smiles, says “Hi!” to everyone, and has conversations with folks that many in her position either look over or downright ignore, such as custodians, facilities folks, and secretaries like me - people who are often deemed as lesser-than or just cogs in a wheel and whom leadership takes for granted. That impacted me, and I felt valued and appreciated. I want to make sure folks I’m leading are feeling heard, valued and remembered.

There are a lot of opportunities for student leadership on campus, and I hope [students] partake in them. A student perspective is important in continuing well-rounded leadership here, and it can’t be done if students don’t step up!



**WAKIURU
WAMWARA**
Associate Professor of
Marketing

A great leader is an inspiring, transformational, visionary servant who dares to make tough decisions. No one achieves anything alone, and I have benefitted from the support and mentorship of many people from all walks of life. I am originally from Kenya, and my African worldview, which encompasses Ubuntu (I am because you are) and Harambee (let us pull together), informs my attitude towards leadership. Leadership means working to achieve common goals while inspiring, mentoring and supporting others to reach their personal goals. It is only in the collective that great things are accomplished.



KEVIN HUANG
Intercultural
Specialist for the
Asian and Native
American Center

Three things make a good leader: consistency, empathy and authenticity. As an Asian American growing up in the Midwest, specifically Columbus, Ohio, I sought community when I did not have it growing up. I once had a community leader continually invite me, a stranger, to events on campus held by their organization. This has held an everlasting impact on me because it was so meaningful to be authentically invited to programs despite being new to the community.



JOYLYNN BROWN
Senior Associate
Athletics Director
and Senior Woman
Administrator

Great leaders listen and can empathize with others, regardless of differences. The key to great leadership is figuring out how to bring all unique individuals together to form a strong team. What can I do to show I am invested in this group of people? How can I show them I care? Taking time to get to know people and what motivates them is huge. If you show you genuinely care about someone, they are more willing to work toward a common goal.

To be a great leader, you need to get involved. There are so many opportunities on this campus, but you have to be willing to step out of your comfort zone to be a part of them. You just need to find your niche and passion and figure out how to contribute. Jump in with both feet! You can do it.



QUATEZ SCOTT
Intercultural
Specialist of the
Bolinga Black
Cultural Resources
Center

When I was a senior in college, I missed out on winning an award I was really excited about. When I didn’t win, my mom told me not to be down. She reminded me that to be nominated was to realize people were watching me. And, even without winning the award, I won because of the impact I had on others around me. That is leadership because it was a reminder always to uplift the people around you. Leadership is hard. It’s making the decisions many people don’t want to make while steering the team towards goals. The other thing to remember is that leadership is not positional—it is attitudinal. No matter where you are in the hierarchy of an organization, how you embrace the people and work sets the tone for your elevation in life.



NICOLE CARTER
Director of the
Women’s Center,
Co-coordinator of
Women, Gender, and
Sexuality Studies

A good leader advocates for those who don’t have a space to speak up for themselves and recognizes that we all have certain leadership abilities that are extraordinary at different times. They also believe in the importance of inclusion and equity. I am where I am today because other people thought that I could lead and educate others. A former professor saw not only my skills but the potentiality of what I could become. Leadership is not a final project. Instead, it is a continuous learning process, making mistakes, perseverance, and success.



AWAD HALABI
Associate Professor,
Departments of
History and Religion

A good leader possesses a vision of how a community and group can move forward but is also flexible enough to modify that goal after listening to the opinions of others. Over the years, I’ve been familiar with the work of community activists. When they have taken on a project, such as increasing voter turn-out, tackling homelessness or hunger in their community, the goal must have seemed remote and unreachable. Over the years, though, these activists have made tremendous gains. Every time I learn about the work of some of these community activists and what they’ve accomplished, it inspires me to think of the time and energy it requires to achieve these goals. It is often quietly done without any significant attention (or even appreciation). Leadership means speaking up in support of others, even if it may be uncomfortable to challenge those in a position of authority.

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