Greetings Friends,

I thank all faculty, staff and students in the School of Health Professions for their resilience, flexibility and cooperation during this difficult time. Our school successfully adapted to all the challenges that came our way in the last few months. We came together as a group and remained focused on our mission to serve the citizens of Kansas, the region, the nation and to develop tomorrow’s leaders through exemplary education, research and service. While we still have a long road ahead, I truly believe that we collectively have what it takes to rise to the challenges.

This edition of the Insider recognizes the achievements, determination and compassion of students in the School of Health Professions. The students highlighted in these articles exemplify the Jayhawk spirit that make our students standout as uniquely trained individuals. I hope you will be as inspired by our students as I am. In this edition, we also introduce four new programs that are now available to our former, present and future students. Finally, the continued contributions of the entire School of Health Professions Leadership team to the success of the school are acknowledged and appreciated on the back page of this newsletter.

I could not be prouder to call the School of Health Professions home. I have no doubt that we will continue to adapt as needed to successfully overcome all our future challenges. I offer my best wishes to all our faculty, staff and students for successes throughout this new academic year.

Abiodun Akinwuntan, Ph.D., MPH, MBA
Dean, School of Health Professions
Professor, Department of Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation Science
Professor, Department of Neurology
Juliana Camargo, Ph.D., MPH, is a post-doctoral fellow in dietetics and nutrition in the University of Kansas School of Health Professions. Her research interests center on nutrition-related health disparities, with an emphasis on improving health and nutrition for Latino populations.

Camargo was born and raised in Brazil. She earned her bachelor’s and master’s degrees in Brazil and worked as a clinical dietitian for four years. In the clinic, she saw parents bringing in children who were overweight and already suffering with chronic diseases that are more common in adults, such as hypertension and type 2 diabetes.

“As I dietitian, I became more interested in exploring what in their diet was leading these children to develop those diseases,” Camargo said. “My first research study was with about 500 elementary school children. My research found that there was a link between the health and environmental factors, such as parents’ education level and the child’s quality of life, and gestational diabetes, and the health of their children.”

In 2015, Camargo applied and was accepted into the University of Kansas medical nutrition doctorate program, where she studied nutrition literacy with Heather Gibbs, Ph.D., RD, LD, associate professor in the KU Department of Dietetics and Nutrition.

“When I got to KU, I had the opportunity to see the health concerns the Latino community in Kansas City was facing through research conducted at JUNTOS Center for Advancing Latino Health,” Camargo said. “I immediately noticed similarities to the patients I saw back in Brazil, such as children and parents struggling with weight and chronic diseases.”

After earning her doctorate, Camargo’s primary research focused on diet patterns and gestational diabetes among pregnant Latinas, who are disproportionately affected by the condition. Camargo said she has found there are challenges in doing research around underserved populations.

“Many of the survey instruments used in research are not available in Spanish or need to be culturally adapted for Latino populations,” Camargo said. “For example, food and nutrition questionnaires may not include foods that are regularly consumed by a particular population, so that can make it difficult to accurately assess what they eat.”

Camargo also said a language barrier still exists for many researchers.

“We are fortunate that we have a few dietitians and health professionals who speak Spanish,” Camargo said. “But research is a team effort, and when you are working primarily with a non-English speaking population, much of the work can falter on the person who speaks Spanish.”

Amany Abusalim graduated in 2020 with a bachelor’s degree in health information management at the University of Kansas and is pursuing her master’s degree in health care management. She now works as a health information management associate with The University of Kansas Health System. We talked to Abusalim about her passion for her chosen field and her volunteer activities during the COVID-19 pandemic.

When did you first become interested in the field of health information management?

I had a lot of trouble deciding what I wanted to study in school. I wanted to be in the health care field, but I was struggling to figure out where my perfect fit was. I did my research and stumbled upon this program. I have an analytical mind and have always strived to be a good leader, so when I found out about this degree, I knew I could walk myself growing into this role. Most importantly, my work would be meaningful.

What do you currently do as a health information management specialist at The University of Kansas Health System?

My primary job is performing chart completion and document management processes.

Why did you decide to volunteer your time delivering groceries during the COVID-19 pandemic?

It’s very easy to feel helpless in times of difficulty, especially when that difficulty is happening on a worldwide scale. It’s easy to feel like you, as an individual, cannot possibly contribute. I saw someone post about volunteering to deliver groceries to people who are more at risk to leave their homes during the pandemic. It made me realize that even if it was something as small as delivering groceries, I can make a difference. If I could reduce one person’s risk, I was going to do it.

What challenges or fears did you have volunteering?

I feared that although my intention was to help reduce someone else’s risk, there was always the possibility that I could instead be putting them at risk if I wasn’t careful enough myself. What if I was bringing the virus to them without knowing it? The thought of that happening terrified me. Although this made me nervous, I knew that going myself instead was ultimately the better option. I did my best to stay as safe as possible during the entire process.

Do you have any advice for next year’s students who may still be overcoming obstacles with Covid-19?

Stay focused on your goals. It’s so easy to get lost in our new reality, but don’t let that discourage you. Change is hard. Some take it easier than others, so don’t feel alone in your struggles. You may have some setbacks, some adjustments to your journey, but isn’t that essentially the essence of life itself? We are constantly having to adapt, refocus and find a new game plan. This is no different. Do what you need to do to get back on track. Plan, fail, regroup and keep pushing forward.
Audiology student group is going strong

The Student Academy of Audiology at the University of Kansas Medical Center serves as a collective voice for students and advances the rights, interests and welfare of students pursuing careers in audiology. It introduces students to lifelong involvement in activities that promote and advance the profession of audiology and provides services, information, education, representation and advocacy for the profession and the public.

Alexandria Kaminsky, a third-year audiology, has been working to get more students involved in the Student Academy of Audiology.

“Everyone has been incredibly committed towards our goal of sponsoring activities in advocacy, education, philanthropy, chapter socials and fundraising,” Kaminsky said. “Because of the pandemic, all in-person spring events had to be reconfigured to an online format which takes extra planning and a lot of teamwork. We didn’t want to halt all events just because they couldn’t play out the way we originally planned them.”

Kaminsky said the academy held two virtual events in the spring. The first was a trivia night social that involved prizes and learning fun facts about audiology professors and the field of audiology.

“I think this gave all of us a chance to connect with each other again and socialize in a relaxed environment,” Kaminsky said.

The second event was a mindfulness and stress management session with Dr. Allison Roodman, a psychologist from the Department of Counseling and Educational Support Services. The event occurred a week prior to finals and gave students an opportunity to learn how to deal with feelings of stress before their virtual finals.

Kaminsky decided early on in her undergraduate studies at the University of Kansas that audiology was her calling.

“It didn’t take long after completing courses in hearing science to develop an interest for the complexity of the auditory system and the diagnostic process,” Kaminsky said. “When I was completing a practicum rotation and seeing firsthand how impactful our services are, I knew I made the right decision.”

As a new academic year begins under a pandemic, Kaminsky advised her fellow audiology students take advantage of the resources made available at KU Medical Center.

“I am so honored to receive this recognition from the KU Medical Center community,” Alnaim said. “I think it is so critical to create opportunities to address the diversity and inclusion both on a campus and community-wide levels. Diversity, to me, is not just something to be achieved, talked about or theorized; it is the source of life for me.”

Alnaim is a member of KU Medical Center Student Governing Council and Graduate Student Council and was the student representative for the Student Diversity Council and the Work Group for the campus Spiritual space in 2019. The group is dedicated to developing the mission and purpose and design of a spiritual space on campus.

Alnaim is also a trainee in Leadership Education in Neurodevelopmental and Related Disabilities programs at KU Medical Center. The program provides the opportunity to develop leadership and advocacy skills to enhance cultural competency and community inclusion for individuals with disabilities.

Alnaim, who moved to the United States from Saudi Arabia in 2013 to pursue her education, will join the Clinical Nutrition Department at King Saud bin Abdulaziz University for Health Sciences (KSAU-HS) as an assistant professor.

Lubna Alnaim wins Kellyann Jones-Jamtgaard Commitment to Diversity Award

Lubna Alnaim, a doctoral candidate in medical nutrition science at the University of Kansas, is the 2020 recipient of the Kellyann Jones-Jamtgaard Commitment to Diversity Award. The award is given annually by the KU Medical Center Office of Student Life to a student for demonstrated, exceptional passion for diversity and the capacity to demonstrate leadership skills in this area. Since the award’s inception in 2019, nine students have been awarded with assistance for international travel experiences.
Working and studying during a pandemic

Sean Witt is a student in the KU Clinical Laboratory Science program and has also been working at LabCorp, a health care diagnostics company. Witt was working as a lab assistant when he decided to become a clinical laboratory scientist. “In my job, I quickly became aware of the importance of reliable lab results and the impact they have on patient outcomes,” Witt said. “I wanted to be a member of the lab staff that was responsible for providing clinicians with valuable diagnostic information, ultimately providing patients with answers to their medical questions.” Witt said working in a clinical laboratory situation during the COVID-19 pandemic has been a challenging experience. “Lab scientists have the possibility to be exposed to pathogens on a daily basis, often concentrated from body fluids and tissues,” Witt said. “This pandemic however has added another layer of danger.” Witt said laboratory personnel are thoroughly trained on how to maintain safety when working with infectious materials. Unfortunately, there had been little training on how to predict who might have been infected with COVID-19 and who could be currently shedding virus particles. Laboratory work often requires close proximity of staff due to limited space.

“I can’t even guess how many times a day I pass within inches of a coworker to change reagents, confirm cell morphologies or just move materials. Unfortunately, there had been little training on how to predict who might have been infected with COVID-19 and who could be currently shedding virus particles. Laboratory work often requires close proximity of staff due to limited space.

“I can’t even guess how many times a day I pass within inches of a coworker to change reagents, confirm cell morphologies or just move around.” Witt said. “We all have an understanding that physical distancing is important, however sometimes it was impossible. Each day I went to work I assumed I was exposing myself to the virus and would eventually become sick.” But Witt said he has tried to stay positive during the pandemic. "Working and contributing to the world granted me the ability to stay positive during this difficult time in history," Witt said. “I did a rotation at the Stowers Institute for Medical Research, and I met an extremely dedicated researcher who dared me to provide solutions to this world problem rather than be consumed by fear and doubt.” Witt said continuing to work on his degree while the pandemic spread has also been a challenge. “I admit that the possibility of falling ill and no longer able to study lab science added another level of stress to my life.” Witt said. “I had come so far in my program and could not imagine being delayed in my studies.” Witt advises students coming into KU Medical Center to try to stay positive. “Now more than ever, it is imperative that medical professionals be fearless and relentless in their duties.” Witt said. “Stay protected so that you can treat more patients, stay focused so that you spend more hours studying, and stay dedicated to your craft so that one day you will master it and provide help to someone who needs it.”

Dietetics and Nutrition intern adapts to learning during a pandemic

Abbey Foglesong has always been passionate about nutrition and helping people to live healthy lifestyles. When she was an undergraduate student at the University of Nebraska, she shadowed a dietician in the university’s neonatal intensive care unit. It was then that she realized she wanted to be a clinical pediatric dietician. She just served an internship with the KU School of Health Professions’ Department of Dietetics and Nutrition. We talked to her about how her internship evolved with the advent of COVID-19.

How quickly and in what ways did your internship change?

I was in the first week of my management rotation at Gardner/Edgerton Public Schools when KU Medical Center suspended in-person classes for two weeks. Shortly thereafter, Gardner/Edgerton cancelled school for the rest of the school year. Within a short period of time, KU Medical Center cancelled classes for two weeks. Shortly thereafter, Gardner/Edgerton cancelled school for the rest of the school year. Within a short period of time, KU Medical Center cancelled classes for the rest of the school year. I went from going to in-person rotations with my preceptor one day to working entirely from home the next. The most devastating part of this ordeal for me has been that I had a summer rotation scheduled at Children’s Mercy that was cancelled due to the pandemic. I had been very excited for this rotation ever since I completed my clinicals at Children’s Mercy last December. But I am very thankful that my director, Dr. Jeanine Goetz, with the KU Department of Dietetics and Nutrition, has truly done whatever she can to help us to have a meaningful internship experience amidst all of the changes. I now feel that I am prepared for anything that comes my way in my future career.

How do you find the positive in every day? How do you encourage others?

I am generally a very positive person. I have made sure to keep that aspect of my personality in everything I do. Although it may sound like a cliché, I am generally a very positive person. I have made sure to keep that aspect of my personality in everything I do. Although it may sound like a cliché, I am encouraged by the promise of each new day. I have learned how to make the best of many kinds of situations and have tried to focus on the little things, all the little victories. I am continually reminded how blessed I am to have this opportunity to complete this internship at one of the best medical centers in the country. I have never lost sight of the ultimate goal, which is to become a registered dietician nutritionist, more specifically in pediatrics. Although this has been a very trying time, each day has brought me one step closer to achieving my dream. I have been so inspired by how much people are pulling together in this pandemic. We will all get through this together.

Do you have any advice for incoming students?

Try to look at each day as one step closer to achieving the goals you set for yourself when you applied for this program. Look at this experience as an opportunity to develop skills in flexibility and emergency preparedness. Any of the opportunities you get throughout this program will give you vital experience for your future career, whether they are remote or in person. Put the same amount of effort into your remote rotations that you would to those that are in person. And don’t hesitate to reach out for help or encouragement when you need it. I’m sure like me, they will be incredibly thankful for their internship experience, and feel blessed to be a part of the University of Kansas Medical Center.
Lydia Gibson earned her doctorate of physical therapy from KU in Spring 2020. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit in early spring, she and her fellow students and physical therapists had to adjust.

“In March and April of 2020, I was completing my final clinical rotation at a hospital-owned physical therapy clinic,” Gibson said. “Every day the clinic enacted new policies and procedures to help protect our patients. Every morning when I went into work, I anticipated a new email containing details on how many new confirmed COVID-19 cases were in our area and what new procedures we would adopt that day in response.”

Gibson said it was particularly challenging because she was just a student at that point.

“As a student I was not part of decision-making process. But I didn’t want to miss the opportunity to make an impact,” Gibson said. “I found that my opportunity was in being present. For most of my patients, I was the only person they interacted with outside of their home. In a time of isolation and fear, I was there to listen, to check-in and to give hope.”

Gibson said when her clinical rotation ended, she was able to volunteer with JaySTART, a free occupational and physical therapy clinic serving the Kansas City community. KU students-in-training, under the direct supervision of licensed physical therapists and occupational therapists, provide rehabilitation services to underserved patients.

“My role was to mentor second-year physical therapy doctoral students who led the virtual — rather than traditional in-person — therapy sessions,” Gibson said. “I was there to help the students reflect and learn from the experience, but I learned so much from watching their creativity and resilience. I was encouraged to see how the JaySTART leadership and the student volunteers are coming together to find solutions and to ensure that our patients are reached.”

Gibson said the JaySTART students did an amazing job. She said knows KU’s new physical therapy students will take the new ways of learning and providing care in stride.

“COVID-19 has taken away a lot of in-person class and clinic experiences. It is okay to be frustrated and disappointed,” Gibson said. “I would advise them that when they are with patients to take time to really listen and to ask them how they are doing with this challenging time. Embrace the opportunity to be part of exploring telehealth and other virtual solutions. Use the momentum from this pandemic to lobby for policy and reimbursement to support our ability to provide excellent patient care.”

School of Health Professions occupational therapist helps produce video for families dealing with COVID-19

Krista Eckels, OTR/L and current Therapeutic Science Ph.D. student, led a University of Kansas Medical Center and The University of Kansas Health System team that developed and produced a video aimed at supporting families at home caring for their loved ones with COVID-19.

Eckels is an assessment and outcomes data specialist for the Zameriowski Institute of Experimental Learning (ZIEL), which is a partnership between the health system and medical center to provide advanced health care education for students and health care professionals.

Eckels said the video was a collaborative, multidisciplinary project. “The content team included a ZIEL nurse educator, infectious disease and family medicine physicians and nurses and me,” Eckels said. “A patient education committee helped ensure the script for the video was consistent with best health literacy practices, and an MPH graduate student provided voiceover and script translation in order to extend outreach to Spanish-speaking community members.”

The video, which is available in English and Spanish, provides important advice about how to take care of COVID-19 patients at home while remaining safe. It includes tips on how to disinfect a home while a COVID patient is living there; food preparation; and when it is necessary to call a doctor or take the patient to a hospital.

The video was released in the spring of 2020, and Eckels said the reaction was very positive. “The Kansas Department of Health and Environment shared the video on its website, which got a lot of attention,” Eckels said. “Another national company that provides preventative care and medication management sent the video to all of their pharmacists to share with patients. And the Juntos Center for Advancing Latino Health also helped disseminate the Spanish version of the video.”

Eckels said it was rewarding to work on a project that is helping people deal with the pandemic.

"With my background in occupational therapy and a portion of my typical work responsibilities paused due to COVID-19, it was a great fit for me to be a part of this project." The video is available on YouTube at youtu.be/yeFDeDmN0k (English) and youtu.be/eq_QHuc65iw (Spanish).
Nurse anesthesia student collects PPE for healthcare workers

Valerie Terrado, a student in the KU nurse anesthesia program, was taking classes and going through clinical rotations when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. Terrado wanted to do something to assist health care workers on the front lines of the pandemic, so she decided to try to collect much-needed personal protective equipment (PPE).

“I was hoping to head to my home state of New York to volunteer in a hospital because that was where the epicenter of the pandemic was, but unfortunately I wasn’t able to because of my school obligations,” Terrado said. “When a friend from Kansas City asked if I knew of any hospitals that needed supplies, I got in touch with people I knew who were working at Mount Sinai Hospital in Manhattan and New York Brooklyn Methodist.”

Terrado worked her friend to contact companies in the catering and wedding industries to see if they had any PPE to donate to hospitals in New York. She collected the donations and sent them to the hospitals.

“I was heartbroken for all the families affected by COVID and felt helpless that I wasn’t able to serve in a hospital,” Terrado said. “But I was happy that I could contribute something.”

Clinical Laboratory Sciences student takes leadership role during the pandemic

Carlee Roberts was a third-year student in the Department of Clinical Laboratory Sciences who was completing lecture and laboratory courses when the pandemic forced the transition to online course delivery. She decided to step forward to become a class leader since the stay-home order began.

Roberts had taken on-line classes before, and she used that experience to help the other students adapt to online learning.

“Personally, I’ve kind of fallen into a leadership role through virtue of being meticulous about time management and being unafraid of talking to faculty,” she said.

Roberts created and shared weekly checklists that kept her classmates organized to meet assignment and exam schedules. She also organized group chats and review sessions among her classmates.

“It’s easy to get overwhelmed by everything that’s going on but being able to check in with everyone and see that we’re all struggling with the same things,” Roberts said. “It helps to lighten the bleakness of isolation.”

Another way she helped make online learning fun is to organize themed days. Beach Day and Scientist Day were two of the special days where students dressed up when they joined Zoom sessions. To help maintain her classmates’ spirit, Carlee also organized non-school related activities, such as virtual game nights and trivia games.

Respiratory therapist student juggles a career and studying during the pandemic

Xaviera Dewberry is a respiratory care student at the KU School of Health Professions. She is working toward earning her degree as part of the school’s Bachelor’s Degree Advancement Program which is an online degree program for working students.

Dewberry said the degree program was perfect for her because she is the U.S. Army.

“I knew I wanted to join this health care field at some capacity,” Dewberry said. “With the army’s help, I was able to train and serve while I go to school.”

Dewberry is currently stationed at Fort Benning in Georgia. When the pandemic hit New York, she traveled with her unit to Manhattan to help convert the Javits Convention Center into a triage hospital.

“Once we established a place for hospital overflow patients to receive help, I worked in the ICU with intubations and in-patient transport,” Dewberry said. “The majority of patients we were seeing were elderly. This was my first experience with the virus.”

Once New York began to get COVID under control, her unit returned to Fort Benning where there was an outbreak of the virus. Dewberry said it started when one training unit member caught Covid-19, and the entire unit tested positive. She said there have been over 1,000 COVID cases on the base.

“We isolate soldiers in their barracks and meet them outside daily with medics for care,” Dewberry said. “We work to keep them comfortable and provide any medications to aid in symptoms until a vaccination becomes available. It has been a very hectic experience, but the lessons learned have been immeasurable.”

One thing Dewberry said has been reinforced during her pandemic experiences is the importance of wearing a mask.

“Absolutely wear the mask because it will protect yourself and others,” Dewberry said. “Wash your hands for at least 20 seconds. Please continue to social distance. And, if you are able, donate masks. This will help us all in controlling the virus.”

Dewberry also encourages students this fall to continue to follow their dreams.

“Definitely pursue what you want to do and don’t let this pandemic to deter you from your goals and aspirations,” she said. “Whether it’s a health career or something else, it’s important to gain all the knowledge you can about what’s going on.”
Occupational therapy students develop program to connect with clients during COVID

Kayla Hamner and Stephanie Munson are students who are working towards their master’s degrees in occupational therapy. Like many School of Health Professions students, they found many of their educational activities upended when the COVID-19 pandemic hit the United States.

One of the programs that was affected by the pandemic was the Department of Occupational Therapy’s Sensory Enhanced Aquatics. The program teaches swimming and water safety to children with autism spectrum disorders. Hamner and Munson wanted to find a way to still reach the swimmers in the program and their families during this time of lockdowns and quarantines.

Working under the mentorship of Lisa Mische Lawson, Ph.D., CTRS, they launched I Can Do It, You Can Do It, a virtual health promotion program for children and adults with disabilities. Using a model from the President’s Council on Sports, Fitness & Nutrition the two students are mentoring participants to set physical activity and nutrition goals and meet weekly to virtually engage in physical activity and support progress toward goals. Participants who meet their goals will earn a Presidential Active Lifestyle Award (PALA+).

“We wanted to find a way to still work with our swimmers and their families during the pandemic, Hamner said. “We also reached out to other occupational therapy department-supported adapted sports programs to include their clients as well.”

For the spring session of the I Can Do It, You Can Do It program, five children from Sensory Enhanced Aquatics and one person from Project Access participated. Six KU occupational therapy students served as mentors. The summer session included 11 participants from Sensory Enhanced Aquatics and 11 occupational therapy students as mentors.

Munson said it wasn’t too difficult to adapt to the new program, although it involved being flexible and creative.

“It was easy to use Zoom to connect with participants and their families. Zoom also made it easy for us to have weekly reflections with the mentors to problem solve through the challenges that come with virtual delivery,” Munson said. “Most of the difficulties about the program came from learning how to keep participants engaged during virtual sessions while still acknowledging their burn out from completing school virtually as well.”

Hamner said the participants’ families also seem to be very appreciative of the efforts to try to keep their kids involved and active.

“They enjoyed the creative ideas to incorporate movement and physical activity into their routines while at home,” Hamner said. “Our families also enjoyed the social aspect of meeting once a week on Zoom and the ability to stay connected with our occupational therapy students.”

Munson said although it took a lot of hard work and creative thinking to come up with a way to keep their Sensory Enhanced Aquatics swimmers involved, it was definitely worth it.

“Sensory Enhanced Aquatics is a program and a community that we love and are very passionate about,” Munson said. “Being able to still connect with our swimmers and families during this pandemic has helped not only our mental health, but also been a constant reminder of why we are in school and what our end goals are.”

This fall the program transitioned to become part of a new service learning site at Turner High School in Kansas City, Kansas, for first-year occupational therapy students. It has also been adapted for group use at the MS Achievement Center at KU Medical Center and American Stroke Foundation.

In 2017, 117 students received awards, averaging $2,460.00 for a total of $288,600.00

In 2018, 117 students received awards, averaging $2,539.00 for a total of $273,700.00

In 2019, 110 students received awards, averaging $4,400.00 for a total of $286,400.00

In 2020, 119 students received awards, averaging $2,285.00 for a total of $272,200.00

Diversity and International Experience Award

Students apply at any time for this awards that aims to promote student diversity and global cultural experiences. This includes scholarships for first-generation students from minority groups and financial support for students offered an international academic trip but without sufficient means to afford the out-of-pocket expenses.

Dean’s Scholarship

This scholarship is given to meritoriously award full-time students within the school of health professions who demonstrate excellence in scholastic accomplishment, professional leadership and commitment to community service as evidenced by achievements while in their program of study.
Class of 2020 Student Profile
Nicholas Marchello, Ph.D.

Nicholas Marchello earned his undergraduate, graduate and doctorate in dietetics and nutrition at the University of Kansas. He also served as an inspirational student leader at the University of Kansas Medical Center. He reflects back on his six years at KU.

What has your experience been like as you earned your degrees at KU?
It’s hard to believe I’ve been here since 2014! I’ve been blessed with so many research and teaching opportunities at all levels of education here, and I know the experience I’ve gained here will translate into a great career. Like the Department of Dietetics and Nutrition, all of our programs in the School of Health Professions demonstrate a level of commitment to ensure their students not only receive a top-notch experience, but their experiences here will directly translate into the current work environment.

What has changed on the KU Medical Center campus since your arrival six years ago?
The Health Education Building, which opened in 2017, was definitely a game changer. To see the university devote so many resources to new education models and a fully-functioning simulation lab helped put KU Medical Center and the School of Health Professions miles beyond other programs in the region.

You have also been a leader on campus both within your department and the School of Health Professions. Where do you find your passion for leadership in the academic environment?
I have always valued the chance to help other students, regardless of their department. My time at KU Medical Center has shown me the value of working as a team, and anything I can do to help a teammate is a positive in my book.

You served on School of Health Professions Student Senate and as acting student chairperson for the senate. How would you like to see student senate continue to evolve?
In a perfect world, I would love to see not only more participation from all three schools and have the senate play a deeper role in student life on-campus and off. There is a great deal of untapped potential in the senate to better integrate all School of Health Professions students into a cohesive unit. We talk a lot about interprofessional collaboration when it comes to education. I would like to see that with the senate.

Any highlights during your time with the Student Senate?
Probably the biggest high point was the initiation of the School of Health Professions Welcome Stack event held in the fall the last two years. It’s a concrete example of the Dean Akinwuntan’s devotion to breaking down barriers between departments and helping students from every department meet each other and learn more about their peers.

What advice would you give to incoming students?
I would say KU Medical Center is the perfect environment to explore your chosen health care career. In addition to providing an outstanding education, the School of Health Professions fosters a strong academic environment that allows students to pursue research and academic pursuits.

Now that you have graduated, where are you going from here?
When I started in dietetics and nutrition, my goal was to graduate and get a clinical job. But after my great experience at KU, I decided I wanted to pursue a career in academic health care. I recently accepted an assistant professor position at Northwest Missouri State in Maryville, Missouri.

Class of 2020 Student Profile
Melike Kahya, DPT

Melike Kahya earned her Doctor of Philosophy in Rehabilitation Science from the University of Kansas in the summer of 2020. We spoke to Melike about her educational and leadership experiences at KU and her plans for the future.

You came to the KU School of Health Professions as an international student. What was that like?
Although I was born in the United States, I raised in Turkey, so I define myself as Turkish-American. I think being Turkish-American gave me a good perspective of understanding of cultural differences and ethnic stereotypes. Being raised bilingually in two countries with such a distinct cultural identity gave me tremendous life experience that I am being thankful for to date. In Turkish culture, it is always appreciated to display humble behaviors. It also valued to respect people who are more knowledgeable than you and to learn from their experiences. My culture influenced me to become more introverted and calmer personal. These behaviors sometimes contradict the U.S. academic system which encourages to speak up for yourself and share success stories. However, I experienced that these personalities lead me to better concentrate on my scientific thinking and to well prepare me when it is time to present my research.

How has the University of Kansas Medical Center’s commitment to interprofessional education influenced you?
While pursuing my Ph.D. at the medical center, I had a chance to work with people from many different professions. As a rehabilitation researcher, I can’t emphasize enough the importance of a multidisciplinary approach to improve patient-centered outcomes and to develop appropriate interventions. For my dissertation project, I worked with physical therapy health care professionals, but also with physicians and psychologists. And as a member of the American Congress of Rehabilitation Medicine organization, I worked with interprofessional teams under different task forces that all united with the common interests in rehabilitation and evidence-based research to improve quality of life for those with disabling conditions.

During your time at KU, you took on a number of leadership roles and won several prestigious awards.
It has been humbling to have my work and leadership recognized. One of the awards I am most proud of was being selected for the T32 NIH Kansas University Neurological and Rehabilitation Sciences Training Program. This award not only helped me to fund my study and Ph.D. expenses but also provided an opportunity to promote my research by attending numerous scientific conferences and applying to other grants. I am also thankful for all the awards given by the Department of Physical Therapy and Rehabilitation to support my research and leadership activities. All these awards supported my academic growth and allowed me to present my research to larger audiences.

What advice would you give to incoming students who have an open mind about where their education might take them?
The KU School of Health Professions is a great place to study with excellent resources and a supportive learning environment. I would advise incoming students to try to volunteer when they see an opportunity for academic or personal growth. They should get out of their comfort zone every once in a while!

What are you doing now that you have graduated?
I’m now a post-doctoral fellow at the Harvard Medical School-affiliated Marcus Institute for Aging Research. After my post-doctoral training, I want to remain in academic health care.
The KU School of Health Professions developed four new academic programs. They include a master of science in genetic counseling, a master of science in athletic training, a doctorate in clinical laboratory sciences and a doctorate in clinical nutrition. With all the new growth, it’s no wonder that the school of Health Professions has seen enrollment increase over the last seven years. The efforts of our faculty who worked hard to bring these programs to life and the contributions of our school stakeholders who continue to give their steadfast support to the development of new programs are highly appreciated.

DOCTORATE OF CLINICAL LABORATORY SCIENCE

Elsinghorst said an important function of a DCLS professional in a health care team is to provide consultation to physicians and other health care providers—as well as patients and families—on the appropriate laboratory test selection and its interpretation.

“With 70 percent of medical decisions being made based on laboratory values, having a DCLS available as a member of the health care team will have a major impact on patient outcomes and satisfaction—and can decrease costs to the health care system,” Elsinghorst said.

DOCTORATE OF CLINICAL NUTRITION

Sullivan said word about the program is already getting out there.

“Since we haven’t done any advertising for the degree program,” Sullivan said. “But students from all over the country and the world have reached out to us for more information. Unfortunately we aren’t able to accept international students at this time.”

The first group of students for this online-only program are admitted for the fall 2020 academic year.

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN GENETIC COUNSELING

Elsinghorst said there has been a growing demand for the genetic counseling program at KU.

“With the rapid expansion of genetic testing as part of medical diagnostics, there is a huge shortage of genetic counselors across Kansas, the Midwest, and the U.S. in general,” Elsinghorst said. “Genetic counselors work with patients to interpret genetic tests and provide guidance and support while patients make decisions about their genetic health. Ours will be the only program in Kansas and in the Kansas City metropolitan area.”

MASTER OF SCIENCE IN ATHLETIC TRAINING

While athletic training is new program for KU Medical Center, athletic training education across the University of Kansas is not. Historically, athletic training education has provided opportunities via an apprenticeship program, a Commission on Accreditation of Athletic Training Education (CAATE)-accredited undergraduate program on the KU Lawrence campus, and now a master’s degree program seeking accreditation CAATE on the medical center campus.

The new program will admit the first class for a summer 2021 start. Taylor said the program is already generating interest.

“With the rapid expansion of genetic testing as part of medical diagnostics, there is a huge shortage of genetic counselors across Kansas, the Midwest, and the U.S. in general,” Elsinghorst said. “Genetic counselors work with patients to interpret genetic tests and provide guidance and support while patients make decisions about their genetic health. Ours will be the only program in Kansas and in the Kansas City metropolitan area.”
Faculty and Leadership PROMOTIONS

FACULTY PROMOTIONS

Five faculty in the School of Health Professions were approved for promotion by University of Kansas Chancellor Doug Girod effective July 1. Previously tenured faculty Sandra Billinger, Ph.D., PT, and Lisa Mische Lawson, Ph.D., CTRS, received promotion to full professor. Hannes Devos, Ph.D., DRS, and Heather Gibbs, Ph.D., RD, were promoted to the rank of associate professor with tenure. Jason Rucker, Ph.D., PT, was promoted to clinical associate professor (clinical/nontenure track).

Dave Burnett, Ph.D., RRT, AE-C, has been appointed associate dean for faculty practice and community partnership for the School of Health Professions. He had been serving as interim associate dean since 2019.

Dory Sabata, OTD, OTR/L, FAOTA has been appointed as the Chair of the Department of Occupational Therapy Education; effective September 01, 2020. Dr. Sabata served well in the capacity of Interim Chair of the Department of Occupational Therapy Education since May 2019.

To Associate Deans Susan Carlson, Jeff Radel and Dave Burnett as well as department chairs Eric Elsinghorst, Tiffany Johnson, Patricia Kluding, Rosann McLean, Donna Nyght, Dory Sabata and Debra Sullivan:

Your steadfast guidance and leadership during this time have been more than remarkable. Our ability to come together and quickly adjust to the constantly changing circumstances has been one of our strengths. We have had our work cut out for us but have continued to put the well-being of faculty, staff and students at the forefront of our minds. The School of Health Professions has continued to function at the highest levels throughout these challenging times.

Last Spring, we successfully graduated 304 students remotely. We depopulated and repopulated research lab spaces. We recruited exceptional faculty and students for the new academic year. I have no doubt we will continue to accomplish more together.

I look forward to a day when we can gather in person to celebrate our achievements. Until then, please accept my sincere gratitude for all the time, effort and hard work that you continue to give our school every day.

Sincerely,

Abiodun
The Student Issue:
KU School of Health Professions students adapt to learning and working during the COVID-19 pandemic

Dietetics and Nutrition post-doc Juliana Camargo works to improve nutrition for Latino populations

Lubna Alnaim wins the Kellyann Jones-Jamtgaard Commitment to Diversity Award

Plus:
A look at the growth of the KU School of Health Professions scholarship program