9-1-2016

Fall 2016

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Grammy award-winning singer Lila Downs accepts an honorary degree at SNL's commencement ceremony on June 11.
The School for New Learning (SNL) has consistently teamed with domestic and international partners to offer distinctive undergraduate and graduate degree programs. We have worked with corporations and organizations as varied as Allstate Insurance Co., UPS and True Value Co. in the United States, as well as the International Bank of Asia in Hong Kong, Assumption University of Thailand and, most recently, Tangaza University College in Kenya.

This past December, the eighth and final undergraduate cohort graduated from the Tangaza program. From the start of our partnership, the goal was to help the university develop its own competence-based degree program for adult students. To help expedite the formation of a local program, SNL hosted professional development workshops for Tangaza faculty on adult education, competence-based education, writing and prior learning assessment. I am proud of the work we accomplished with our colleagues, of the nearly 140 alumni of this program and of the continuing work they are doing.

As we conclude our program at Tangaza, SNL continues to develop new local relationships. We work closely with our current partner institutions to offer the best combination of value and affordability through program customizations, discounts through DePaul and employee tuition reimbursement offered by the company. Students in the undergraduate cohort at Rosalind Franklin University of Medicine and Science have nearly completed their degrees. This fall, as part of our partnership with the Fraternal Order of Police, SNL will launch a cohort of 30 police officers and will offer classes at DePaul and at the Chicago Police Education and Training Academy. We have also built a strong partnership with Fifth Third Bank, where 20 employees began their undergraduate program in May. As a result, SNL is helping the organization meet its learning goals and helping students gain the skills, knowledge and abilities needed to advance their careers. We were invited to begin a second cohort, which we expect to start in 2017. If you are part of an organization that might benefit from such a partnership, I invite you to contact me at malicea@depaul.edu to discuss possibilities.

In addition, we have been working on updating our competence-based undergraduate degree program. We have revised our curriculum over the years to ensure it remains current and rigorous, but we also want to take advantage of the opportunity to respond to the changing U.S. Department of Education regulations governing such programs. We anticipate launching our updated program next year. I look forward to sharing more about this revision in our next issue.
Banking on a strong relationship

SNL launches new cohort with Fifth Third Bank

For years, David Hinman, a seasoned banking veteran who currently serves as commercial banking director for Chicago and Northwest Indiana at Fifth Third Bank, has admired the perseverance of SNL students. When the opportunity presented itself to formally partner with the school to launch a cohort for Fifth Third employees seeking bachelor’s degrees, Hinman jumped at the chance.

What about SNL students resonates with you?

SNL students approach the workplace differently. They realize they are responsible for their own career and that they are not entitled to anything. They realize the need to invest in themselves, and they have the maturity, personal organization and self-discipline to do so. They need to demonstrate ability. They need to earn their advancement, and they are completely committed to doing that. SNL has the profile of students I’d like to come work at Fifth Third.

How do you feel a customized liberal arts degree benefits the bank?

In liberal arts programs, you’re trained to approach situations with a different point of view and to value different points of views. If you’re going to work in financial services in the city, you end up working with populations from all over the world with very different priorities. A liberal arts education trains people to suppress their personal opinions and sincerely listen to the customer. That helps our employees learn what the customer is trying to accomplish, what is and isn’t important to them, and then to work with the customer on things that matter to them, as opposed to the things that matter to us. In other programs, the learning is too narrow. There’s always a drive toward a specific answer. That’s not true in the liberal arts.

What impact will the cohort have on Fifth Third Bank?

We have several SNL graduates in the company who serve as role models for others. I think that’s important. The cohort takes our partnership with DePaul to another level. These programs are good for DePaul, they are good for us, and they are good for the students. I compliment Marisa on putting together a program that really is the best for everyone involved. There are 20 students in the first cohort, and they will serve as pioneers to show that this really works. The program will only get bigger in the years to come as people see how valuable it is.

“The program will only get bigger in the years to come as people see how valuable it is.”
SNL’s part-time faculty boasts an impressive number of specialties, honed by years of painstaking practice. Recently, several members of the SNL community were recognized for their efforts in the field, including a gubernatorial appointment on a library board and an award from the Illinois Park and Recreation Association. SNL’s part-time faculty bring these experiences with them, thereby enriching the classroom experience.

Preserving Abraham Lincoln's legacy

Over his 35-year career at SNL, R. Craig Sautter has taught scores of philosophy, politics, history, literature and creative writing courses, but it was a class he taught in the early 1980s that ultimately led to his current appointment on the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Advisory Board. Sautter remembered hearing of a reformer named Pat Quinn, so he invited him to speak to a class. “I predict you'll be governor of Illinois,” he told Quinn. More than 20 years later, Sautter was proven right.

In honor of Sautter’s support over the years, then-Gov. Quinn appointed him to the library’s advisory board. He was confirmed by the state senate in 2012 to serve a five-year term, ending in 2017. This appointment is not merely ceremonial to Sautter, who has written 10 books covering various topics, including Lincoln. “I've been able to see the original Emancipation Proclamation and the original notes for the Gettysburg Address,” he says. “It's pretty amazing.” Former Executive Vice President of Academic Affairs Richard Meister also served on the board, which met to discuss a variety of topics, including strategic plans and the transfer of materials. “The museum has more than 52,000 items associated with Lincoln, so outside of the Library of Congress, it has the largest collection,” he explains. With his term wrapping up, Sautter looks forward to what’s next. “Books, politics, reading—I’m a happy person,” he says. "The good, the true and the beautiful are the ideals in which I try to engage myself."

Sharing Chicago’s impressive history

Joseph Cunniff knows Chicago like the back of his hand. Cunniff’s father was a Chicago-based businessman, and when his customers would visit the city, Cunniff would tag along while his father shared all the city had to offer. “I’ve always been interested in learning more about Chicago,” he says. “If I stand in front of a building or if I go to a Chicago Symphony Orchestra concert, I want to know all about it. I like sharing that knowledge with other people.” That’s just what Cunniff has been doing for the last 32 years at DePaul and for the last 10 years with Road Scholar, a nonprofit geared toward providing educational travel opportunities for older adults.

Road Scholar recently asked Cunniff to take on more responsibilities, in recognition of his contributions during the last decade. “I try to get people to recognize the excitement of getting involved with the fine arts, of using their mind and spirit to connect with the fine arts. I try to bring out the artist in each person,” he says. He often gets stopped on the street by former students or tour members who were moved by his instruction. “People like to see Chicago’s different neighborhoods and are amazed by Chicago architecture,” he explains. “We have an exciting history as a city that burned down and came back. The fine arts, music, painting and architecture—they are all related in wonderful, mysterious ways.”

Inspiring wellness in Illinois

Unsure of what she wanted to do, LoriKay Paden enrolled in the class Introduction to Leisure and Society at Illinois State University, never expecting she would go on to earn bachelor’s and master’s degrees in health, physical education and recreation. “I’ve always had a passion for fitness and wellness, and just seeing that what we do on a daily basis can impact someone’s wellness was so meaningful to me,” she says. “Over the years, I’ve adopted this tagline: I want to be a life-changer and a memory-maker no matter what I’m doing.” Paden served 13 years as a recreation and wellness practitioner before transitioning to higher education at the University of Illinois in 2006, where she has served as an educator and academic advisor for 12 years.

In recognition of her 25 years of service and her efforts to develop a silent auction that helped raise funds for student and professional development, the Illinois Park and Recreation Association awarded Paden the 2015 Chairman Award. “I’ve got this unique role where I’m still a practitioner, but I’m also an educator,” she explains. “I can bridge that gap and really build strength among practitioners and educators to help provide the best for our students statewide.” For the past two years, Paden has been lending her expertise in the classroom for SNL. “After this class, so many students tell me that their eyes are open. They say, ‘I never knew how valuable taking time for myself could be or how valuable leisure and recreation can be. This has changed my life.’ I love hearing that!”
Providing bilingual resources

When Maria Ugarte-Ramos (SNL ‘91) and her sisters could not find reasonably priced bilingual care for their mother, she decided to do something about it. “My thought was that we cannot possibly be the only family in the country experiencing this challenge,” she says. Ugarte-Ramos embarked on a mission to conduct a three-phase study during which she researched online bilingual resources, held focus groups to determine the needs of caregivers and conducted a national survey to understand family challenges. The study revealed enormous anxiety, stress and diminishing health among those caring for ill family members. “My findings motivated me to help the caregivers lead healthier lives.”

To meet these needs, Ugarte-Ramos created the FAMA Bilingual Center for Family Caregivers Inc., a nonprofit, online service that provides bilingual resources for caregivers. “Our mission is to improve and maintain the mental, emotional, spiritual and physical health of family caregivers,” she explains. In recognition of her efforts, Ugarte-Ramos received the 2015 Distinguished Woman Award for Community Leadership from La Raza, a Spanish-language newspaper. “It’s wonderful that I’ve been able to raise awareness and offer helpful information to families at such a critical time.”

SNL influences national liberal education guidelines

Ask the general population about college, and many think of vast lecture halls, endless papers and solitary studying. Rarely do they mention the development of practical skills and competencies, but that’s what SNL is hoping to change in a partnership with the Association of American Colleges & Universities (AAC&U), a national organization with 1,350 institutional members that focuses on the importance of undergraduate liberal education. SNL is part of an ongoing AAC&U national project called Liberal Education and America’s Promise (LEAP). Carol Schneider, who became AAC&U president emerita in June of this year, met with SNL faculty and staff in April to discuss the ways in which the school can work with AAC&U to accomplish this mission.

“It’s not enough for students to have book learning,” Schneider stresses. “We want to know what students can do with complex situations where we don’t yet know the answer. We want to prepare our students to be solution creators, not just right-answer finders.” A recent AAC&U survey reported that 73 percent of employers thought an applied learning project would improve a college graduate’s preparation for the workforce. “Employers don’t use the language of liberal education, but they urgently charge us to do a better job of producing students who have those cross-cutting capacities that are usually identified with liberal education: critical thinking, problem-solving, communication skills and the ability to work successfully with others,” she explains.

In response, AAC&U commissioned case studies of 13 institutions, including SNL, that require students to complete culminating projects. “We’re showcasing exciting reforms in higher education, and we invited SNL to be part of this portrait of where higher education can and should go,” she adds. The LEAP framework was developed with input from these institutions and employers in mind. “AAC&U is not just promoting college for careers, but also as a way of building capacity for a diverse democracy. We still have a lot of work to do to become a genuine, just and inclusive community.”

“We want to prepare our students to be solution creators, not just right-answer finders.”

Published by Via Sapientiae, 2016
COMMENCEMENT

SPEAKERS STRIVE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

EDUCATION IN AFRICA

Sister Loretta Brennan, C.S.B. (DHL ’16), and Josephine Kulea (DHL ’16), founder of the Samburu Girls Foundation, were honored at the final School for New Learning (SNL) commencement ceremony at Tangaza University College, where they received honorary doctorates. Sister Loretta has a long history of education advocacy. When she arrived at Tangaza College in 2002, she began advocating for the school to enhance education opportunities for students and faculty. Kulea, a nurse by training, started the Samburu Girls Foundation in 2012 to rescue young girls from arranged marriage, female genital mutilation and “beading,” a practice that allows tribe leaders to present young girls with beaded necklaces to claim them for sex. Kulea advocates for these girls and steers them toward independence and education.

At the December 2015 ceremony, 27 students graduated with bachelor’s degrees with a concentration in leadership and management, which brought the total to more than 140 since the program’s inception. Although the partnership has ended, SNL will still have a presence at the college through the new alumni-led leadership guild and a senior leadership development program, funded by the Conrad N. Hilton Foundation. Dean Marisa Alicea also assures that the bond between the schools will remain strong, and SNL will provide mentorship as needed.

“The mission of this collaboration was to educate Catholic religious congregations to contribute to the revitalization of Africa,” Alicea says. “Our graduates have done just that. They have had a significant impact, including their work with some of the poorest and most vulnerable communities throughout Africa.”
A HARMONIOUS CONCLUSION

The SNL Chicago commencement ceremony was filled with music when Grammy Award-winning artist Lila Downs (DHL ’16) served as commencement speaker and was awarded a doctorate of humane letters. Touted for her ability to address personal and social issues through her music, Downs offers a unique perspective, having grown up in both Mexico and Minnesota.

“Through her music, she shares the contributions and difficulties of Mexicans in the United States,” said Dean Marisa Alicea in her introduction of the speaker. “Her voice transcends frontiers. Her songs sing of love, pain and migration, and they remind us that we are citizens of the world, and we should be proud of our roots. (Downs) serves as a reminder that we are global citizens with the capacity to make a positive impact through our daily actions.”

Downs serenaded the audience with a medley of “Pastures of Plenty” and “This Land Is Your Land” and urged the captivated audience to use their education to help others, as well as themselves. “You are now stronger and smarter and ready to take the next steps in each of your journeys,” she said. “This also involves a sense of responsibility. Education gives you a vision through which you may share in your knowledge and apply it to help your community. You can make a real difference in other people’s lives and in your own.”

“Through her music, she shares the contributions and difficulties of Mexicans in the United States.”
FOOD FOR THE SOUL

Restorative justice inspires alumna’s nonprofit

Susan Trieschmann (SNL ‘07) intended to sign up for a business course but realized too late that what she actually signed up for was a course on restorative justice. It would turn out to be one of the best mistakes she ever made. Initially, she was disillusioned by the class, grumbling through her weekly journal assignments. It wasn’t until the final class that it finally clicked for Trieschmann. “They sent me to the correctional facilities where we jail our children, and it was life-changing,” she says. “When we incarcerate children, there’s so much damage that’s being done to them. Generally, they are being incarcerated because there has been damage done to them in their community, and then we re-victimize them by putting them in prison and release them without any services.”

Following that class, Trieschmann, along with two friends, founded a small nonprofit called Restorative Justice Evanston, a volunteer advocacy group that promotes nonviolent solutions to injuries, building strength, unity and respect in the community. Soon, peaceful interventions weren’t enough for Trieschmann. “I kept hearing how the kids wanted jobs so they could stay out of the justice system, but there wasn’t anything available,” she says. “I decided to come up with a way to help them.”

In May 2012, Trieschmann opened Curt’s Café, a nonprofit restaurant named both as an acronym for “Creating Unique Restaurant Training” and in honor of Curt Sharp, her late brother-in-law, friend and partner in their catering business, Food for Thought. Curt’s Café and the new Curt’s South, both in Evanston, provide training in work and life skills for teen mothers and young adults who have been through the juvenile justice system. Fifty percent of the support for the café comes from fundraising, and the other 50 percent comes from café sales, a unique business model for such an enterprise. Also unlike other organizations, Trieschmann takes only the hardest cases. “My heart doesn’t allow me to think that any child or person is hopeless,” she explains. “We humanize these young kids in our neighborhoods to show the community they are not bad kids. They are not everything they are labeled to be.”

More than 150 young adults have passed through Curt’s Café and Curt’s South on their way to achieving careers in the food services industry. During the three-month training cycle, participants serve in every role found in a small restaurant or café, from dishwasher to cashier. In addition, they work with an on-staff or volunteer social worker on anything from newsletter writing to filing out housing paperwork. “At the end of the three-month training, we take them for job interviews and sit in the car like nervous parents,” she says. “It’s very much like a regular teenager, but these are 18- or 19-year-olds who haven’t had the benefit of that in their lives.”

That single restorative justice class at DePaul revealed a passion for social justice that surprised Trieschmann herself. “I was always worried about my fellow man,” she admits. “I went to rallies. I was a hippie. I stood up for women’s rights, but I was never as passionate as I am now.” Although she counts her own children as her greatest accomplishment, Curt’s Café and Curt’s South remain a close second. “It’s very humbling work that we do, but I think we get more out of it than even the kids.”
SECOND CHANCES

Danny Mackey is grateful for the scholarships that helped him achieve his degree.

Danny Mackey has excelled during his time at SNL. His grade point average qualified him for the Tau Sigma Academic Honor Society for transfer students and the Golden Key International Honour Society, an achievement only 15 percent of undergraduate students receive. Mackey reflects on the impact of scholarship support on his success.

“This is my second chance at college. The first time I went to college was right out of high school. I didn’t do too well. I lost focus. When the economy went bad, I decided to change careers, but I wasn’t getting any interviews, so I decided to try college again. I didn’t think in a million years that I would be accepted with my old transcripts, but SNL gave me a shot. It’s difficult. I work full time, I have three children and I go to school full time, but this program changed my life.

“When I enrolled at SNL and started receiving scholarships, having that financial cushion gave me a clear mind to focus on academics. It motivated me and boosted my confidence. DePaul is a bright spot for me.”

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Adult Men of Color Initiative launches peer mentoring

John LittleJohn Jr. (SNL MA ‘10), director of SNL’s Adult Men of Color (AMOC) Initiative, academic advisor and part-time faculty member, received a 2015 Vincentian Endowment Fund Award to launch the AMOC peer mentoring program. This program will support DePaul’s student retention strategy focused on recruiting, enrolling, retaining and empowering diverse populations. The AMOC Initiative was founded at SNL in 2011 to support the academic success of men of color at DePaul, as well as to provide engagement, leadership and networking opportunities for students of color.

New Perspectives on European Women’s Legal History

Assistant Professor Sara Kimble’s latest book, “New Perspectives on European Women’s Legal History” (Routledge), was published in July 2016. Kimble co-authored the introduction, served as contributing author of a chapter and co-edited the anthology, which explores the ways in which law contributes to the social construction of gender.

Barbara Radner receives leadership award

Barbara Radner, associate professor and director of the Polk Bros Foundation Center for Urban Education, received the 2015 Community School Leadership Award from the Federation for Community Schools at the 11th annual Community Schools Forum in November 2015. Radner was recognized for her support of the federation, resource coordinators and community schools over the years, as well as her efforts to change outcomes for students across the country.
Adult Bridge Program celebrates its 25th anniversary

2016 marks the 25th anniversary of the DePaul Adult Bridge Program, a collaboration between SNL and the City Colleges of Chicago (CCC). This innovative program allows adult students, 24 years and older, to complete initial coursework at CCC and then transfer to a bachelor’s degree program through SNL. The classes are team-taught by both CCC and SNL faculty, and students are supported through the program with hands-on advising from SNL professionals. Visit bit.ly/SNLbridge for more information.

Alumnus speaks at the White House

Michael Johnson (SNL ’02), CEO of Johnson Talent Development, introduced Vice President Joe Biden at the White House UpSkilling Summit. The summit was part of the UpSkill America initiative, which strives to provide the workforce with the education and training needed to develop new skills and earn higher wages. Johnson briefly spoke of his rise through the ranks at UPS, where he previously served as vice president and chief human resources officer. “[UPS] provided me with those opportunities.” Upon taking the stage, Biden called Johnson a “poster child” for upskilling.
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