MIZZOU NURSING

NEWS FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI SINCLAIR SCHOOL OF NURSING 2025-2026



LEADING THE WAY 2026



From The Dean

For close to 125 years, the University of Missouri Sinclair School of Nursing has prepared the next generation of nursing leaders, educators, scientists and clinicians. We embrace our role as a national leader in academic nursing; pushing boundaries, welcoming collaborators, building clinical practice opportunities and driving changes in health systems. Throughout this issue you will see examples of the many forms of nursing leadership that define our school and mission.

We are challenging the paradigm of what a successful nursing career looks like. We are thinking deeply about how we prepare and support nurses so they can achieve successful, meaningful, long careers. We support nurses to expand beyond developing clinical knowledge and skills; we help them build a strong professional identity, so they have the confidence to navigate an increasingly challenging health care environment. Once in the workforce we want them to stay engaged as thriving professionals with dynamic careers, realizing there are many paths to success.

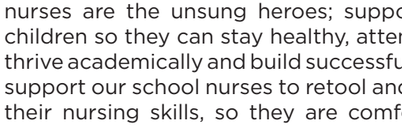
We are strengthening partnerships across Missouri, preparing nurses to serve their communities. Every day in primary and secondary schools throughout Missouri, school nurses are the unsung heroes; supporting our children so they can stay healthy, attend school, thrive academically and build successful lives. We support our school nurses to retool and enhance their nursing skills, so they are comfortable in their increasingly challenging role.

The opening of our first nurse practitioner-led clinic in Holts Summit represents years of vision, persistence and tenacity to advance nursing as an independent practice in collaboration with our medical colleagues. We are demonstrating what is possible when nursing education, clinical practice and communities come together.

Mizzou Nursing is part of the larger ecosystem at the University of Missouri. As Missouri's flagship university and a land-grant institution, we have a responsibility to use our knowledge and expertise in service to others. At the Sinclair School of Nursing, that means educating nurses, so they are prepared to lead in building partnerships that strengthen communities, advancing research that addresses real health challenges and developing approaches to care that reaches people where they live.

The future of nursing and health care is constantly changing in response to societal demand. Our responsibility is to shape the future of nursing and health care and constantly strive for excellence.

That is how Mizzou Nursing is **Leading the Way.**



Lori Popejoy, PhD, RN, FGSA, FAAN
Dean and Professor
Sinclair School of Nursing

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We want to hear from you!
Send feedback about this issue, suggest future article ideas or share your story on how the Sinclair School of Nursing has impacted you. Email us!

Sinclair School of Nursing
University of Missouri

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From the Nursing Alumni Organization



This past year marked an exciting new chapter for the Nursing Alumni Organization as we launched a refreshed structure designed to create more meaningful and flexible ways for alumni to stay connected with Mizzou Nursing.

Alumni from across the country have supported the school through volunteerism, preceptor experiences, student engagement and alumni outreach. From welcoming future nurses to campus, to supporting hands-on learning experiences and reconnecting at alumni events, this first year reinforced the impact of ***Mizzou Nurses for Mizzou Nurses.***

At the same time, the Nursing Alumni Advisory Council continues to help guide alumni engagement efforts and strengthen connections across the Mizzou Nursing community.

One of the most exciting parts of this transition has been the growth of the Mizzou Alumni Ambassador network within Mizzou Nursing. This model allows alumni to stay involved in ways that fit their schedules and interests, whether through volunteering, attending events, supporting students or staying connected with fellow graduates. Thank you to everyone who was involved last year and we hope you will continue your engagement in the year to come in a way that is meaningful to you.

If you've been thinking about reconnecting with Mizzou Nursing, we encourage you to take that first step this year. There are opportunities to get involved at every level, whether you have a few hours to give, want to attend events, volunteer with students or simply stay informed through our quarterly alumni newsletters and communications. Joining the Mizzou Alumni Association is another meaningful way to support alumni engagement efforts and initiatives that help strengthen connections across Mizzou Nursing.

We hope to see many of you during our Nursing Annual Banquet and Reunion Weekend on April 23-24, 2027, or any other opportunity you may have to visit campus and reconnect.

If you are interested in learning more about the Nursing Alumni Organization or have questions about ways to become involved, I would encourage you to reach out. Feel free to contact me at *VollrathC@outlook.com*, and I will be glad to answer questions or help connect you with the right person or opportunity.

Thank you for continuing to be part of the Mizzou Nursing community. Your time, support and engagement truly make a difference.

MIZ!

Dr. Christina Hoff Vollrath

Christina Hoff-Vollrath,
BSN '92, MS(N) '09, DNP '21
President, Nursing Alumni Organization

Nursing Alumni Organization Advisory Council

In partnership with the Mizzou Alumni Association, the Nursing Alumni Organization (NAO) Advisory Council brings together alumni around a shared commitment to Mizzou Nursing and its future. Guided by ***Mizzou Nurses for Mizzou Nurses***, the council strengthens lifelong connections among alumni, the school and the university while celebrating the achievements and contributions of Mizzou Nurses. The council also creates meaningful opportunities for alumni to connect with one another and support today's students and future generations. Want to get involved? Contact Cheryl Byrd at *byrdch@missouri.edu.*

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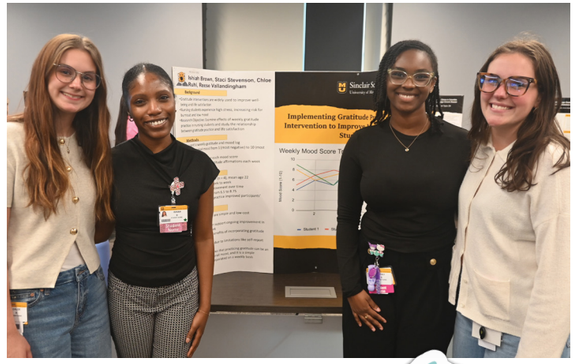
















A Year in Photos









Leading Practice-Ready Nurses to Successful Careers

Written by Dale Smith

With new graduates leaving nursing at high rates, educators are discovering that the secret to career longevity isn't just more clinical training in college. Instead, the solution appears to require developing a clearer sense of professional identity — what it means to think, act and feel like a nurse.

Too many recent nursing graduates find themselves in what seem like impossible situations. Here's one: A new NICU nurse has two patients, one of whom is doing poorly and requires most of the care time. The unit is short-staffed, and no one is free to help. After a frustrating shift, the nurse goes home knowing they haven't met even basic standards of care for two vulnerable neonates.

"How would you feel?" asks Nelda Godfrey, director of Nursing Career Success, Identity and Innovation at the Sinclair School of Nursing. "You might think, 'I'm not good enough. Obviously, I can't handle this. Maybe this isn't for me.'"

Those reactions are showing up in new nursing graduates at an alarming rate. Roughly 23 percent leave their first job within 18 months. A hospital administrator recently told Godfrey, BSN '77, PhD '99, that, despite good pay, her facility was losing a substantial percentage of new nurses at four months. Such departures cost the organization roughly $60,000 per nurse. And that says nothing of the educational expense and emotional toll on the nurse who thought they'd found a calling in acute care and instead may have left the profession.

For years, educators thought they could solve the problem with more hours in the simulation lab and more clinical time before graduation. That's part of it, Godfrey says. But new studies confirm the importance of another thread entirely: Nurses early in their careers are craving help understanding what it actually means to be a member of the nursing profession.

Not the tasks. The identity — the profession's answer to, "Who am I, and why does it matter?"

Professional Identity

Other health fields have been teaching "professional identity formation" for decades. Medical schools started in the early 2000s, after educators noticed that students who could master anatomy and physiology often struggled to picture themselves as physicians. Student nurses have a short, four-semester runway to acquire nursing knowledge and skills. "There's little room left to explore who you're becoming and a misconception about how much responsibility we carry," Godfrey says.

Nursing only "caught fire" with the professional identity idea recently, says Godfrey. In 2018, she helped convene a think tank of 50 nurse educators and researchers from across the U.S. and Canada



The tree above was created during the 2018 International Society for Professional Identity in Nursing when asked what it means to think, act and feel like a nurse. Image courtesy of Nelda Godfrey.

to ask what it means to think, act and feel like a nurse and how nursing identity might be taught and measured.

The research-based model has four domains. **Values and ethics** refer to principles guiding conduct. **Knowledge** is evidence- and experience-based information. **Nurse as leader** describes a provider who transforms a shared vision into reality. **Comportment** refers to a nurse's words, actions and presence. Godfrey describes the domains as handholds on a climbing wall, something nurses can reach for when the work becomes disorienting. Researchers also built a set of teaching competencies and eventually a validated research instrument now used in professional identity studies in 22 countries.

Touchpoints

When Godfrey explains the idea to working nurses, they get it right away. "It'll take maybe three minutes, and he or she will understand the what and the why." They seem to intuit the value. A common response: "I've been trying to find the words to explain this for a long time," Godfrey says.

Godfrey resists the idea of a generational shift leading nurses to leave the profession or that today's nurses are somehow less committed than their predecessors. Nor does she lay blame with hospitals, which help foster professional identity despite navigating extreme financial pressures. Preceptors are stretched too thin. Nobody set out to leave new nurses without a framework to understand their role. If anything, she says, the job has changed faster than the vocabulary and support systems nurses need.

But when health care systems can't flex — when a nurse can't get help with a care overload, when scheduling can't accommodate the unpredictability of real life — something breaks that goes beyond ordinary fatigue. Some researchers call it moral injury. It's the particular ache of a nurse knowing they couldn't provide care they know how to give. Godfrey thinks it's a more accurate and useful descriptor than burnout because it points to its own set of remedies. (Read page 6 to learn how the school is solving these issues.)

Toward a broader definition

Part of what's at stake, Godfrey argues, is an old, tired script about what nursing even is — the notion that nurses are the soft, relational counterpart to a doctor's technical expertise. The four domains push back on that. Values and ethics, yes. But also knowledge. Also leadership. Also the skill of walking onto a 46-bed unit and, through nothing but presence and comportment, changing the feeling and tone of the unit over a 12-hour shift. Think of it as offering a competent and calming presence.

"We've had far too narrow an interpretation of our discipline," she says. In seeking a broader understanding of nursing, she studied nursing history.

Across cultures and millennia, she says, societies have recognized the nurse's role as healer and guardian, someone who not only treats patients at the bedside but also sustains the collective work of care.

Godfrey and her colleagues are articulating that timeless function and making it part of the ethos of nursing education and practice. Nurses who know the value of what they carry into each encounter can thrive.

"We are at the very beginning of what nursing will be," says Godfrey. The next generation, she hopes, won't have to build their identity from scratch, alone, during difficult shifts. They'll have the map of what is possible on day one.

For the NICU nurse going solo with two fragile patients, the domains offer an empowering way to frame the experience. Knowledge says the nurse did, in fact, understand what to do. Comportment says their calm concentration mattered, even if the shift was rough. Nurse as leader is a reminder that, even in isolation, they guide care through expertise and quiet authority. Values and ethics say the ache they felt afterward showed they cared just as they should.

Building Nursing Careers To Last

From revamped coursework to support for practicing nurses through microlearning videos, the Sinclair School of Nursing is redefining how nurses grow their capacity in nursing and belonging for the long haul.

New curricular changes and support for practicing nurses are sharpening the school's focus on professional identity development.

In the classroom: A recent curriculum revision was grounded in the 2021 American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) Essentials, said Amber Vroman, assistant teaching professor and director of the BSN program. To fully inform the work, "We did a deep dive," interviewing students, faculty and clinical partners to make the curriculum better anticipate the needs of practicing nurses.

Key results: A new Transition to Nursing Practice course focuses on professional identity, well-being, self-care, communication, teamwork, NCLEX-RN© Exam readiness and lifelong learning. The course aims to prepare students for real-world stressors – rapidly changing technology, emotional strain, workplace violence — and help them manage expectations while navigating complex environments.

Also new is the Holistic Health Promotion and Wellness course, which deals with wellness and disease prevention as well as nurses' personal well-being and professional identity formation. "Joining the profession asks for more than clinical judgment and hands-on skills," Vroman, MS(N) '14, said. "It's an internal transformation."

The updated curriculum now includes the Common, Chronic and Complex (CCC) series, a refocused adult nursing sequence. Organized around AACN's spheres of care, the new series emphasizes chronic and end-of-life care. The geriatric component was revamped to focus on chronic disease self-management and expanded by 45 clinical hours. Pharmacology coursework was restructured to include an applied lab and a second course midway through the program to sharpen clinical application.

After graduation: The school's Nurse Career Success Initiative is developing a program to support practicing nurses, particularly recent graduates who are most at risk of leaving the profession. The Early-Career Nurse Professional Development Program seeks to improve nurse retention, professional identity, belonging and well-being. "There's nobody else doing this work," said Sean Pridgeon, director of career well-being at the school. The framework considers nursing careers in four phases: student, newly licensed, early career and experienced.

One aspect of the program will be short videos, funded in part with alumni donations, to deliver short bursts of core educational content and end with a question for reflection. "This first iteration's video style is similar to social media such as TikTok," Pridgeon, DNP '21, said. Video offerings will be paired with facilitated group discussions to address lingering questions and build the peer mentorship many early-career nurses say they lack. "We ultimately plan to track outcomes such as burnout, sense of belonging and intent to leave the profession."

Longer term, Pridgeon envisions expanding the model statewide, including to rural and critical-access hospitals where new nurses often face the steepest demands with the least support.

For Pridgeon, a former cardiac ICU nurse and 16-year Army Reserve nurse, the work is personal, and his questions have a sense of urgency: "How do we make nursing optimistic? We're dealing with people in their worst moment. How do we still find some positivity at the end of the day?"

To learn more about the Nurse Career Success Initiative, email Sean at *pridgeons@missouri.edu.*



Susan Taylor, BSN '87, MS(N) '89, helps clinical students in the skills lab as an alumni volunteer standardized participant



Care Close to Home

Written by Anissa Lockett | Photo credit MU Health Care

Mizzou Nursing's first nurse practitioner-led clinic in Holts Summit is expanding access to primary care while giving future advanced practice nurses the opportunity to learn alongside APRN providers serving their own communities.



(L to R) Julie Miller, Lori Popejoy, Renee Riedel, Christa Torrisi, PhD '24, Kelli Cash, BSN '03, MS(N) '10, DNP '19 and Carissa Thompson.

Carissa Thompson, FNP, RN, doesn't just work in Holts Summit. She lives here.

For more than 14 years, Thompson has called the community home. She raises her family here, serves with the local fire department and understands the realities of accessing health care in a smaller community because she has experienced them herself.

"I grew up rural, and we never had close primary care," Thompson said. "For most of my life, we had to go to Jefferson City for any type of care so we just wouldn't go."

Renee Riedel, FNP, RN, understands that connection, too. She lives about 20 minutes away in Tebbetts, Missouri, and previously cared for patients from Holts Summit and surrounding communities. Today, both are nurse practitioners and assistant clinical professors with the University of Missouri Sinclair School of Nursing providing care at MU Health Care's new primary care clinic in Holts Summit.

Their connection to the area is central to the model behind Mizzou Nursing's first nurse practitioner-led clinic.

The clinic opened May 5, 2026, through a partnership between MU Health Care and the Sinclair School of Nursing. Advanced practice nurse practitioners collaborate with MU physicians to ensure patients receive expert care close to home. The clinic also serves as a clinical learning site, giving nursing students hands-on experience providing care in a community-based setting.

"Nurses live in these communities and want to provide care in these communities," said Julie Miller, director of clinical faculty practice at the school. "Our advanced practice nursing students are already living and working throughout Missouri. When we create opportunities for them to provide high-quality primary care where they live, we can help bridge gaps in access across the state and around the nation."

Understanding the community

Thompson has seen the need throughout her career. She spent much of it in emergency medicine, where she frequently saw patients seeking care for conditions that could have been managed in a primary care office.

Later, while working in urgent care, she saw patients from Callaway, Osage and surrounding counties facing similar problems. Some needed medication changes or treatment for relatively simple illnesses. Others had no primary care provider at all.

"People would say, 'I don't see anyone because I don't have gas to get there,'" Thompson said. "Here, we're in a prime location. They're able to walk here."

Living in Holts Summit also gives Thompson an understanding of the community itself: its families, schools and the rural areas just beyond the city limits.

"You have to build a relationship with patients, but you also have to build a plan that fits them," Thompson said.

Riedel has seen the same need. Before joining the clinic, she practiced nearby and cared for patients from throughout the region. Her patients today range from children and younger adults establishing primary care to people managing diabetes, cardiovascular disease, autoimmune disorders and other chronic conditions.

"There are so many people in this area where the resources just aren't there," Riedel said. "There's a lot that we can do right here."

The clinic offers traditional appointments, telehealth and same-day sick care for patients ages 2 and older. It is also connected to MU Health Care's electronic health record network, allowing Thompson and Riedel to coordinate care and connect patients with specialty services when needed.

"To me, the importance lies in having support that feels close, familiar and genuinely invested in the people who live here. Having services right here in Holts Summit means you don't have to carve out half a day, fight traffic or rearrange your life just to take care of yourself," patient Kathy Ramirez said. "You get easy access, friendly support and a sense of belonging; all of which make wellness feel doable."

Care built on relationships

Being part of the community also shapes how Thompson and Riedel approach their patients. For Thompson, trust starts with listening.

"A lot of the trust APRNs build with patients comes from our experience with nurse advocacy," she said. "It's walking in and letting them tell you their story." That means understanding not only a diagnosis but the circumstances that determine whether a care plan will work for each patient.

Riedel places a similar emphasis on patient education. Rather than simply telling patients what they need to do, she wants them to understand why.







President Mun Choi and Ric Ransom hold the ribbon for Lori Popejoy with faculty and staff of Mizzou and officials of Holts Summit.

"I love to provide education to patients," Riedel said. "I explain in layman's terms what is happening in the body, what the medication is for and why certain changes are important."

For Riedel, health extends beyond a diagnosis. She sees patients coping with chronic illness, loss and other life changes that affect their overall well-being.

"The spiritual, emotional and physical — they all go together," she said. "Sometimes if one thing is out of order, it affects everything else."

Years of work, one shared vision

While Thompson and Riedel are putting the model into practice, the clinic represents years of work by faculty, staff and leaders at the Sinclair School of Nursing and partners across the university. Developing a faculty practice model that could serve patients while educating future nurses required sustained collaboration.

"This clinic represents years of commitment from people who believed nurses could lead a model like this," said Lori Popejoy, BSN '93, MS(N) '96, PhD '07. "Many people contributed their expertise and continued moving this idea forward. It is gratifying to see their work reflected in a clinic that is now serving patients and creating new opportunities for our students."

A model that can grow

For the School of Nursing, the long-term opportunity is to learn from Holts Summit and consider how nurse-led faculty practice could expand access to primary care across Missouri. During the 2025-26 academic year, 192 Sinclair School of Nursing students in the state were pursuing advanced practice nursing degrees while living and working in their own communities.



MU Health Care staff working at Holts Summit (L to R) Susanne Eoff, Stephanie Williams, Tracy Richter and Cynthia Curtis

"The landscape of health care has changed, and we have the opportunity to respond," said Miller, BSN '91, MS(N) '13, DNP '17. "Holts Summit gives us an opportunity to demonstrate a different model of leadership and care; one we hope can be repeated in small communities around Missouri."

For Thompson and Riedel, that larger goal begins with the people walking through their door today. They are caring for their neighbors and building relationships with families, while students learning beside them can see what community-based primary care looks like in practice.

It extends the reach of a model built around a simple idea: Care is easier to access when the people providing it are already part of the place you call home.

Leading Through Partnerships

Mizzou Nursing Supports School Nurses and Child Health Throughout Missouri

Written by Jack Wax

School nurses are the heart, soul and frontline professionals of a health care system that serves 900,000 Missouri students. Although seldom acknowledged, school nurses play a critical role in keeping children, families and communities healthy. They comfort, manage chronic health conditions, connect families with community resources, respond to medical emergencies and teach children how to manage their health and prevent illnesses such as colds and flu. In one moment, they may care for a child with a broken bone or life-threatening allergic reaction; in the next, they may educate a parent about the importance of vaccinations.

The Sinclair School of Nursing partners with programs and schools, providing education and resources that support school nurses and enhance the health and well-being of school-age children.

"We are dedicated to helping school nurses obtain the resources and training that they need; and in return, we experience a similar dedication from them as they continue to allow us to bring students into school settings to gain experience and to see what life looks like as a school nurse," said Associate Dean of Academic Affairs Robin Harris.

This mutually beneficial relationship is leveraged by technology but is built on professional relationships with nurses and school administrators throughout the state. In July, Mizzou Nursing partnered with the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services (DHSS) — Adolescent and School Health Program to produce this year's School Health Academy, a professional development conference that brought school nurses to campus for three free days of intense learning and community building. Typically, school nurses may be the only health care professional in a school — especially in rural districts — so being in touch with others facing the same challenges was especially helpful for the 145 attendees.

In addition to classroom sessions on topics such as diabetes care, emergency preparedness and helping students who experience internet bullying, the nurses practiced clinical skills in the School of Nursing's Miller Family Simulation Center. "The attendees had an opportunity to get hands-on experiences practicing gastrostomy care, tracheostomy care and participating in respiratory simulations. We also dedicated a day to leadership skills," said Missouri School Nurse Specialist Kelly Vaugh. Having traveled to about 80 school districts this year, Vaugh has a ground-level perspective on the needs of school nurses. "The School Health Academy sessions are based on what the nurses have told us they need to know more about, and that's so important because they can't get a lot of education in their school settings," she said.

Mizzou Nursing instructors taught sessions on patient care topics and led workshops on developing leadership skills. "When you think about their work, it's essential that school nurses are able to lead and advocate for individual kids, for children's health, for policies and procedures or even funding," Harris, MS(N) '06 said. "Helping school nurses understand the significance of being leaders means they must recognize that if they want a seat at the table, they need to use their voice," she said. One entire day of the conference was dedicated to building leadership skills.



BE PART OF THE PARTNERSHIP - BE A PRECEPTOR

Preceptors play an essential role in student success through mentorship, guidance and real-world experiences.

Mizzou Nursing deeply values the time and commitment of our clinical partners and preceptors who prepare the next generation of Mizzou Nurses.

Ready to make an impact?

Give back to the profession through your expertise. Graduate nursing preceptors are needed across a variety of clinical settings.

MIZZOU Nurses for MIZZOU NURSES

Visit the Preceptor Portal on our website to learn more or scan this QR code.

Meeting a need — together

In Missouri, about 1,700 school nurses are responsible for providing health care to every child enrolled in the state's public and charter schools. It doesn't matter whether those children live in small towns more than an hour from a medical facility or attend an urban high school located across the street from a major medical center — they need and deserve information and access to services that can help them live healthy lives. Sometimes, it takes multiple organizations and a team of health care professionals and school administrators to meet this need.

The SCHOLAR Clinic in Columbia, now in its third year, is a prime example of an alliance that can do just that. Assistant Clinical Professor Megan Kruse staffs and manages the SCHOLAR Clinic, a joint project of the School of Nursing, the Columbia Public Schools and Clarity Healthcare — a community-based, federally-funded entity. On a typical day, 10 to 16 school students will walk through her clinic doors — some directed to her by the district's 41 school nurses, others self-referred or referred by a parent. Kruse, BSN '16, sees her role as an extension of the school nurses' care.

"Whether it's an emergency situation in school or an occasion when a school nurse might be questioning themselves, it's nice for them to have someone they reach out to and say, 'This is what's happening; this is what I'm seeing. Can you help me with this?' I'm here to give them the reassurance they need that they're doing a good job."

While providing nursing care to school-age students, Kruse also serves as a preceptor for nursing students. "We provide an avenue for Mizzou Nursing students to get that firsthand clinical experience," she said. Graduate APRN students and undergraduate BSN students spend varying amounts of time in the clinic, ranging from a few days to a few months.

Columbia is only one of many school districts that benefit from having the Sinclair School of Nursing in the neighborhood. Most students choose to complete their 60 hours of required community health service or their pediatric clinical in nearby communities such as New Bloomfield, Southern Boone County, Marshall or Jefferson City. More than 1,000 children each year are screened for vision, hearing and blood pressure by Mizzou Nursing students. Obvious dental problems are also identified during the screening process. "Sometimes the students discover unique needs and make a major impact, said Sinclair School of Nursing's community outreach coordinator Morgan Shahan, DNP '19. "One of our students raised almost $2,000 to help a group of English as Second Language students overcome food insecurity," she said.

Show Me School Health

Whether Mizzou Nursing professors are teaching other nurses at a conference or sharing their expertise through work at the SCHOLAR Clinic or other settings, their research and clinical experience support school nurses throughout Missouri, all day, every day. Their expertise has been digitized and is included among the many reports and videos available at the Show Me School Health website (showmeschoolhealth.org), an

ever-expanding compilation of resources available to school health professionals.

The site is a partnership between the DHSS — Adolescent and School Health Program and the University of Missouri's Continuing Education for Health Professions (CEHP). It includes a network of school nurse experts who helped build and review those resources. "It's a living, breathing organism," said Todd Winterbower, MU Extension's associate director for CEHP. "We're always making updates, keeping it current," he said.

Show Me School Health features extensive information on just about any health care issue a school nurse could encounter — everything from asthma to obesity to mental health. It also has more than 50 "Just in Time" learning modules consisting of instructional videos and skill competency checklists on topics like cardiovascular issues, neurology and respiration. Additionally, it offers eight self-paced learning modules on topics such as medication administration and individualized health care plans along with policy and procedure. It includes online courses, such as one for new school nurse orientation. "We aimed to increase participants' confidence and competence in their roles, reduce burnout, improve workforce retention and empower the school health team to become more effective leaders and advocates for their students," Winterbower said.

Ardith Harmon, BSN '03, MS(N) '06, relies on Show Me School Health for professional development and for improving care of students. As the head district nurse for Clark County R-1 School District, based in the far northern Missouri city of Kahoka, she completed the website's comprehensive school nurse orientation course, preparing her for the National Board for Certification of School Nurses exam. "It just seemed like a great opportunity to go back and review some of the basics," she said. When she was informed that a medically complex student was transferring to the district, she searched the website, then studied the section on tracheostomy care. Although 80 miles from the Mizzou campus and in a part of the state with few allied health professionals to consult with, she was able to access state-of-the-art techniques and the most recent research.

Harmon's health care team consists of herself, another full-time and one half-time school nurse. Shouldering the care of the district's 1,100 students, their work isn't as visible as that of classroom teachers, but it is essential. A two-hour drive from Kahoka, in Columbia's SCHOLAR Clinic, Megan Kruse articulates the values and motivations that inspire Harmon's team and other nurses to build careers in Missouri's schools. "School nurses have a vital impact on the well-being of children, their families and the communities in which they live every day. They deserve greater recognition and appreciation for what they do," she said.

Kruse's sentiment is actualized in the programs and partnerships continually being developed by Mizzou Nursing.



Community health student giving a presentation to preschoolers in Columbia, MO



(L to R) From DHSS, Benjamen Pringer, Kelly Vaugh and Elissa Brueggemann - From SSON, Morgan Shahan and Robin Harris

In the News



Rachel Trosky presenting at the Missouri Capitol

A day at the Missouri Capitol

Rachel Trosky was one of 10 Mizzou undergraduate researchers selected to travel to Jefferson City in April to present their work to lawmakers and government officials as part of the University of Missouri System's Undergraduate Research Day at the Capitol.

Trosky was impacted by the experience, "It gave me the opportunity to not only share my research but also learn how to tailor my presentation toward the audience, an important aspect of effective research dissemination," she said. "It gave me the chance to share our findings with legislators who work directly on policies that impact patients, including one legislator who is also a nurse!"



Nursing students with Jessica Peuterbaugh, assistant teaching professor

Partnering with the Missouri Scholars Academy

This summer Jessica Peuterbaugh, assistant teaching professor, led a group of clinical students to provide non-emergency medical care for the Missouri Scholars Academy (MSA).

MSA is a three-week, on-campus program administered by the MU Honors College for 330 of Missouri's academically gifted students entering their junior year of high school. "By caring for high school students from across Missouri, our nursing students are strengthening their clinical skills while giving back to communities throughout the state," Peuterbaugh said.

Thank you to the faculty members who made this opportunity possible for both students and campers: Meghan Corburn, BSN '15, DNP '20; Amber Vroman, MS(N) '14; Morgan Shahan, DNP '19; Katrina Fannin, BSN '21, MS(N) '26; Myra Galloway, BSN '09; Ashley Martin, BSN '19, MS(N) '25; Jennifer Case and Rebecca Ulmer.



Mizzou work-study students Brittni Chin and Chynna Gardner with their supervisor, Jeni Ragsdell

Mizzou students work behind the scenes

Each semester, work-study students ensure the Sinclair School of Nursing's Miller Family Simulation Center operates flawlessly, preparing future nurses for life-saving moments.

In April, Chynna Gardner and Brittni Chin were highlighted during National Student Employment Week as 2 of the 6,000 student employees at Mizzou who contribute their talents to offices, labs and programs across campus.

"Over time, the experience has been incredibly valuable for nursing school," Chin said. "I've been able to observe a wide range of skills in action and become familiar with the equipment required for each one. That hands-on exposure has helped me better understand the material and explain it more confidently on exams."

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Study Abroad





Rebecca Ulmer and Kim Oeth, BSN '04 with students in Belize













Megan Weiss with alpacas in Ecuador







BELIZE

In Belize, students gained hands-on experience in community and public health nursing. Led by Assistant Teaching Professors Kim Oeth and Rebecca Ulmer, the students provided health screenings and education in neighborhoods, homes and senior living facilities. One of their most significant accomplishments was teaching the Stop the Bleed program to more than 120 residents, including members of the National Police Academy.

"The immersive experience gave students a unique opportunity to understand how Belizeans live and view their health and health care systems," Rebecca Ulmer said. "Our students developed and delivered meaningful health education as they built connections with community members. Their work will leave a lasting impact by equipping residents with potentially life-saving knowledge and skills."

ECUADOR

Led by Associate Teaching Professor Miriam Butler, students traveled to Ecuador, where they partnered with local community health centers and worked with the Red Cross. At a nursing home, students spent time with residents participating in mobility exercises, cognitive activities and social engagement opportunities. They also conducted home visits in neighboring communities and worked alongside local health care professionals. Beyond their clinical experiences, students immersed themselves in Ecuadorian culture, explored the country and even met a few alpacas along the way.

For RN to BSN student Megan Weiss, the experience reinforced the importance of understanding patients beyond their immediate health needs.

"Going directly into the communities and meeting patients and families where they lived reminded me that nursing is about so much more than treating an illness," Weiss said. "It is about understanding the person, their environment and the barriers they face every day."

ITALY

In Italy, students explored nursing ethics and examined how culture, values and professional standards influence patient care. Through coursework and visits to Italian hospitals, they compared nursing practice and ethical approaches in the U.S. and Italian health care systems. Students were led by Robin Harris, MS(N) '06 and Jayde Wood, BSN '18, MS(N) '23.

And of course, there was some time to explore Italy through cuisine and the many historical landmarks.

"My experience in Italy was an incredible opportunity to grow both personally and professionally," Avery Albin, a clinical nursing student, said. "I learned about different approaches to patient care, gained a deeper appreciation for the nursing profession and experienced health care in a new culture, all while making memories I will hold onto forever."



Avery Albin in Italy

Leading Through Change

Written by Anissa Lockett

Research rarely follows a straight line; it is an evolutionary process. Early findings lead to new questions, and preliminary data provide the foundation for larger studies and future opportunities.

However, when priorities shift and traditional sources of funding become more competitive, maintaining that momentum can be challenging.

“We cannot control shifts in the funding landscape, but we can control how we respond,” said Deidre Wipke-Tevis, associate dean for research. “Our researchers are doing what nurses have always done: using the resources available to them to address the needs in front of them. Their creativity, persistence and commitment help ensure that we continue making progress on the health challenges facing Missourians, even in times of change.”

Endowed funds, university grants, foundation support and other resources help faculty continue important work and position projects for future competitive external funding.

Building momentum

For faculty establishing a research program, early funding can provide the time and resources needed to develop preliminary evidence and compete for larger grants.

Assistant Professor Knoo Lee received support from the Vivian E. Snell Fund for Gerontological Research in spring 2026 to advance his Alzheimer’s disease research. His work focuses on using digital health technologies and passive sensing to identify early behavioral and functional changes associated with Alzheimer’s disease, with the long-term goal of supporting earlier detection and helping older adults maintain independence at home.

The support allows Lee to build on his current work and collect additional preliminary data that can strengthen future proposals, including potential applications related to Alzheimer’s disease through the National Institute on Aging or National Institute of Nursing Research.

Seed funding can also provide established researchers with opportunities to test entirely new approaches. From the Ground Up, led by Professor Maithe Enriquez, featured on page 20, began with support from the Ben and Gloria Gambaro Faculty Endowment in Entrepreneurial Nursing. That initial investment gave Enriquez and her team an opportunity to launch the community health pilot, assess how well it met community needs and build a foundation for future growth.

Thinking outside the box

Internal support, combined with clinical and industry partnerships, is also helping find new ways to advance promising projects.

Associate Professor Jennifer Hulett is leading a study examining the relationship between nurses’ workload and well-being. Using biometric data from Oura Rings with electronic health record data and participant interviews, the research aims to better understand the impact of workload demands on the nursing workforce.

Making the study possible required an innovative approach to stakeholders and funding. Support came together through four sources: the University of Missouri Division of Research, Innovation and Impact’s Research Council grant program, the Sinclair School of Nursing’s Harriet H. Werley Faculty Research Fund, Oracle through the Tiger Institute and Oura. Together, the partners provided technology, expertise and resources needed to conduct the study.

The collaboration extends beyond funding. Tiger Institute and Oracle partners contributed expertise to the study’s design and helped connect nursing research with the technology and electronic health record data needed to examine workload in a new way.

“The ability to do a project like this, with this level of complexity, is feasible because of the multiple partners involved,” said Hulett, BSN ’95, MS(N) ’99, PhD ’15. “Their input makes for a better project than a single researcher trying to do it alone.”

“Research can still move forward in a tough funding climate if we’re willing to think outside the box and build partnerships,” Hulett said. “This project shows what is possible when people and organizations come together around research they believe is important.”

For Hulett, keeping that research moving has implications beyond Mizzou. The findings could help health care organizations better understand the relationship between workload and nurse well-being and identify changes that support a healthier, more sustainable nursing workforce.

Keeping the research engine moving

For established researchers with long-running programs of study, the challenge can be different.

Professor Amy Vogelsmeier has spent decades studying how health care systems can better serve older adults, particularly those living in nursing homes. Her work focuses on nursing home safety and systems improvement, including the roles registered nurses and advanced practice registered nurses (APRN) play in improving patient outcomes.

That body of research has contributed to changes in nursing home care well beyond Missouri. Vogelsmeier, MS(N) ’97, PhD ’08, was part of the Missouri Quality Initiative (MOQI), an eight-year Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services demonstration project that embedded APRNs in Missouri nursing homes with the goal of reducing avoidable hospitalizations. The success of MOQI has influenced care delivery for millions of U.S. nursing home residents and has been adopted as a model by managed care organizations.

Today, Vogelsmeier is building on that foundation while navigating a changing research environment.

Named the inaugural Verna Adwell Rhodes Endowed Chair in Nursing in 2025, Vogelsmeier has used resources associated with the position to advance several projects focused on improving care for older adults.

Her team is advancing work across four projects, including research involving care coordination and remote patient monitoring technology in nursing homes. The support allows her to maintain research assistants and staff to continue the work necessary to prepare data and develop future grant proposals.

That type of support fills an important space in the research process.

Major grants fund defined projects for specific periods, but a research program does not simply stop between awards. Teams must continue analyzing findings, generating new questions and building evidence for future proposals. Vogelsmeier describes this as maintaining

> **“Momentum matters. It allows us to keep moving forward rather than starting over each time.”**
>
> ***- Amy Vogelsmeier, MS(N) ’97, PhD ’08***

the “research engine” between grants. “Momentum matters,” Vogelsmeier said. “It allows us to keep moving forward rather than starting over each time.”

One area of Vogelsmeier’s externally funded work has been supported by the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ). However, recent funding shifts have affected the availability of future AHRQ funds. She and her collaborators are considering how their expertise and emerging research questions in health services research can align with other agencies and funding priorities.

Endowed support provides flexibility during those transitions, allowing Vogelsmeier to continue developing projects while pursuing the next source of external support.

The work also allows her to build on decades of research aimed at improving health care systems for older adults. That includes examining how technology and remote patient monitoring can support care delivery as well as continuing research into care coordination and the role of the nursing workforce in long-term care.

Her appointment as the Verna Adwell Rhodes Endowed Chair in Nursing adds another dimension: creating opportunities for students and other researchers. Vogelsmeier says one of her goals in the role is to expand research experiences for graduate and undergraduate students so they can see the impact of nursing science firsthand.

“I am so grateful to be named the Verna Adwell Rhodes Endowed Chair. This position allows us to sustain the team and the momentum behind our work. It’s an investment in science, and in the people, especially students, who will carry it forward.”

Investing in what comes next

Moving research forward also requires investing in the next generation of researchers and creating opportunities to work across disciplines.

Assistant Professor Alisha Johnson is helping do both through the arts, social sciences or humanities (ASH) Scholars Program. Johnson and Kerri McBee-Black of Textile and Apparel Management proposed an interdisciplinary Human-Centered Design project that will bring together

nursing, design, occupational therapy, engineering and industry expertise to explore accessibility for people with disabilities and older adults.

Beginning in the 2026-27 academic year, undergraduate nursing students will work with the interdisciplinary research team and gain experience in areas including research design, data collection, participant engagement and dissemination.

The project builds on Johnson's work involving aging, person-centered health care and technology while helping establish collaborations that can support future research and external funding opportunities.
"I have found that undergraduate students are a rich, often untapped resource for research, so I am excited and honored to collaborate with Dr. McKee-Black and the Honors College on our ASH-funded IDEAsLab. Focusing on human-centered design is a natural fit for nurses and forms a strong foundation for training our undergraduate researchers to consider sound research design and implementation," Johnson said.

Leading research forward
With support from donors, endowed funds, university resources and industry partners, Mizzou Nursing is investing in the people, ideas and infrastructure behind discovery. Those investments are helping nurse scientists sustain important research today while building a foundation to advance science into tomorrow.

HELP LEAD WHAT'S NEXT

By expanding our research power and investing in discovery, our faculty and students are driving lifesaving breakthroughs and shaping tomorrow's treatments. We're advancing care across Missouri and around the world to provide hope, healing and a healthier future.

Your investment expands access to advanced care, attracts top talent and positions Mizzou Nursing to turn new initiatives into meaningful progress.

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FACULTY HIGHLIGHTS



Professor Anne Sales has been invited to serve on the National Advisory Council for Nursing Research. She will be advising national leaders on priorities and activities of the National Institute of Nursing Research.



Curators' Distinguished Professor Emerita Marilyn Rantz has been invited to serve on the American Academy of Nursing's Edge Runners National Advisory Council, helping advance innovative approaches to improving health and health care.



Professor Nelda Godfrey has been appointed to the American Academy of Nursing's Determinants of Health Expert Forum contributing her expertise to advance nursing and health policy.

Associate Dean of Academic Affairs Robin Harris and Associate Teaching Professors Miriam Butler and Stefanie Birk, recently graduated from the Novak Leadership Institute, strengthening their leadership skills through professional development focused on communication, collaboration and organizational impact.



Leading What's Next

Missouri's health care needs are changing, and the Sinclair School of Nursing is responding with new opportunities to prepare highly qualified nurses, strengthen the workforce, support innovative research and improve access to care across the state.

Expanding maternal care
The School of Nursing is working to improve access to maternal and child health care through education, research and clinical practice. With support from the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services in partnership with the Department of Social Services through the Rural Health Transformation Program, the school is seeking pre-accreditation from the Accreditation Commission for Midwifery Education for a certified nurse-midwife program.

Missouri currently has no certified nurse-midwife education programs. If successfully pre-accredited, a certified nurse-midwife program at Mizzou will create a new pathway to prepare providers to care for women and families throughout the reproductive lifespan while helping address gaps in maternal health care across the state.

Veronica Kloeppel, BSN '12, DNP '19, has been named interim director and will lead the school's efforts to seek pre-accreditation.

The new program complements the school's broader commitment to improving the health of women and families across Missouri. Research led by Mizzou Nursing faculty and postdoctoral fellows addresses critical issues across the lifespan, from maternal-child health and breastfeeding support to chronic pain, substance use disorders and breast cancer survivorship. For example, Jamie Morton PhD '22, studies chronic pelvic pain among women in rural and underserved communities, Allison Anbari, PhD '17, and Professor Jane McElroy (Family and Community Medicine) are examining the experiences of rural breast cancer survivors, and Karry Weston, BSN '02, PhD '24, is working to improve access to evidence-based breastfeeding support.

Creating more pathways to nursing
Meeting Missouri's health care needs also requires preparing more nurses. Demand for a Mizzou Nursing education continues to exceed available space, with the school admitting approximately 240 students, or just 54% of applicants, to its BSN clinical program each year.

Funding through Missouri's Nurse Education Incentive Program is helping Mizzou Nursing create a new evening and weekend BSN option. Pending Missouri State Board of Nursing approval, this program expansion will ultimately add 64 admission slots.

Led by Nadia Kurtz, BSN '12, MS(N) '14, the option will provide another pathway for students to earn a nursing degree and increase the number of highly qualified nurses prepared to enter the workforce.

Expanding access to care
Mizzou Nursing is also putting new models of care into practice. The school's first nurse practitioner-led clinic in Holts Summit expands access to primary care and creates clinical learning opportunities for future advanced practice nurses. Read more about the school's commitment to improve access to care in "Care Close to Home" on page 7.



Growing Health From the Ground Up

Written by Anissa Lockett | Featured above Karry Weston and Friederike Albrecht

A partnership between Columbia Center for Urban Agriculture and Mizzou Nursing is using gardens as a gateway to better health while giving undergraduate and graduate nursing students, postdoctoral fellows and researchers a new perspective on what it means to care for a community.

For families participating in Columbia Center for Urban Agriculture's Opportunity Gardens program, a backyard garden can provide much more than tomatoes, peppers and fresh greens. It can be a source of nutritious food, a point of pride and an opportunity to build healthier habits.

Now, those gardens are also opening the door to conversations about health.

Through From the Ground Up, Sinclair School of Nursing faculty, researchers and students are partnering with Columbia Center for Urban Agriculture (CCUA) to bring health screenings, education and connections to resources directly to families participating in Opportunity Gardens.

Led by Maithe Enriquez, professor at the Sinclair School of Nursing, the pilot project builds on CCUA's established program, which helps families experiencing food insecurity establish and maintain home gardens by providing supplies, education and ongoing support. Mizzou Nursing adds another layer by helping families understand how the food they grow and the choices they make every day can positively influence their health.

"This project demonstrates how nursing can meet people where they are," Enriquez said. "We're able to bring health screenings, education and resources directly to families while creating meaningful learning opportunities for the next generation of nurses."

It is a partnership that begins not in a clinic or classroom, but in a garden.

Starting with what matters to families

Karry Weston, BSN '02, PhD '24, is a postdoctoral fellow at the Sinclair School of Nursing and co-investigator with Enriquez. She helped design the project's interventions, educational components and scope. She also visits participants in their gardens.

"Their gardens are the catalyst to establish a conversation and a connection," Weston said. The nursing team builds on families' interest in what they are growing to talk about nutrition and health, creating comfortable conversations with individuals who may experience barriers to traditional health care.

During visits, the nursing team offers blood pressure and hemoglobin A1C screenings, nutrition education and guidance on using garden-grown produce to support health. When concerns are identified, participants can also be connected with health care providers and other community resources.

During one early visit, the team identified significantly elevated blood pressure in a participant and encouraged follow-up care.

For Friederike Albrecht, a PhD student at the Sinclair School of Nursing, those experiences have reinforced the importance of pairing health information with practical education people can use in their daily lives.

One participant Albrecht has worked with is managing hypertension and, through the program, discovered she also has an elevated hemoglobin A1C. Motivated to create a healthier future for her son, she has worked with Albrecht to better understand ingredient lists, blood sugar and the connections among fiber, cholesterol and the foods her family eats.

What began largely as a preventive health initiative has evolved as the team learns that many participants need information not only about preventing chronic conditions but also about managing existing health concerns. For Enriquez and the research team, adapting the program based on what participants share is an important part of community-engaged research.

A partnership rooted in trust

From the Ground Up builds on the relationships CCUA has already established with participating families. For Weston, working alongside a trusted community organization has been one of the most valuable aspects of the project, allowing the nursing team to join a program where relationships already exist and participants are actively working toward healthier lives.

The collaboration also illustrates an important lesson for health researchers: Improving community health doesn't always require creating something new. Sometimes it means recognizing what is already working and finding meaningful ways to contribute.

Shaping the next generation of public health nurses and nurse researchers

The impact of From the Ground Up extends beyond participating families. This experience is also influencing the students and researchers doing the work.

Albrecht came to the project with an interest in rural health and participatory research and initially planned to focus her dissertation on diabetes in rural populations. Working with From the Ground Up participants broadened that perspective as she encountered similar challenges among underserved individuals in Columbia who may live close to health care but still lack the knowledge, resources or support needed to manage their health. The experience prompted her to expand her research to broader issues surrounding community health and underserved populations.

The project has also allowed Albrecht to develop as a mentor. During the summer, she worked with a BSN student, introducing him to Institutional Review Board procedures, research protocols and the day-to-day work of community-based research.

Undergraduate honors students helped lay the groundwork for the initiative, while undergraduate and graduate nursing students and postdoctoral fellows contribute to research and community outreach. Undergraduate nursing students also join the team as part of their community and public health nursing clinical hours, working with faculty members Morgan Shahan, associate teaching professor, and

"Opportunity Gardens works because it happens right outside people's back doors," said Katie Molitor, program director for Columbia Center for Urban Agriculture. "Since 2011, we have provided the space, tools and mentoring to help families grow their own food. Now, the School of Nursing brings health screenings and education directly to participants, creating a bridge between gardening, nutrition and health."

"We really get to know families when gardening in their yards. We hear about their goals and dreams as well as personal challenges like food costs and health concerns," Molitor said. "From the Ground Up provides a missing piece by connecting gardening and social determinants of health while giving future health care professionals valuable experience in community-based care."

Casey McCormick, assistant teaching professor, to gain meaningful experience in community-based care.

The experience is influencing Weston's research on rural maternal and child health outcomes. She sees connections between family health and nutrition that could inform work ranging from maternal nutrition and breastfeeding education to the foods families choose for themselves and their children.

“Learning about community health and community-partnered health has opened my research up to new ideas,” Weston said. “I hope to take what I am learning and apply it to my other research projects.”

Planting seeds for what comes next

From the Ground Up began with seed funding from the Ben and Gloria Gambaro Faculty Endowment in Entrepreneurial Nursing, giving Enriquez and her team the opportunity to launch and test the community health pilot.

“This type of philanthropic support allows researchers to take promising ideas from concept to reality, generating the evidence and momentum needed to build sustainable programs that can grow and attract future funding,” Associate Dean for Research Deidre Wipke-Tevis said.

Researchers are continuing to recruit participants and refine the educational components of the program based on what families need. At the same time, the team is developing grant proposals that could provide additional funding and extend the reach of the program.

Enriquez sees the combination of community impact and student development as central to the project. “The impact extends beyond today’s participants by building a model that can grow and serve even more communities in the future,” she said.

The model is built around relationships: CCUA bringing expertise in gardening and food access, families bringing their experiences and goals, and nurses bringing health knowledge, education and research.

And sometimes the starting point for all three is simply standing together in a garden.



CCUA Schoolhouse, an interactive, one-room educational building located at Columbia's Agriculture Park, is one more of the many programs CCUA offers.



RN to BSN student, Parker Dimond, helping with site visits

To learn more about CCUA visit columbiaurbanag.com

STUDENT HIGHLIGHTS



Irena Malek, BSN ’26

Irena Malek received the Missouri Nurses Association’s Future Nurse Leader Award, which recognizes nursing students who demonstrate leadership and a commitment to the nursing profession.



Jossie Rood

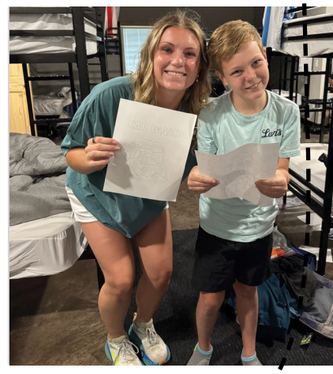
As a 2025-26 Essig Undergraduate Research Mentorship recipient, Jossie Rood worked with Assistant Professor John Robert Bautista on research she presented at MU Health Sciences Research Day and the Midwest Nursing Research Society (MNRS) Annual Research Conference. At MNRS, she received the inaugural Health Systems, Policy & Informatics Research Implementation Interest Group Undergraduate Research Award.





Show Me Research Week Awards

Five Mizzou Nursing researchers received awards during the University of Missouri’s Show Me Research Week, which celebrates research and discovery across campus. Congratulations to postdoctoral fellow Karry Weston and graduate students Chaeli Stenuf, Holly Ortman, Gracey Henry Jesudasan and Veronica Thompson.



Camp Barnabas

For the fourth year, Mizzou Nursing students and faculty joined the medical team at Camp Barnabas in Purdy, Missouri. Forty-one students completed part of their community health clinical rotation at the camp, gaining hands-on experience caring for campers with disabilities and chronic health needs. Morgan Shahan coordinated the program, while faculty members Robin Harris, Jennifer Case and Nicole Bartow, DNP ’22, each spent a week at camp leading and supporting students.



Dean's Advisory Board

The Sinclair School of Nursing Dean's Advisory Board brings together distinguished alumni and accomplished leaders from nursing, health care and related industries who share a commitment to the future of Mizzou Nursing.

Through their diverse expertise and perspectives, board members provide guidance to the dean and leadership on strategic opportunities, program development, quality management, community engagement, student success and philanthropic initiatives. They also serve as advocates for the school to help strengthen connections and advance the school's mission.

We are pleased to welcome the newest members of the Dean's Advisory Board and introduce the experience and leadership they bring to Mizzou Nursing.



Tiffany Burt

Tiffany Burt is a global biotech executive with more than 25 years of leadership experience in medical affairs, commercial strategy, operations, strategic planning and profit-and-loss ownership. She is committed to advancing transformational therapies for patients with significant unmet needs. Most recently, she built and led the medical affairs function at Mineralys Therapeutics, recruiting and developing an organization of more than 50 people and establishing a culture of scientific excellence and accountability in support of the company's innovative hypertension and chronic kidney disease programs. Burt has held senior leadership roles at ProQR Therapeutics, Verastem Oncology, EMD Serono, ARIAD Pharmaceuticals and Novartis. She earned a bachelor's degree from Vanderbilt University and an MBA from Webster University.



Daniel Clay

Daniel Clay is dean and professor at the University of Iowa College of Education and previously served as dean of the University of Missouri College of Education. His research has focused on mental health, chronic illness and community reintegration for children, while his leadership has emphasized organizational improvement and innovation in higher education. Clay also serves as a senior consultant with Triangle Associates and is an entrepreneur and investor in education and technology startups. He holds a PhD and an MBA from the University of Missouri.



Susan Conrad

Susan Conrad is founder and president of Eicon Partners, where she advises corporate and nonprofit leaders and boards on strategic planning and deployment, succession planning, change management, executive coaching, team development and intentional culture creation. A seasoned executive and entrepreneur, Conrad has built her career around connecting people and business strategies to drive growth and long-term success. Her experience spans finance, strategy, acquisitions and talent development across several industries. Conrad earned a bachelor's degree in business administration from the University of Missouri and an MBA from Washington University in St. Louis.



Misty Jones, BSN '14

Misty Jones is president and CEO of Stanford Health Care Tri-Valley, where she provides executive leadership for nursing practice, patient care and clinical operations. A registered nurse and health care executive, Jones has held leadership roles in academic health systems and community hospitals, including MU Health Care and SSM Health, with a focus on strategic leadership, innovation and patient-centered care. Throughout her career, she has championed quality improvement, workforce development and the advancement of nursing leadership. Jones earned her bachelor's degree in nursing from the University of Missouri and an MSN and MBA from Chamberlain College of Nursing and Keller School of Business in a dual master's program.



Heidi Lucas

Heidi Lucas is executive director of the Missouri Rural Health Association, leading statewide efforts to strengthen health and health care in rural Missouri through advocacy, partnerships and education. With more than 20 years of experience in public health and nonprofit leadership, she has helped advance policy and systemic changes affecting health care access and delivery throughout the state. Lucas is a recognized voice on rural health and health policy. Her advocacy has contributed to significant modernization of Missouri's health care delivery practices and landmark workplace violence prevention legislation. She holds a master's degree in public affairs from the University of Missouri.



Ken Nichols

Ken Nichols is a health care and business leader who serves as marketing director for Healthy Blue at Elevance Health. In this role, he leads growth and engagement strategies focused on strengthening market performance, improving member experience and expanding community impact. His experience includes strategic partnerships, marketing, operational improvement and cross-functional leadership. Before joining Elevance Health, Nichols held leadership roles at BJC HealthCare and Microsoft, working across health care, public sector and enterprise markets. He earned his bachelor's degree from the University of Missouri and an MBA from Lindenwood University.



Burl Stamp

Burl Stamp, FACHE, is president and founder of Stamp & Chase, a firm that partners with organizations to improve staff engagement and retention, leadership effectiveness and customer and patient experience. Before launching Stamp & Chase, Stamp served in executive roles at several leading health care organizations, including as president and CEO of Phoenix Children's Hospital and vice president of St. Louis Children's Hospital/BJC HealthCare. He is the author of *Becoming a Better Boss and The Healing Art of Communication*, a faculty member of the American College of Healthcare Executives and a former board member of SoutheastHEALTH. Stamp earned a BSBA in marketing and communications from Southeast Missouri State University and an MBA in finance from Washington University in St. Louis.



Sarah Willson, BSN '96

Sarah Willson was appointed director of the Missouri Department of Health and Senior Services by Governor Mike Kehoe on Jan. 14, 2025. She brings experience as both a practicing nurse and health care executive to the role. Throughout her career, she has focused on improving quality, efficiency and patient outcomes while helping shape health care policy at the state and federal levels. Before joining DHSS, Willson spent nearly a decade with the Missouri Hospital Association as the vice president of clinical and regulatory affairs and held leadership roles in hospice and hospital care. She earned her bachelor's degree in nursing from the University of Missouri and an MBA in health management from William Woods University.



From Student to Nurse: How the Nurse Residency Program Helps New Grads Thrive

Written by Josie Luebbert | Photo credit MU Health Care

For every nursing student, there comes a moment when graduation shifts from feeling far away to suddenly feeling real. Your classes and clinicals are wrapping up, your new badge is waiting, and soon, you'll be the nurse responsible for your patients' care. That transition can be exciting, but it's also one of the biggest challenges of a nursing career.

At MU Health Care, new graduate nurses don't have to navigate it alone. Through its accredited Nurse Residency Program, the organization pairs hands-on experience with structured education, mentorship and wellness resources, offering a built-in community designed to help new nurses gain confidence during their first year of practice. The 12-month program complements each nurse's unit-specific orientation with monthly seminars, an evidence-based practice project and poster presentation and opportunities to connect with peers and leaders.

For Rachel Phelps, BSN '23, the support made all the difference. Phelps joined MU Health Care's neurosurgical ICU after completing her practicum there as a Sinclair School of Nursing student. While she felt comfortable with the unit and its team, stepping into the role of a registered nurse was still a big change.

"I didn't really realize what the responsibility of being an inpatient ICU nurse was like," she said. "The amount of autonomy that you have in decision-making, you're like, 'Wow, this is it!' But it was cool to realize that my voice matters and that I can really impact a patient's outcome."

Like many new nurses, Phelps remembers the first weeks as both exciting and intimidating. "All of it," she laughed when asked what felt the hardest. "You're taking care of really sick patients, learning time management, learning how to talk to doctors, learning medications. As you get more specialized, there are things you simply don't learn in nursing school."

The Nurse Residency Program helps bridge that gap from the generalist knowledge learned in nursing school to the specialist knowledge often required in practice.

"The biggest thing was being connected with people who were in the same situation as me," Phelps said. "You're surrounded by peers who are saying, 'Yeah, this is hard,' or, 'This happened to me too.' It was validating to realize I wasn't the only one who felt nervous before work."

Beyond building connections, the program introduced her to the network of educators, leaders and support resources available at MU Health Care.

"You learn that if your preceptor doesn't know the answer, you can go to your educator. If your educator doesn't know, you can go to your manager. There are all these people who want to help you succeed," she said.

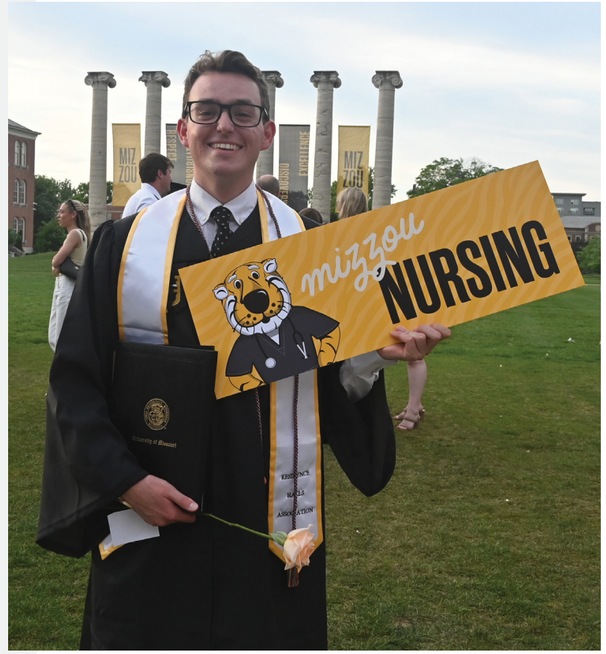
Josh Bartgis, BSN '26, says his path to nursing looked a little different. Originally from Bentonville, Arkansas, Bartgis thought he wanted to become a veterinarian. After first working in a clinic as a vet tech, he realized he wanted to provide the highest level of care possible while building relationships with families. Nursing offered the opportunity to make that kind of impact.

While completing his clinical rotations at MU Health Care, he discovered another passion: neonatal intensive care. "I did one clinical in the NICU, and I thought, 'Wait a minute, I kind of like this,'" he said. Today, as a recent graduate of the Sinclair School of Nursing, Bartgis cares for some of the hospital's smallest and most vulnerable patients, but he doesn't do so alone.

"The teamwork is the main thing that I really loved," he said. "Anytime someone leaves the room, they're asking, 'Can I do anything for you?' You really feel the teamwork and the community when you come to work."

That collaborative culture extends into the Nurse Residency Program, where new nurses from across the academic health system gather throughout the year to learn from clinical experts, practice essential skills, discuss real-world experiences and continue developing professionally.

Monthly seminars cover topics ranging from communication and prioritization to patient safety, resilience, leadership and evidence-based practice. Along the way, nurse residents also meet with organizational leaders, connect with their peers, complete an evidence-based practice project and celebrate their accomplishments at residency graduation at the end of their first year.



Josh Bartgis at Commencement in May 2026

One of the main takeaways for Bartgis is that no one is expected to figure everything out alone. When asked what it felt like to accept his first nursing position, he laughed. "I was like, 'Oh wow — is this real?'" he said. "You've been working toward this your whole life, and then all of a sudden you're there."

That feeling is exactly why MU Health Care invests in helping new nurses build confidence from day one. The Nurse Residency Program is accredited through the American Nurses Credentialing Center's Practice Transition Accreditation Program (PTAP®), which recognizes its commitment to helping new nurses successfully transition into professional practice. Nursing students can apply for graduate nurse positions up to a year before earning their degree. This increases their chances of joining their preferred specialty while beginning the transition into professional practice.

Looking back, Phelps has simple advice for students preparing to begin their own careers. "It's okay not to know everything," she said. "I'm still learning things. It's a good thing to keep seeking knowledge and continue learning."

Mizzou Nursing Alumni Awardees 2026



Rebecca McClanahan, MS(N) ’82
Citation of Merit Award

Rebecca McClanahan has spent a lifetime helping others find their voice, whether as students beginning their nursing careers, colleagues working to advance the profession or leaders shaping public policy. Through education, advocacy and service, she has influenced generations of nurses and helped improve health care across Missouri.

After earning her Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Truman State University, McClanahan completed her master's degree in community mental health nursing at the Sinclair School of Nursing and later pursued doctoral studies at the University of Kansas.

For more than 30 years, she taught nursing at Truman State University, where she encouraged students to look beyond bedside care and recognize the many ways nurses can make a difference. Through community-based learning experiences, research projects and conversations about health policy, she challenged students to see themselves as future leaders, advocates and change makers.

When reflecting on her own graduate school experience, McClanahan is quick to acknowledge the faculty members who helped her succeed. “As I think back to graduate school days, much appreciation goes to the pioneers of those early years of graduate study within the School of Nursing,” she said. “They were teaching, advising and supporting graduate students like me who were working full time, raising children and serving their communities.”

Teaching remained one of the most rewarding parts of her career. “My great joy as a professor of nursing was helping launch young people into the profession,” she said. “It was not just another graduation ceremony. It was gaining another group of colleagues.”

In 2006, McClanahan became only the third nurse elected to the Missouri House of Representatives. During her two terms, she worked on issues ranging from health care and higher education to workforce development and the state budget. She also helped advance legislation that expanded prescriptive authority for advanced practice registered nurses and supported efforts to improve access to care for Missourians.

Her influence extends well beyond elected office. A longtime leader in the Missouri Nurses Association, she has served in numerous leadership roles, including two terms as president, vice president, Political Action Committee chair and fundraising coordinator. She has spent decades helping strengthen nursing's voice in public policy, mentoring future nurse advocates and supporting legislation that benefits both nurses and patients. In 2023, she was inducted into the Missouri Nurses Association Hall of Fame in recognition of her lifelong commitment to advancing the profession and improving health care across Missouri.

Today, McClanahan continues to encourage nurses to become involved in advocacy and public service. She often reminds colleagues that “if we want to play in the policy world, we need to play in the political world.”

A proud mother of two sons and grandmother of three, McClanahan moved to Connecticut in 2021 to be closer to family. The move followed caring for her husband of 47 years, Marvin McClanahan, a Vietnam veteran whose health challenges were linked to Agent Orange exposure during his military service.

Looking back, her career reflects a simple but powerful belief: nurses can make a difference far beyond the bedside. Through education, advocacy and service, she has done exactly that. That legacy makes her a fitting recipient of the Citation of Merit Award.



Lori Popejoy and Rebecca McClanahan



Sarah Muegge, BSN ’75, MS(N) ’08
Alumni of the Year Award

Sarah Muegge is a proud graduate of the University of Missouri Sinclair School of Nursing whose career reflects a lifelong commitment to nursing education, professional development and patient care improvement across Missouri communities.

Muegge’s nursing career began at the University of Missouri’s Rusk Rehabilitation Center, where instructor Barbara Warner, BSN ’74 introduced her to the growing specialty of rehabilitation nursing and helped shape her early professional goals. During that same time, Muegge also met her future husband, Dave, while caring for a patient at Rusk. Dave graduated from the University of Missouri School of Medicine in 1977, and the couple married that November, two years after Muegge’s graduation from Mizzou Nursing. They later moved to Springfield, Illinois, where she spent several years building her acute care nursing experience before eventually returning home to Springfield, Missouri.

In 1980, Muegge joined CoxHealth’s newly established Educational Services Department. Under the guidance of mentor Ginny Haymes, BSN ’62, she found a passion for staff education and professional development that would define much of her career. Over the next 37 years, she helped support accreditation efforts in rehabilitation and ambulatory care while working closely with nursing staff to strengthen clinical practice and improve patient care outcomes.

As health care continued to evolve, Muegge became especially interested in ambulatory care, vaccine safety and public health education. Wanting to continue learning herself, she enrolled in Mizzou Nursing’s online master’s program. Her experience with evidence-based practice changed the way she approached nursing education and encouraged her to rethink how nurses learn, teach and adapt to changing health care needs. She later published articles related to ambulatory care and immunization safety and became known among colleagues as a thoughtful educator, mentor and problem-solver.

Muegge also credits Mizzou Nursing graduate Nancy Hoeman, MS(N) ’78, longtime nursing educator Shirley Farrah, BSN ’66, and colleague Amanda Spickard as important influences throughout her career. Their encouragement led to opportunities in statewide nursing conferences, public health outreach and professional collaboration that continued long after retirement.

Even after retiring from CoxHealth, Muegge remained committed to serving others. She assisted with vaccination and contact tracing efforts during the COVID-19 pandemic and also supported public health response efforts following the 2011 Joplin tornado.

She and her husband, Dave, continue to support Mizzou Nursing and were honored to help establish the Muegge Conference Room.



(L to R) Alice Kuehn, Sarah Muegge, Chuka Emezue, Lori Young and Rebecca McClanahan

“Nursing provides professional opportunities that were unheard of when I graduated. Mizzou Nursing graduates continue to serve in countless roles that support patient care through teaching, research, administration, informatics and health policy. No matter the setting, our graduates have the skills to adapt and help address the complex health challenges facing our nation.”



Chuka Nestor Emezue, PhD ’21, MPH, MPA, CHES
Alumni Achievement Award

Chuka Nestor Emezue is an assistant professor in the Department of Women, Children and Family Nursing at Rush University College of Nursing, where he holds the inaugural John L. and Helen Kellogg Endowed Faculty Scholar appointment. His research sits at the intersection of interpersonal and community violence, youth mental health and family well-being, with sustained attention to boys, men and fathers affected by violence. He develops equity-focused, community-engaged interventions that prioritize early prevention, reaching youth and families before violence escalates to hospitalization legal system involvement, child welfare intervention or loss of life.

A proud graduate of the Sinclair School of Nursing, he completed his PhD in three years after earning dual master’s degrees in public health and public administration at Mizzou. His dissertation on dating violence among rural adolescent boys and digital prevention strategies received the 2022 New Investigator Award and Outstanding Dissertation Award from the Midwest Nursing Research Society.

At Rush, he developed BrotherlyACT, a digital clinical intervention that integrates life-skills coaching, safety planning and help-seeking navigation for young Black males exposed to firearm and community violence. He is co-developing FatherlyACT, a father-child program designed to interrupt the intergenerational transmission of family violence, and KinCircle Health LLC, a unified digital platform translating this work for broader reach. Through the EMERGE Innova+ions Lab, he directs flagship youth research internships and advisory boards that prepare high school students from Chicago’s West and South Sides as community co-researchers and future nurse scientists.

His scholarship appears in leading nursing, public health and digital health journals, and he has delivered more than 100 scholarly presentations. He has contributed to national conversations through op-eds and media features in the Chicago Tribune, Ms. Magazine, NPR and other outlets. His work is supported by the National Institutes of Health and major private foundations, including the Rita and Alex Hillman Foundation, with a focus on supporting youth, families and frontline providers while advancing equitable violence prevention and strengthening family health.

“What Mizzou gave me was permission to take youth violence seriously as a clinical, structural, and deeply human problem. The young people I work with are not waiting to be saved. They are already adapting, already surviving, already teaching us what prevention should look like if we are paying attention. My hope is that the interventions, the lab and the students we train at Rush leave behind a clearer message for the field, that prevention is possible, that families deserve to be reached early and that nursing science has a real seat at this table.”



Lori Penner Young, BSN ’85
Humanitarian Award

Lori Penner Young, exemplifies the compassion, dedication and leadership honored by the Sinclair School of Nursing Humanitarian Award. Early in her career, in the Medical Intensive Care Unit at University Hospital, Young distinguished herself by tackling challenging cases and mentoring new nurses and students. She later worked in the Cardiac Catheterization Lab and collaborative research with Dr. Greg Flaker and Dr. Richard Webel.

Young served for 13 years as a school nurse at Logan-Rogersville Upper Elementary, providing daily student care, supporting families and promoting a safe, healthy learning environment. She lives in Rogersville, Missouri, with her husband, Will. Building a family legacy at Mizzou, she, her husband and their two daughters are all proud University of Missouri alumni.

In 2010, she went on her first mission trip to Nicaragua with Project HOPE, based out of Springfield, Missouri. She traveled with her daughters, who were in high school and middle school at the time.

Five years later, after leaving school nursing, she was invited to join the Project HOPE staff. At that time, construction had just begun on Project HOPE’s base of operations in Haiti. The director, Kim Bradley, asked her to travel to Haiti and evaluate how a medical outreach clinic could be established. Haiti was never a place she had envisioned herself serving, but Bradley explained, God told him that Young needed to go. Her response was simple: “Well, He didn’t tell me that!”

Yet just two months later, she found herself on a plane bound for Haiti. It became a powerful lesson in trusting God’s direction and a reminder to never say never.

For the past decade, Young has served as medical director and volunteer medical coordinator for Project HOPE, supporting underserved communities in Nicaragua and Haiti. She organizes medical clinics, recruits health care teams, ensures the availability of essential supplies and collaborates closely with local physicians. She often travels to provide hands-on care while training teams to serve effectively and compassionately, including facilitating treatment for children from Haiti in the United States. Her work includes community health education, with a focus on hygiene and women’s health, as part of these international missions.

Through her decades of clinical excellence, humanitarian service and mentorship, Young has touched countless lives. Her dedication to improving health and well-being, both at home and abroad, makes her a truly deserving recipient of the Sinclair School of Nursing Humanitarian of the Year award.

“Looking back, I can see that God was preparing me for something greater than I could see at the time. Missions work stretches my faith, challenges my skills and deepens my understanding of what it truly means to serve others. To my fellow nurses, you may not always see where your path is leading you, but what you do matters. Every skill you gain and every life you touch is part of something far greater than you can imagine.”



Alice F. Kuehn
Honorary Alumni Award

Dr. Alice F. Kuehn, associate professor emerita at the University of Missouri’s Sinclair School of Nursing, is recognized as the 2026 Honorary Alumna for her impact on nursing education, research and community health.

Throughout her distinguished career, Kuehn represents the values of collaboration, compassion and service. Early on, she worked with the School of Medicine Family Practice faculty to explore joint opportunities for nurse practitioners and medical students to learn and work together in a rural setting. As principal investigator for a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation grant on a nursing workforce development model, she brought together clinical and academic partners from a variety of health care and academic settings to develop and/or strengthen a teamwork model. She worked with public health nursing faculty to establish a career mobility program for public health nurses in Missouri.

Later, partnering with Ann Deaton from Human Environmental Sciences Extension, they published *Aging Missouri: A profile of wellness promotion and health care resources for Missouri’s older adults.* The publication was based on statewide data collected by MU undergraduate nursing students in a gerontological nursing class. Each student was assigned two or three Missouri counties to document resources available to older adults. They also interviewed two older residents in each county regarding their awareness and use of those services, creating an interesting addition to the report.

Another educational grant project promoted culturally competent nursing among the United States, Canada and Mexico, connecting two university undergraduate nursing programs from each country to explore nursing roles across North American borders. An online course developed by the six universities studied role differences and similarities in nursing practice, followed by meaningful student clinical exchanges across the three countries, with a goal of expanding understanding of global health and preparing them to care for increasingly diverse populations.

Colleagues and former students alike describe Kuehn as a dedicated mentor and meticulous leader whose guidance shaped countless nursing careers. Her teaching and public health outreach reached communities across Missouri, including an initiative at Fitzgibbon Hospital in Marshall, where baccalaureate and associate degree

nursing students from MU and Moberly Community College worked together in a differentiated practice and shared governance model. Later, a clinic she developed at Higbee Senior Center gave nurse practitioner students opportunities to demonstrate potential for improving senior health care in rural settings.

Following her retirement in 2010, Kuehn continued her ministry of care as the faith community nurse at St. Peter Parish in Jefferson City for 18 years. Today, she participates in a regional task force to advance faith community nursing and health ministries across 38 Missouri counties. Through her leadership, compassion and vision, Kuehn continues to embody the mission and spirit of Mizzou Nursing by improving health, uplifting communities and inspiring others to serve.

"The driving force throughout my tenure here at Mizzou was to provide, promote and expand graduate and undergraduate educational opportunities — collaborative practice with different areas of nursing and other health professionals, international experiences for undergraduates, greater awareness of and preparation to care for our aging population and the joy of serving others. Because of the support of family, faculty, staff and students during my time here, I feel these goals and dreams were not in vain."



Maria McDaniel Heyssel
Distinguished Friend of the School

Maria McDaniel Heyssel was part of the 1956 class of the University of Missouri School of Nursing and has remained a lifelong champion of nursing, education and service. During her years at MU, she was a freshman honorary with Mortar Board, a member of Kappa Epsilon Alpha and a senior women's honorary. Her connection with Mizzou Nursing began as a student and has continued for decades through her interest in and support of the school's progress and impact.

Heyssel's career reflects leadership across health care education, international medical collaboration and public humanities. Early in her professional life, she taught newborn care to Japanese wives and English to medical and nursing students in Japan while her husband served on an international medical assignment.

After returning to the United States, Heyssel began coordinating major international medical meetings and symposia to support global collaboration among physicians and researchers. During this time, she edited Swedish physician of internal medicine Jan Walderstrom's book, *Monoclonal and Polyclonal Hypergammaglobulinemia.*

Heyssel later expanded her work in education and public service. She earned a bachelor's degree, magna cum laude, in English from the University of Maryland, Baltimore County. There she was invited to join Phi Kappa Phi and given a key in 1973 before her graduation. Heyssel went on to serve as executive director of a statewide humanities and public policy organization in Maryland. In this role, she helped launch and lead grant programs that connected scholarship with community needs. Her work earned both a governor's citation and a citation from Bowie State College.

Throughout her life, Heyssel has remained connected to the Sinclair School of Nursing, following its growth and celebrating its commitment to educating future nurses. Her career and continued engagement reflect a belief in learning, leadership and service that extends beyond the classroom and continues to inspire the Mizzou Nursing community.

"During all of this, I was ever aware of the Sinclair School of Nursing. I read their publications and other articles and kept up with the progress made in research, patient care, home care, diseases and new treatments!"

2026 AWARD RECIPIENTS
BANQUET AWARDS CEREMONY REVIEW

2026 STUDENT AWARDS
7th Semester Student Award for Excellence — Austin Rush
8th Semester Student Award for Excellence — Kharis Andrews
RN-BSN Student Award for Excellence — Deborah Freemantle
MS(N) Student Award for Excellence — Kristin Baker
DNP Student Award for Excellence — Elizabeth Rolwing
PhD Student Award for Excellence — Kassi Maturino

2026 FACULTY & STAFF AWARDS
Staff Award for Excellence — Mary Younker
Faculty Award for Excellence in Research — Maithe Enriquez
Faculty Award for Excellence in Teaching — Jennifer O'Connor
Betty Crim Faculty Enhancement Award — Nicole Bartow

CHECK OUT ALL OF THE PHOTOS AT
flickr.com/photos/sinclairtigers/albums



Austin Rush and Truman

Save the Date

2027 MIZZOU NURSING ANNUAL AWARDS & ALUMNI WEEKEND

Reconnect with classmates, celebrate your legacy and discover how Mizzou Nursing is Leading Tomorrow.
Honored years: 1957 | 1967 | 1977 | 1987 | 1997 | 2007 | 2017

NURSING ANNUAL AWARDS BANQUET | FRIDAY, APRIL 23, 2027
NURSING ALUMNI REUNION | SATURDAY, APRIL 24, 2027

On Friday we will be honoring our 2027 alumni award winners, announcing our student, faculty and staff awards and inducting new annual and elevating Nightingale Gift Society members. Saturday will be a day to reconnect, reflect and explore at the alumni reunion. Keep an eye out for registration opening in early 2027.

Sinclair School of Nursing
University of Missouri

University of Missouri
Columbia, MO 65211

CALLING ALL ALUMNI!

Time to update your info

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