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## //// MESSAGE from the Dean



Greetings Friends,

In this issue of The Insider, we highlight some of the ways we continue to support students in the KU School of Health Professions. The school has worked hard to expand access and resources for students interested in our programs. We have strategically increased access to scholarship funding to reach a more diverse population. This initiative would not have been possible without the generous support of individuals like Dr. Anthony Kovac. Dr. Kovac has been very generous with his financial resources, time, skills and interest to the benefit of our students. He has been a very good friend and tremendous support to the School of Health Professions.

Another instrumental initiative is the hiring of Alex Lopez, the school's outreach and recruitment specialist, to assist and guide applicants in deciding which School of Health Professions program might be right for their future. In this issue of The Insider, we also share details on the Master of Science Athletic Training degree program, with updates on students as we follow them through the creation of this new program.

As dean of the KU School of Health Professions, I am proud and appreciative of all the support our school has received. A heartfelt thank you to the Board of Advocates, donors and friends who continue to contribute their resources, time and energy to increase the opportunities our students are offered.

**Abiodun Akinwuntan, Ph.D., MPH, MBA, FASAHP, FACRM**

*Dean, School of Health Professions*

*Professor, Department of Physical Therapy, Rehabilitation Science and Athletic Training*

*Professor, Department of Neurology*

# KU School of Health Professions Ups Its Scholarship Game

Scholarships available to health professions students have grown immensely over the past several years.



**Anthony Kovac, M.D., and Abiodun Akinwuntan, Ph.D., MPH, MBA, FASAHP, FACRM**

Well-trained health professionals are critical to the wellbeing of all Kansans. However, the state is currently experiencing a growing deficit of these essential health care professionals. According to a report by the Health Resources and Services Administration, at least seven health professions will face shortages ranging from 10% to 20% in the coming years.

In an effort to help alleviate those shortages, the University of Kansas School of Health Professions has been working to recruit more students into its programs. One of the methods the school has been using is increasing the number of scholarships available to students.

Abiodun Akinwuntan, Ph.D., MPH, MBA, FASAHP, FACRM, dean of the KU School of Health Professions, has made

increasing financial support for students a top priority.

“The School of Health Professions and KU Medical Center as a whole, are committed to developing and enhancing initiatives to support our students, including financially,” Akinwuntan said. “We also believe that providing much-needed financial support and scholarships will help attract more students from diverse

and rural backgrounds and create a well-rounded learning and working environment for all our faculty, staff and students.”

In the past few years, Dr. Akinwuntan and the leadership of the KU School of Health Professions worked to create and fund more scholarships for the school’s students. Among the new scholarships are:

- **The Samuel Porritt Rehabilitation Excellence Scholarship**

The scholarship was established in 2021 by Samuel Porritt, the founder of the Falling Forward Foundation. The foundation assists people who have financial barriers to getting adequate rehabilitation after catastrophic medical events such as strokes, traumatic brain injuries and spinal cord injuries. The scholarship is awarded to students studying in a rehabilitation or therapy program in the KU School of Health Professions.

- **The 2+2 Degree Programs Diversity Scholarship**

The scholarship was established to address the acute need for medical laboratory scientists, health information managers and respiratory therapists. Recipients must be first-generation college students in the final two academic years of their degree program.

- **The Graduate Degree Programs Diversity Scholarship**

The scholarship was established to address the acute need for athletic trainers, audiologists, nurse anesthetists, registered dietitians, molecular biotechnologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists and speech-language pathologists. Recipients must be first-generation college students in the final two academic years of their degree program.

- **The Rebekah Mani Clinical Scholar Fund in Dietetics and Nutrition**

The fund was started by Mani M. Mani, M.D., who served as the medical director of the Gene and Barbara Burnett Burn Center before his retirement. The fund provides support for students who are receiving clinical dietetics training and education at the KU School of Health Professions and supports bringing clinical dietetics students and professionals from overseas to KU Medical Center to study clinical dietetics and then return to their home countries to train clinical dietitians.

- **Diversity and International Experiences Fund Award**

The award is open to students in the School of Health Professions from diverse backgrounds who are first-generation university students and to support students with academic-based international travel funding, pipeline scholarships and financial hardship.

- **The Kovac Diversity Student Support Fund for Health Professions**

The fund was established in 2021 by Anthony Kovac, M.D., who is a strong proponent of interdisciplinary education, research and clinical practice. The scholarship fund was established to promote diversity among students and the growth of multidisciplinary initiatives in the School of Health Professions, complementing similar scholarship funds established by Dr. Kovac for the schools of Nursing and Medicine at KU Medical Center.

Dr. Kovac said the scholarships he sponsors, as well as the other forms of financial support the KU School of Health Professions provides, will benefit the school as a whole.

“I believe that students who better understand, appreciate and embrace diversity on professional and personal levels will have a better educational experience,” Kovac said. “They will be able to contribute more to society for the benefit of all the citizens of Kansas, the United States and the world.”

For more information on how to donate to the KU School of Health Professions scholarship programs, visit [kuendowment.org/Your-Gift/Areas-of-Support/Academic-Medical-Center/Health-Professions](https://kuendowment.org/Your-Gift/Areas-of-Support/Academic-Medical-Center/Health-Professions) or call 913-562-2718.



# Meet Our Pipeline Scholarship Recipients

A growing number of students in the KU School of Health Professions are taking advantage of the scholarships the school is offering. Four of those students tell us what that aid means to them.



**ASHLEY BARRY, MPH, RRT**, is pursuing her doctorate in the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation while teaching in the Department of Respiratory Care and Diagnostic Science. She was the first recipient from what would become the Diversity and International Experience Fund.

*In Charity Beyond Borders, started by KU faculty, both faculty and students travel to Ghana. About 20 people run clinics and do a whole bunch of other things, but it's expensive because it's a month long and a little over \$4,000. I knew I couldn't go because it was too expensive...I really wanted to go, but I figured it would be after graduate school, when I wasn't a student anymore. The dean (of the School of Health Professions) asked me if I was going, and I said no. But the dean worked with the Office of International Programs, and they found money for me to go. I was so excited. That trip has changed the trajectory of my career and my perspective on health care professions.*

**LINDSAY GARCIA** is enrolled in the Doctor of Physical Therapy (DPT) program and received a \$5,000 scholarship from the DIFE.

*I always had the plan of pursuing a career in physical therapy. When I started applying to programs, KU Medical Center was at the top of my list. When I received my acceptance offer, I wasn't able to accept right away due to financial hardships. I wrote a letter to the department explaining that I may not be able to attend KU because I couldn't manage the cost. I actually heard back from the dean of the School of Health Professions, and he told me he would see if there was additional help out there. That's how I got my DIFE scholarship. I was overjoyed that my story was heard, my situation was understood and the school actually cared about what I was going through.*





**SAMUEL DURAIRAJ** is pursuing his Ph.D. in rehabilitation science in the Department of Physical Therapy, Rehabilitation Science and Athletic Training. He received a \$3,000 scholarship from the DIFE.

*I come from India, where I was senior faculty at Christian Medical College, Vellore. When I decided it was time to upgrade myself, I knew I would need to look outside of India, because there is a limited Ph.D. scope there. I had been a Modale Junior Research Fellow at KU Medical Center in 2014, so I knew about the program and the school. Because of the pandemic, there was a huge delay in the visa department, so I came alone, with the idea to save up some money, and then my family would follow. I have a wife, a daughter, who is 6, and a son, who is 1. I was worried about my family's care, and children are expensive. That is why I applied (to DIFE). Those funds will help pay tuition so other money can go to supporting my family.*

**LEILA ASGHARI** is pursuing her master's degree in the Department of Dietetics and Nutrition. The School of Health Professions awarded her a \$2,000 DIFE scholarship.

*As an international student, I do not have the same opportunities as other students to work and make money due to the restrictions associated with my visa. As a result of this reward, I believe I am studying at a school that is concerned about my financial challenges due to my nationality and background and is committed to fostering equality and diversity. Now I am very confident the school is committed to fostering equality and diversity and is aware of international financial difficulties. By supporting international students from different backgrounds and countries, the School of Health Professions achieves the goal of diversity not only in the school but also among health care workers serving in their communities. Nutritionists with diverse backgrounds are capable of understanding the dietary needs and preferences of people from various socio-cultural backgrounds.*





# A Conversation with the School of Health Professions' Student Recruiter

Alex Lopez is the outreach and recruitment specialist for the KU School of Health Professions. We spoke to him about the rewards and challenges of meeting and recruiting potential health professions students to KU.



### ***When did you start as a recruitment specialist for the School of Health Professions?***

My position was created in 2020 with the purpose to promote, create awareness and provide guidance to high school and college students seeking careers in health care, including those already with degrees wanting a career change.

### ***What is it like to recruit for so many different programs?***

It's a very humble experience, and it has helped me put into a much broader perspective the concept of wholistic patient care and interdisciplinary collaborations. Every day I get to learn something new from the best of the best. The opportunity to work with faculty — coming from eight academic departments that include 25 different degrees and certificates — is something I don't take for granted.

***Tell us about your travel.***

While I am based at the KU Medical Center campus, this role allows me to travel to different parts of the metro area, all corners of the state of Kansas, from Lawrence to Garden City and everything in between, including Wichita, Topeka, Manhattan, Salina and Hays.

Between early-September to early-December and late-February to early-May, I travel at least three times per week, attending a recruitment event outside of the KU Medical Center campus.

The need to promote our programs and cultivate more awareness means we have to make as many recruiting events as possible. For example, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the need for qualified health care workers in different sectors will increase by at least 16 percent by 2030. Among them are clinical laboratory scientists, health information managers and respiratory therapists, which our school has all three programs, all of which are represented in the School of Health Professions.

***What is the most challenging aspect of your position?***

Very often at recruitment events, many people think that I'm representing the School of Medicine or School of Nursing. Nearly every other conversation involves explaining KU Medical Center is composed of the three schools.

Even in different events if I'm the only KU Medical Center representative, the host has said something like "today we have a representative from the medical center, if you're thinking about becoming a physician, a nurse or learn about other careers in health care, talk to him." I make sure people know that the School of Health Professions is so much more than just "other careers in health care."

***What is the most rewarding aspect of your position?***

There are so many of them. One aspect is the privilege of interacting with students in different stages of their college journey. From meeting a student in their annual high school college fair; introducing myself to members of a pre-health club; giving words of encouragement when the semester is not going so well; writing a recommendation letter; receiving an email letting me know they just received a letter of acceptance to one of our programs; and congratulating them during at graduation.

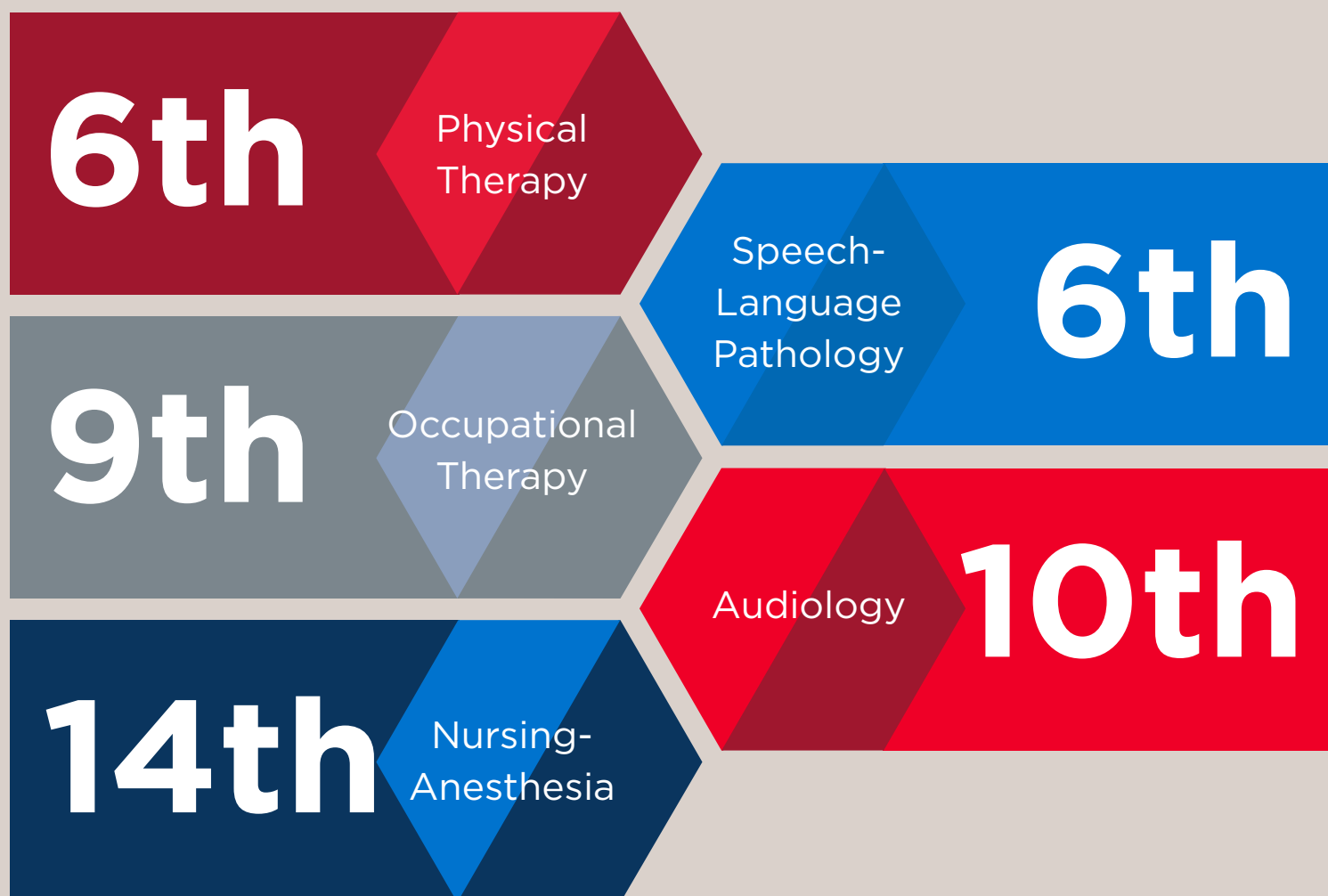
This role also allows me to collaborate closely with a number of partners within KU, such as the Office of Admissions, Undergraduate Academic Advising Office, University Career Center and the KU Medical Center Office of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, just to mention a few. I also get to work with academic advisors from both community colleges and four-year institutions in a variety of different ways and capacities to ensure their students know about our programs and the different pathways to get here.

Lastly, I get to use my bilingual skills to communicate with students, parents and members of different community organizations throughout the metro. Any opportunity that I get to use my Spanish, I take it.

## Top-Ranked Programs

### Programs Among the Nation's Best

KU School of Health Professions offers some of the top-ranked graduate programs in the country among public universities, according to the U.S. News and World Report rankings for 2022:





## Our Newest Alumni

Departments within the School of Health Professions conferred degrees and certificates to 321 students in May 2022. Graduates could attend an in-person recognition ceremony for the first time in three years since the ceremonies in 2020 and 2021 were virtual.



Bachelor of Science in Clinical Laboratory Science Clinical Concentration (13)  
Molecular Biotechnology Concentration (1)  
Molecular Biotechnology and Clinical Concentration (5)  
Doctorate in Clinical Laboratory Science (1)  
Bachelor of Science in Health Information Management (21)  
Bachelor of Science in Respiratory Care (12)  
Respiratory Therapy Degree Advancement (8)  
Cardiovascular Sonography (6)  
Diagnostic Ultrasound and Vascular Technology (4)  
Nuclear Medicine Technology (3)  
Dietetic Internship Graduate Certificate (17)  
Dietetic and Integrative Medicine Graduate Certificate (4)  
Master of Science in Dietetics and Nutrition (20)  
Doctor of Philosophy in Medical Nutrition Science (1)  
Master of Arts in Speech-Language Pathology (35)  
Doctor of Philosophy in Speech-Language Pathology (5)  
Doctor of Audiology (6)  
Doctor of Nurse Anesthesia Practice (36)  
Entry-Level Doctor of Occupational Therapy (41)  
Post-Professional Doctor of Occupational Therapy (3)  
Doctor of Philosophy in Therapeutic Science (2)  
Doctor of Physical Therapy (59)  
Doctor of Philosophy in Rehabilitation Science (1)

# A Look Back at the New Athletic Training Program's First Year

Last summer, the first classes began in the new Master of Science in Athletic Training (MSAT) program, part of the re-named Department of Physical Therapy, Rehabilitation Science and Athletic Training. Replacing the bachelor's degree program on the KU campus in Lawrence, the MSAT program was created in response to the profession's educational accrediting body changing the training requirement from a bachelor's to a master's degree, comparable to other health professions such as physical and occupational therapy. Below, the three inaugural students in the MSAT program — Abigail Garrett, Natalie Ligtenberg and Hannah Prymek — along with founding program director LesLee Taylor, Ph.D., reflect on the first year of the two-year program.

***What stands out to you as the best thing about being in the program so far?***

**Prymek:** The people we've gotten to work with — everyone from our athletic training staff and professors, preceptors at sites, the physical therapy staff and students and the clinical lab science program.

**Ligtenberg:** I agree. And the tireless effort of the staff. Everyone on the staff team has pulled late nights to get my classmates and me feedback on our assignments. They have all jumped through hoops for us to be successful, happy and healthy.

**Garrett:** And starting out as a small program makes it feel more like a family than you would imagine a graduate school program to feel. Each member in the department wants to get to know us on a professional and a personal level. They adjust their teaching style to optimize our learning, and they want us to be successful.

***How is the program evolving? Are there any changes being made because of what's been learned over the last year?***

**Taylor:** The athletic training faculty and staff met with the first cohort of students to debrief on the past year. The students had both things they enjoyed and want the program to continue and constructive suggestions for improvement. These included course sequencing, assignments, clinical education requirements and non-academic aspects of the program.

**Ligtenberg:** A lot of what we spoke about in that meeting was about changing the courses we take with the physical therapists to be more inclusive of our program. We also talked about better structuring the classes we take to be more conducive to our clinical rotations.

**Prymek:** One thing we developed from that meeting was a plan-of-care project. That's basically where we take an athlete who's been hurt and use the knowledge we've gained over the last year to come up with the appropriate diagnosis and evaluation techniques, and then take them through a therapeutic intervention to get them back to play. It was a lot of work, but it helped us get the idea of working in a real setting.

***How has this first year altered your view of what it means to be an athletic trainer?***

**Garrett:** I have a greater appreciation for the importance of interprofessional collaboration between all health care providers. As athletic trainers, we collaborate with many clinicians in treating athletes.

**Ligtenberg:** I learned more about the many hats an athletic trainer wears. We're administrators, researchers and leaders, and we work with other medical professionals in a wide array of settings. Something else that I hadn't really thought about until the last year is the administrative duties of the athletic trainer, including inventory, documentation and staffing.

***The program is new but already seems to have a great variety of clinical rotation opportunities. Tell us about that.***

**Taylor:** A big success of the program is how the Kansas City health care community, including athletic trainers, has volunteered to provide clinical education opportunities and support to the program. The University of Kansas Hospital System, Kansas Team Health (KU Athletics), the Sports Medicine and Performance Center (school district partners) and physicians in

the family medicine and orthopedic sports medicine fellowship programs are an integral part of what we do. Additionally, a number of secondary schools, colleges, physician practices and professional sports teams in the area have reached out. It's a wonderful problem to have more clinical sites and individuals wanting to be involved than we currently have students to place!

**Prymek:** I really enjoyed my high school rotation and my small Division 2 college rotation (Rockhurst) where I covered men's and women's lacrosse. It was nice to work in a smaller setting where I had a little bit more time to spend rehabbing with athletes and just getting to know the kids at the Division 2 level.

**Garrett:** I have gotten to work with KU Athletics with the baseball and volleyball teams as well as Kansas City Kansas Community college and their athletes. I've learned so much from all my preceptors. They are all incredibly knowledgeable about sports medicine and preventing, assessing and treating athletes with a variety of injuries and illnesses.

**Ligtenberg:** I enjoyed mine, too. I had rotations at the NAIA (National Association of Intercollegiate Athletics) level and at the professional level with Sporting Kansas City's Second Team. At both, I was able to help with evaluations, rehabilitation, taping, game coverage, organizational duties and therapeutic interventions.

***What are your plans for after graduation? Have they changed since you began the program?***

**Garrett:** I originally just wanted to jump into my career, but now I feel like I still have so much to learn. So, I plan to apply for a year-long internship before I settle into my profession.

**Prymek:** If you had asked me last summer before we started clinical sites, I would have told you I wanted to work at a Division 1 Power Five football program after graduation. Now after having gotten exposure to more places and sports, I'd say I have no idea. I don't know where I want to end up, and I'm okay with that for now. I'm just getting the most I can from every rotation and site so that when it is time to apply for positions I'll know what I want.

**Ligtenberg:** When I first started the program, I wanted to go back to a small town in Idaho and work at my high school as the first medical professional on staff and create an entire medical team from the ground up. I am still passionate about that, but it's not what I want to do directly after graduation. I'm up for anything at this point and am willing to adapt to any challenge.



**LesLee Taylor,**  
Ph.D., LAT, ATC



**Natalie Ligtenberg**



**Hannah Prymek**



**Abigail Garrett**

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# theinsider

UNIVERSITY OF KANSAS SCHOOL OF HEALTH PROFESSIONS

## *Recruitment and Outreach*

The KU School of Health Professions is upping its scholarship game

Q & A with Outreach and Recruitment Specialist  
Alex Lopez

### *PLUS:*

The new athletic training program marks its first year  
at KU Medical Center

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The University of Kansas

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