

Department of
Kinesiology and Community Health

KCH

2024 Honors and Awards



College of Applied
Health Sciences

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN

Program

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Message from the Department Head



Dr. Kim Graber

The outstanding degree programs offered by our department—in Kinesiology, Community Health and Interdisciplinary Health Sciences—are regarded as leading programs across the country and around the world. The excellence of our programs is enhanced and strengthened by the extraordinary students who enroll in them. Each year, we honor some of our most accomplished students with awards and scholarships that recognize academic distinction, personal and professional growth, and service to the campus and larger communities. We are deeply proud of this year's recipients, who have distinguished themselves through exemplary work and leadership in both academic and extracurricular settings.

As I read through all that you have achieved in your time with us, I feel especially proud that you have clearly demonstrated your commitment to the values that we hold dear in the Department of Kinesiology and Community Health and the College of Applied Health Sciences: justice, fairness, respect and compassion. You have shown your unwavering support for eradicating disparities in physical activity, health and health care, and for making healthy and safe communities accessible to all. Through your educational, research and outreach activities, you have affirmed our belief in the validity of diverse lived experiences, and in the importance of using them to inform our work.

I wish you bright and fulfilling futures. Whether you are continuing your journey with KCH or beginning a new phase elsewhere, I know you will continue to shine. You are and will continue to be esteemed representatives of this department wherever the future takes you. Congratulations!

Message from the Dean



Dr. Cheryl Hanley-Maxwell

Now more than ever, the world needs excellent practitioners, educators and researchers who dedicate their professional lives to improving the health and well-being of individuals, families and communities. Those of you who are receiving scholarships and awards this year will surely be among the leaders whose work enhances the quality of life throughout the lifespan and across our diverse society. As you apply your comprehensive, interdisciplinary understanding of human movement, holistic health and community contexts to addressing challenges to healthy living, you will make significant and long-lasting contributions to the betterment of our world, to the benefit of all.

I am so proud of each and every one of you, and so impressed by all that you have already accomplished in classrooms and research labs on campus and through hands-on learning experiences in the larger community. You have earned these awards through your hard work and commitment and in the process, have earned our respect and admiration.

Congratulations! May your futures continue to be defined by excellence, dedication, creativity and passion, and may your successes be many.

Reginald J. Alston Award for Excellence in Community Health and Rehabilitation

Community Health alumnus Travis Gayle (Ph.D., 2006) created this award in honor of his mentor, Dr. Reginald Alston. Preference is given to a student with a focus on rehabilitation, disability and chronic illness, with special preference for students who are applying, have applied or will apply scholarly work to clinical and/or practical applications within the community.



Rifat Binte Alam

“I deeply appreciate the support of friends and alumni who generously fund the awards. Their contributions play a vital role in recognizing and encouraging excellence among students as they pursue their research and scholarly works. As a final-year Ph.D. student in Community Health, my journey from a medical school in Bangladesh to working with older adults with dementia fueled my passion for research in dementia care.”

As a medical graduate from Bangladesh, Alam had the opportunity to provide healthcare to underserved communities, including older adults, which ignited her passion for researching cognitive health among aging populations. In her doctoral studies in community health, she is deeply committed to investigating the complexities of factors influencing cognitive decline, Alzheimer’s disease, and related dementias within diverse communities. Last year, she was selected as the Paul D. Doolen Scholar, a prestigious scholarship supporting aging research presented to by awarding two exceptional graduate students from the University of Illinois System. A member of the Aging and Diversity Lab, Alam’s focus is on investigating cognitive health and dementia factors among older adults, with a goal to address disparities through community health workers. In her free time, Alam loves music and exploring new places.



Kaustubh Vijay Parab

“This award gives me prime recognition and support, especially towards my graduation. I am grateful to have such support from the noble deeds of the sponsors. The award gives me a sense of immense support the university has built as the current students’ friends.”

Clinical epidemiology of chronic diseases is the area of research and practice that interests Parab. His goals are to understand the risk factors and health disparities and analyze preventive treatments to reduce the progression of Type 2 diabetes complications. He had a rich research experience with his wonderful mentors in the Department of Kinesiology and Community Health. Examples of recent research experiences include self-efficacy research with Harshal P. Mahajan, research assistant professor for the McKechnie Family Living in Interactive Future Environments (LIFE) Home research center, and food accessibility research with Assistant Professor Chelsea R. Singleton. Previously, he studied MPH epidemiology at the University of South Florida and medical school in India. In his free time, Parab likes to exercise, swim and sketch. He also enjoys running and biking on mountain and road bike trails in summer.



Adam Syed

“Healthcare is a field built on understanding and empathy for one another despite cultural, linguistic or physical barriers. I am honored to receive this award as it enables me to expand my cultural competence through studying abroad. I seek to apply these experiences to my professional work with Spanish-speaking communities and deliver personable quality care to those who have yet to receive it. Receiving the support of friends and alums of the department is a tremendous honor and a source of confidence. I am grateful for their generosity and their belief in my mission.”

Syed is pursuing a dual degree in Human Nutrition and Community Health at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. His passion lies in health equity and community well-being, exemplified by his involvement. Notably, Syed is the founder of the Cheese Club at Illinois, a vibrant student organization celebrating both the diversity of cheese and culture. In addition, he founded the Healthcare Book Club, a group addressing healthcare inequities and fostering interpersonal growth among pre-health students through reading. Syed’s experience extends to his role as a scribe at the Campaign County Christian Health Center, where he provides support to physicians during patient encounters. Concurrently, his research pursuits in the Human Factors Aging Lab, under KCH Assistant Professor Diego Hernández-Saavedra, delve into critical areas such as healthcare technology and exercise epigenetics. In his free time, Syed enjoys practicing archery, playing board games with his twin brother for some friendly competition, reading nonfiction literature, and spending time with family.

Jerry D. Burnam Student Scholarship

Established in 2015 by Dr. Jerry Burnam, who held the position of associate dean of Academic Affairs in the College of Applied Health Sciences for many years before retiring in 2000, the scholarship is awarded to students who are transferring or have transferred into AHS from another institution or another college within the University of Illinois. Preference is given to students who are first generation, have a history of community service, participated in the U.S. military or ROTC or graduated from an Illinois high school in a "low-sending" county.



Mariah Bates

"Receiving this award is a representation of my work as a student here at Illinois. This award represents an investment into my future and allows me to focus on my studies rather than financial burdens. I am truly grateful to the faculty and staff that make these scholarship opportunities possible for students. I'm happy to know that the generosity of others can make such a huge impact on this campus."

Bates is working toward a bachelor's degree in interdisciplinary health sciences and is on track to graduate by May 2025. After finishing her undergraduate degree, Bates plans to enroll in medical school, as she is driven by a passion for enhancing African American representation in the healthcare sector. In her time at Illinois, Bates has demonstrated strong commitment to community engagement. In addition to her organizational and leadership abilities, Bates possesses a compassionate and approachable personality, fostering connections with both her peers and those she assists. Bates has been playing tennis for six years and also enjoys reading. You'll likely catch her at the ARC working out or studying at the Illini Union on campus.



Vinh T. Vo

"I am sincerely honored to have been selected as a recipient of this award. I appreciate this award and thank you for the generosity of the donors as I wish to someday also give back to the community I grew up in. As a Parkland Pathway student transferring in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, receiving help from the department and donors has taught me the importance of validation and investment in oneself."

Vo plans to complete his B.S. in Interdisciplinary Health Sciences in May and continue his study toward an M.S. in Community Health. He aims to become an oral pathologist providing care for underrepresented and underserved communities. His passion for community-centered care stems from the populations he has worked with in his research experiences. Vo is an undergraduate research assistant in KCH Assistant Professor Sheena Martenies's Healthy Early Life Environment Lab. Vo's tasks involve conducting participant home visits in an intervention studying indoor air pollutants and inflammation in kids. Vo has volunteered at the local Carle Hospital and the Avicenna Community Health Center. He is a Dean's List honoree and a recipient of the I-LEAP Research Scholar Award. In his free time, Vo is a family caregiver for my family members, and enjoys listening to music, creating graphic designs and trying new foods.

Pamela C. Butler Scholarship

The Pamela C. Butler Scholarship, generously established by alumna Pam Butler, provides vital support to economically disadvantaged undergraduate students within the Department of Kinesiology and Community Health. This award embodies Pam's enduring commitment to fostering equitable opportunities and empowering aspiring scholars to pursue their academic dreams.



Jae'da Thompson

"Getting this award means so much to me as it will help me to continue on in my education as I plan to obtain a master's after completing my undergraduate degree in May 2025. This award helps to eliminate some of the financial burden that comes with pursuing higher education and I am so grateful to have been selected to receive it. I am beyond thankful for the generosity of the donors and alumni who continue to support the department."

Thompson's career goal is to become a psychiatric nurse practitioner. She has seen so many people within her family and in her community experience so many different mental health challenges, and she wants to play an active role in combating these issues. She currently works as a research assistant in LAS Associate Professor Sharde Smith's African American Family Stress and Resiliency Lab and is actively researching ways to address the mental health challenges that the African American community faces. Thompson has a passion for community service and has had various experiences volunteering at Crisis Nursery, Wesley Food Pantry, Carle Foundation Hospital and ClarkLindsey. She also does a lot of community service through the Mannie Lee Jackson Leadership and Enrichment Program (I-LEAP), where she serves as president of their student advisory board. She is excited to continue this commitment to service in her future career. In her free time, Thompson enjoys spending quality time with family and friends, watching movies, reading and trying out new restaurants.

Joanne M. and Charles M. Carraway Scholarship

This scholarship was established through a generous estate gift made by Robinson, Ill., native Joanne Carraway (PEW, 1951) and her husband Charles. Their endowment provides permanent financial support and recognition to students studying Kinesiology and Community Health.



Mariam Ajeigbe

"Receiving this scholarship means the world to me. I have wanted to pursue a career in medicine since the age of five, and this year I am faced with one of the biggest hurdles of my medical journey, the MCAT. I am currently self-studying for my MCAT, and with the financial assistance of this scholarship I will be able to maximize my studying. I greatly appreciate the continued support of the department and would like to thank you for fueling my career potential."

Ajeigbe is poised to graduate in May with a degree in interdisciplinary health sciences, specializing in health diversity concentration. Her career aspiration is to become a physician dedicated to advocating for and serving as a voice of underrepresented individuals in healthcare. Ajeigbe is an intern at the Crisis Nursery, and also serves as a summer intern at RUSH, pre-health ambassador at the Career Center, chemistry tutor for the Office of Student Minority Affairs, secretary of IHEAL, social chair of Vis-A-Vis and the diversity, equity and inclusion chair of PhiDe. In her free time, Ajeigbe bakes desserts for her baking business, Desirable Desserts. She also enjoys spending time with family and friends, cooking, watching TV, shopping and traveling.



Mary Ellen Mendy



Babatope Ogunjesa



Fatima Pantoja Lara



Yuritzy Tello Rocha

Joanne M. and Charles M. Carraway Scholarship continued

“I am a fourth-year student pursuing a Ph.D. in Community Health. Getting this scholarship means that I can have funding for study participants who will be recruited as part of my dissertation and pay off some credit card debts. Ever since I received the news, I have had a big smile on my face and it feels like a burden has been lifted off my shoulders. I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the donors for this award. With this award, my dissertation work on minority women’s mental health can be propelled to the next level.”

Mendy is from The Gambia, West Africa. She received her Master of Public Health degree at the University of Illinois Springfield. While working on her master’s degree, she received the Graduate Public Service Internship award, which gave her the opportunity to intern at the Illinois Department of Public Health for two years. This experience greatly helped pave the way for Mendy’s public health career. She is currently working toward a Ph.D. in Community Health, under the guidance of Associate Professor Sandraluz Lara-Cinisomo. Mendy is a member of the Laboratory for Emotion and Stress Assessment, where she assists with projects related to Latina women’s perinatal mental health. Mendy’s career goal is to work as a researcher, with a special focus on the intricate relationship between perinatal women’s mental health and gestational diabetes. In her free time, she creates content for her YouTube channel.

“I’m honored to receive your scholarship as a Nigerian student passionate about reducing health inequities. Your generosity empowers me to expand and present my research about unpaid caregivers of older adults. Despite initial cultural adjustments at Illinois, I’ve thrived thanks to Dr. Andiar Schwingel and my supportive lab community. With your scholarship, I can manage essential expenses (rent, food) and present my research at a caregiving conference!”

Ogunjesa, also affectionately known as “Kunle,” is a doctoral candidate studying community health under the supervision of KCH Associate Professor Andiar Schwingel. Passionate about empowering vulnerable groups, Ogunjesa’s research examines how socioeconomics, behaviors and culture impact health. He focuses on older adults and their unpaid caregivers. For his dissertation, Ogunjesa is investigating the obstacles preventing family caregivers from utilizing respite care services. By identifying these barriers, he hopes to develop interventions that promote equitable resource access to support unpaid caregivers. He has previously been honored with the Center on Health, Aging and Disability travel award for his research work and has volunteered at the Cornerstone Family Health Center in Chicago. Upon graduation, Ogunjesa aspires to embark on a career in academia. He enjoys keeping up with current affairs and watching documentaries on travel, culture and societies when he’s not immersed in academia. He also enjoys playing ping pong and beach walking.

“Receiving this award was a complete surprise. I was born in Guadalajara, Mexico, and lived there for 13 years. During that time, I found my love for medicine thanks to my parents. They were my inspiration to pursue a career in the healthcare field, and now that I am here, I can prove my capabilities to them. For this, I want to personally thank you for being so generous as to help me fund my education; it is never easy to be away from those you love most, but now, I am happy to know that I have a great support system here at Illinois.”

Pantoja Lara is working toward a bachelor’s in community health and plans to graduate in 2027. She plans to continue her studies in medical school. Advocating for minority populations in the healthcare field has always been a top priority for her, and working one-on-one with patients from different backgrounds can give her the experience she needs to recognize health disparities among. She is working as a research assistant in KCH Professor Wendy Rogers’ Human Factors and Aging Lab. Pantoja Lara’s duties include identifying best practices to recruit minority populations (African American, Hispanic, Asian American and Native American) that are late-deafened, have multiple sclerosis or have vision problems, as well as recognizing barriers that might prevent retention of participants. In her free time, she enjoys drawing—both traditionally and digitally—and taking outdoor walks. She also enjoys spending quality time with her family, listening to music and going out to eat.

“As a first-generation college student from Mexico who moved to the U.S. at 12, winning this award signifies a significant relief from the financial pressures I face. This scholarship not only assists in covering my higher education expenses but also underscores my unwavering dedication and proactive approach to shaping my future. I feel very fortunate to receive the support of friends and alumni of the department whose mission is to help students like me fund their education and provide recognition for their achievements.”

Tello Rocha is pursuing a master’s degree in health technology and is on track to graduate in August. After graduation she aims to develop products for individuals with disabilities, particularly older adults. Tello Rocha chose the University of Illinois for its comprehensive curriculum, focusing on human factors, user design and focus on older adults. The Disability Design class emphasized empathy design, altering her perspective on inclusive products. Outside academics, Taekwondo helps her de-stress and stay active. Post-graduation, Tello Rocha plans to enter the medical devices/pharmaceutical field. Her passion for advocating for underserved communities is noticeable in her current role as a translator at the Great Lakes Center for Farmworker Health and Wellbeing, where she translates documents and develops Spanish-language infographics for Spanish-speaking farm workers. In her free time, Tello Rocha enjoys participating in a variety of activities such as reading, listening to music, dancing, talking with my family, experimenting with diverse cuisines in the kitchen, hanging out with friends and participating in various sports.

Carol L. Chittenden Scholarship

Supported by gifts made by Carol Chittenden and her spouse Bill through the Chittenden Family Foundation, this award recognizes undergraduate students who have shown some professional promise, scholarship and service to their profession.

Frances Balto

“This award is an opportunity for me to focus on making the most of my last semester at Illinois through extracurricular involvement and academic endeavors. As a working student, financial support gifts me valuable time and energy to pursue advancements in all areas of my life. Having support from friends and alumni of the department who fund these awards programs reminds me that I will always have a community of supporters here at Illinois who recognize students’ achievements and truly want to see us thrive.”

Balto is scheduled to graduate in May with a B.S. in Kinesiology. She plans to pursue a master’s degree in occupational therapy at Mount Mary University in Milwaukee. Balto aims to work in pediatrics, specifically with children with disabilities and chronic conditions through early intervention programs. In the past three years at Illinois, Balto gained valuable experience at the Champaign Gymnastics Academy and Athletico Physical Therapy. These experiences have helped her understand the importance of rehabilitation and therapy, both preventatively and for recovery. Additionally, she participated in the Adult Development, Adaptation and Technology Lab under KCH Assistant Professor Shannon Mejia. This lab strives to find ways to integrate a biopsychosocial approach to developing and implementing health technologies for older adults. In her free time, Balto competes for Illinois’ club gymnastics team, Flippin’ Illini, and serves as the club’s president.



Camilo Jaime-Rivera

“Getting this award means the world to me. I can focus less on funding my education and focus more on what I really like to do, which is learning new things. This award is also a huge blessing for my parents because they work so hard to get me where I am today. Getting the support of friends and alumni of the department inspires me to give back to others in the future. I feel gratitude knowing that there are people looking out for others and I truly appreciate them.”

Jaime-Rivera is scheduled to graduate in May with a B.S. in Kinesiology and then will pursue a master’s in accounting. Ultimately, he wants to work toward a Ph.D. in Kinesiology so that he may study the effects of exercise on cognition, aging and biological processes. After transferring to the University of Illinois from his local community college, Jaime-Rivera dove into his love of exercise with kinesiology. After joining the START program during his senior year, he recognized his interest in research with the current work he does in the Human Factors and Aging Laboratory on campus. Jaime-Rivera is an active member of the student council for the College of Applied Health Sciences. There, he works to bridge faculty and students together to create meaningful opportunities for his peers. As a part-time barista at Starbucks at the Illini Union and a resident adviser at Illini Tower, Jaime-Rivera values spending time building new skills. In his free time, Jaime-Rivera hangs out with friends and often goes to the ARC to stay grounded and occasionally walks, runs and bike rides when it’s sunny out.

Community Health Alumni Scholarship

To support a student pursuing a degree in Community Health who shows professional promise, academic merit and a financial need. The scholarship is funded by generous alumni and friends of the Community Health program.



Brenda Galan

“Receiving this award is significant to me; as first-generation students, we often have to work multiple jobs. Having worked two jobs and balancing graduate school has been a superpower! The support of friends and alumni of the department has been a reminder of their support and vision for me as a future public health professional. I feel honored to know that they see my contributions to campus and beyond. It has been a reminder that imposter syndrome is only as powerful as you let it be.”

Galan is a first-generation student in the BS-MPH track. She will graduate this August, concurrently receiving her degrees. Proud of her Mexican heritage, her passions stem from her experiences as a daughter of immigrants. She has previously served as the Co-VP of Education for the Illinois Coalition Assisting Undocumented Students' Education (I-CAUSE) RSO, where she provided educational materials on immigration terminology and ally training for the campus community. Most recently, she served as a patient service representative with Promise Healthcare, where she was the first point of contact for primarily Spanish-speaking patients. The work she has been involved in has driven her passion for fighting against injustices. She hopes to impact children and families of diverse backgrounds and plans on entering the child and mental health sector. You can find her baking cakes, perfecting her matcha lattes at home, going for walks and watching Studio Ghibli movies in her free time.

T. K. Cureton Physical Fitness Research Award

Dr. Thomas Cureton (1901-92), often referred to as the “father of physical fitness,” was an internationally renowned scientist who played a crucial role in the development of the fitness movement in the United States. The T.K. Cureton Physical Fitness Research Award is supported by gifts made by Dr. Cureton’s wife Portia and friends and alumni of the department. Portia Cureton (1917-2010) received a master’s degree in Kinesiology from the University of Illinois in 1945.



Jihoon Choi

“I am immensely grateful to all the friends and alumni of the department for the donation and for supporting and helping students in need. I hope to contribute and provide valuable research interpretations through my personal experiences. In this sense, your support affirms my confidence that I can be a valuable researcher with great motivation. I truly appreciate your support.”

Choi is a doctoral student planning to complete his Ph.D. in Kinesiology by May 2026. His career goal is to become a professor at an academic institution where he can continue the study of sport in the dimension of social sciences. Choi is studying cultural and interpretive studies with KCH Associate Professor Synthia Sydnor. He is currently researching on the topic of golf and popular culture within the context of South Korea, with attempts to analyze sport-themed TV shows to understand the ways in which golf as a culture is being consumed in Korean society. Before embarking on his Ph.D. program, Choi amassed significant experience in golf, specifically completing the golf teaching professional course and qualifying for the ability test conducted by the Korean Professional Golfers' Association (KPGA). He also taught golf courses at Chung-Ang University where he obtained his master's degree.

Helga M. Deutsch Scholarship

Dr. Helga Deutsch (1938-93) served the Department of Kinesiology for more than 20 years as a professor, assistant department head and director of undergraduate studies. Established in 1994 by her family, the scholarship recognizes Kinesiology students who have shown scholarly merit, professional promise and financial need.



Joel Emil

“I am deeply grateful for the invaluable support provided through your generous scholarship. Hailing from India with immigrant parents, attending the University of Illinois has been transformative. Your belief in my potential fuels my determination to give back and pursue aspirations beyond graduation. Thank you for making my dreams a reality. Your impact is immeasurable.”

Emil is driven by a strong ambition to pursue a career as a physical therapist, specializing in sports and neuroscience. Employed as a personal assistant within the Beckwith Residential Support Services program, Emil dedicates himself to supporting student residents with physical disabilities. His responsibilities include facilitating exercise routines, assisting with transfers and aiding in everyday activities tailored to individual needs. In addition to his professional role, Emil serves as an undergraduate research assistant in KCH Associate Professor Chung-Yi Chiu’s lab. His research focuses on studying the transition of student service members and veterans from military to civilian life, while actively contributing to diverse projects aimed at enhancing understanding and support for this population. Emil’s commitment to academic excellence has been recognized through prestigious awards, including the James Scholar and the Carol L. Chittenden Scholarship Award. These accolades reflect his dedication to scholarly pursuits and his unwavering pursuit of knowledge in his chosen field. In his free time, Emil finds joy in life’s simple pleasures like cycling through scenic routes, camping under the stars, fishing in rivers and sharing laughter and stories with family and friends, creating lasting memories together.



Leah Jaber

“I’m incredibly grateful for receiving this award, which will hopefully help fund my study abroad to Greece, where I will explore interdisciplinary health studies. It means the world to me, as I’m passionate about understanding global health disparities and making a change. This scholarship is a huge relief, especially as a full-time student involved in extracurriculars. Thank you for this honor and support towards my academic journey.”

Jaber plans to complete her B.S in Kinesiology in May 2025. After her time at Illinois she seeks to complete her master’s degree to become a physician assistant. Becoming a PA is very important to Jaber as she aims to work in pediatrics to fulfill her dream of working with children, caring for their health and wellness. As a PA she will be professionally equipped to assist any healthcare professional as she plans to go back to her parents’ hometown and other countries that are medically deprived to provide free medical services, as she has done recently in Panama with Global Medical Training. Throughout her time at Illinois, she’s been on the executive board of the Kinesiology Student Association leading impactful events, fostering a sense of community and engagement among 100+ members and working as chemistry lab prep staff. She is also a research assistant for the Pedagogical Kinesiology Lab researching the importance of adaptive physical education. In her free time, Jaber likes to find new recipes to cook with her roommate, read books and find volunteering opportunities that she and the members of the Kinesiology Student Association can attend.



Kyle Wilson

“This award reminds me that there are always people helping others. That is what this world needs more of: people doing the best they can to help others succeed with them. I am very appreciative of this opportunity. I am thankful that there are people that have the means to help others and choose to do just that.”

Wilson is a senior in the kinesiology program and will graduate in May with a bachelor’s degree. He is working toward applying to medical school for orthopedic surgery and sports medicine. Prior to returning to school, Wilson spent eight years working in the U.S. Navy in the medical field. He is now a proud husband and father of two children: a boy and a girl. His driving force now is to create the best life for his family and to show his children that it is never too late to follow your dreams. Wilson is from Champaign and grew up with the desire to attend college as a Fighting Illini, so when the opportunity came he could not resist. He is thankful for the opportunity to represent this award, as it reminds him that there are others out there using their station to better the lives of others.

Beulah Drom Scholarship

Beulah Drom (1904-2003), a Kinesiology faculty member from 1947-70, was known by her students as the “teacher of teachers.” She was a pioneer in the field of body mechanics and movement. In recognition of her significant contributions, her colleague Dr. Alyce Cheska established the scholarship, which is supported through gifts made by friends and alumni.



Clarissa Harrington

“It is an honor to be selected for the Beulah Drom Scholarship. I cannot put into words how grateful I am for this opportunity. Getting this recognition has further motivated me to pursue my future goals. I am eternally grateful for the support of the friends and alumni in the KCH department. Their generosity is greatly appreciated and will not be forgotten.”

Harrington plans to obtain her BS-MPH by May 2027 and pursue a career in public health. Her career goal is to minimize the effects of health disparities and help close the large health equity gap that minorities face today. In the future, she would also like to pursue research focused on marginalized communities. Harrington works as an undergraduate assistant in KCH Associate Professor Naiman Khan’s lab, as well as at an afterschool program called DREAAM. Additionally, Harrington is vice president of Ewezo, Florida Avenue Residence Hall’s Black student council. She is also I-LEAP’s co-volunteer chair, a student advisory board located in AHS. In her free time, Harrington enjoys spending time with friends, going to the gym, listening to music and exploring campus.



Ariana Hightower

“I am so honored and thankful to be receiving this award. It means so much to me that my hard work and dedication have been recognized. I hope by earning this award I can show other students from underrepresented backgrounds that they are more than capable of reaching their goals, too. To have friends and alumni of the department support me on my academic journey feels amazing. Not only will this help me financially, but it has motivated me to continue working as hard as I can to reach my goals in life.”

Hightower plans to graduate in May 2026 with a B.S. in Interdisciplinary Health. Her career goal is to become a gynecologist. She is passionate about advocating for maternal health disparities for black women in the U.S. Harrington is in the spring 2024 pledge class for the pre-health fraternity Alpha Epsilon Delta. She also volunteers in the NICU at Carle Foundation Hospital and volunteers for Reaching and Educating America’s Chemists of Tomorrow. Her other campus involvements include RSOs such as Planned Parenthood General Action, which strives to educate students about reproductive rights and the resources available to them on campus, and Diverse Curlz which strives to uplift, educate and advocate for natural hair. In her free time Hightower enjoys reading, listening to music, shopping and spending time with family and friends.

Aurelio E. “Joe” Florio Scholarship

Providing financial support to undergraduate students in Community Health who demonstrate academic excellence and potential leadership as health educators, the scholarship is supported by the Florio family, alumni and friends. Professor Florio (1910-2001), a faculty member in Community Health for 40 years, was a well-regarded leader in traffic and driver education safety programs and served as the first president of the Illinois Driver Education Association.



Savannah Guzman

“Receiving this award is an honor, and it motivates me to continue to pursue my career goals and make a positive difference in the community health field. It feels amazing to know that I am so supported by the friends and alumni and have people that believe in me. I am so grateful for the generosity and support of the department who made this possible!”

Guzman is poised to graduate in May 2026 and plans to pursue a Master of Public Health. She has spent her undergraduate years gaining experience in research, volunteering at McKinley Health Center as a special populations peer educator, and being an ignite fellow tutor with Teach For America. Guzman is doing research in KCH Assistant Professor Rachel Hoopsick’s lab that utilizes epidemiological methods to understand the relationship between the mental health of healthcare workers and substance abuse through her epidemiological studies. Driven by a passion for addressing health disparities and inequities, Guzman is dedicated to furthering her knowledge and experience to make meaningful contributions to the community. In her free time, Guzman likes to crochet, play the ukulele, spend time with her family and listen to music.

Ralph Geeseman Scholarship for Veterans

Ralph Geeseman provided 39 years of service to the University of Illinois Department of Kinesiology. He was proud of his service to the College but also to his service in the United States Navy. Applicants must be students currently enrolled in the College of Applied Health Sciences who have either served in or are training for a branch of the U.S. military, or who are dependents of active members of the military.



Sam Bautista

“As a veteran, I take pride in having served and putting the needs of others before mine. It’s good to know that my hard work and sacrifices in the past have paid off. This award will support me in pursuing my academic journey so that one day, I will be able to help others again. It’s inspiring to see many people support the University of Illinois and its students. I’m thankful for their continuous support because it helps so many students each year pay for their way through college.”

Bautista is an Air Force Veteran and is pursuing a degree in community health. He plans to become a lawyer with special interests in corporate law and international law. He also has a considerable interest in global health and public policy. During his tenure in the Air Force, Bautista worked as a medical laboratory technician in various healthcare settings. His responsibilities included performing clinical laboratory testing and analyzing quality control data. In addition, Bautista also held leadership responsibilities in and outside the lab. His four-year service in the Air Force led to many individual and team achievements. Bautista spends his free time traveling anywhere. He finds happiness in exploring new places and hopes to travel around the world one day.



**Klayton
Donoghue**

Ralph Geeseman Scholarship for Veterans continued

“I would like to thank you for your gracious scholarship donation. I am grateful to be a two-time recipient of the Ralph Geeseman Scholarship for Veterans. It is always an honor to be recognized for my military service. This scholarship has provided me with much-appreciated financial support. After completing my physical education teacher certification, I intend on going to grad school and eventually earning my Ph.D. in order to have a career in higher education.”

Donoghue plans to complete his physical education teacher certification in fall 2024. After completion, he intends to become a physical education teacher in the Champaign-Urbana community. As a physical education teacher, Donoghue’s goal is to foster a positive physical cultural experience for students while empowering them to value and embrace all bodies. Prior to becoming a student at the University of Illinois, Donoghue was an aircrew egress technician in the United States Air Force for four years. He works as an undergraduate research assistant in the Pedagogical Kinesiology Lab, as well as an assistant facilities manager for the School of Literatures, Cultures and Linguistics. In his free time, Donoghue enjoys playing pickleball and video games with his friends. He also loves going to the movie theater.



Kyle Wilson

“This award reminds me that there are always people helping others. That is what this world needs more of: people doing the best they can to help others succeed with them. I am very appreciative of this opportunity. I am thankful that there are people that have the means to help others and choose to do just that.”

Wilson is a senior in the kinesiology program and will graduate in May with a bachelor’s degree. He is working toward applying to medical school for orthopedic surgery and sports medicine. Prior to returning to school, Wilson spent eight years working in the U.S. Navy in the medical field. He is now a proud husband and father of two children: a boy and a girl. His driving force now is to create the best life for his family and to show his children that it is never too late to follow your dreams. Wilson is from Champaign and grew up with the desire to attend college as a Fighting Illini, so when the opportunity came he could not resist. He is thankful for the opportunity to represent this award, as it reminds him that there are others out there using their station to better the lives of others.

Kathleen M. Haywood Graduate Kinesiology Scholarship

Dr. Kathleen Haywood (Physical Education, Ph.D., 1976) is a retired professor and associate dean emeritus who is an internationally known scholar of motor development. She has authored several books and articles on the subject, and has also published extensively on the instruction of archery. Established in 2022 by Dr. Haywood, the scholarship is awarded to graduate students majoring in kinesiology or physical education.



Sahel Moein

“I extend my gratitude for the impactful scholarship that has significantly brightened my academic journey at the University of Illinois. Coming from Iran, pursuing a Ph.D. in Kinesiology at this esteemed institution aligns perfectly with my passion for doing research on improving the well-being and quality of life among individuals with mobility disabilities. Receiving support from friends and alumni who generously fund the awards program is deeply meaningful. Their generosity highlights a strong sense of belonging to this university, and it serves as a powerful motivator for us to continue their legacy in the future.”

Moein is a first-year Ph.D. student in Kinesiology. She has completed her Doctor of Medicine degree at Shahroud University of Medical Sciences in Iran, and master’s degree in exercise science and kinesiology at Illinois. With three years of clinical practice in Iran, Moein actively contributed to public health during the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, her three years of research experience in rehabilitation science, both in Iran and the U.S., focuses on improving functional independence in performing activities of daily living, community participation and quality of life for non-ambulatory individuals with mobility disabilities. Moein’s dedication to impactful research underscores her commitment to enhancing the lives of those facing mobility disabilities. During her free time, she enjoys cooking and trying out new recipes. She also likes watching documentaries to learn about different things and expand her knowledge.



Gabrielle Ryan Strittmater

Kathleen M. Haywood Graduate Kinesiology Scholarship continued

“I am incredibly grateful to receive the Kathleen M. Haywood Graduate Kinesiology Scholarship award. I was selected to participate in the inaugural AIESEP Summer School for Ph.D. students in the fields of physical education and sport pedagogy at University of Jyväskylä in Finland in May. The funding received through the generosity of donors has greatly aided in the fees associated with this incredible professional development opportunity. The University of Illinois has provided me a home and family while I complete my Ph.D.”

Strittmater is a second-year doctoral student and serves as a teaching assistant on campus. She enjoys instructing kinesiology courses such as Coaching Strategies and Children’s Movement. Further, she is a research assistant with the Pedagogy Kinesiology Laboratory. During her time in the PKL, she has collaborated on various projects surrounding teacher socialization into physical education and physical education teacher education (PETE) programs. Her own research interests surround democratic teaching practices, meaningful physical education and teacher preparation. Upon graduation, Strittmater’s goal is to become a PETE faculty member. Along with teaching duties, she intends to continue research in PETE to better understand best practices. In her free time, she enjoys an array of physical activities. Although outdoor pursuits such as hiking and kayaking remain her favorite, she also loves cycling classes and pickleball. Time with friends and family remains central to her free time and, she says, nothing beats an overpriced latte and thrift shopping.

Laura J. Huelster Award

Laura Huelster (1906-86) was a faculty member in the Department of Physical Education for Women for 43 years, including 17 years as department head. Dr. Huelster was known for her leadership in changing the role of women in physical education. The Laura J. Huelster Award—which supports graduate students in Kinesiology who are working on their dissertations—was created to honor Dr. Huelster’s many contributions to the University of Illinois and the profession.



Andy Askow

“I am so thankful to receive this award. To me, this award is a confirmation that my dedication and commitment to our work is productive and recognized. This award is a reminder that we stand on the shoulders of giants and is a motivator to continually strive to be that giant for future students and researchers. More importantly, this award is a reminder that the hard work and long days are all in service of discovery. I am more than honored to have been chosen for this award and my hope is to continue to be the type of student deserving of his award.”

Askow is a Ph.D. student under the advisement of KCH Associate Professor Nicholas Burd in the Nutrition and Exercise Performance Research Group. He received his master’s degree from Texas Christian University with a dual concentration in exercise physiology and sport science. Askow came to the University of Illinois in fall 2019 with the goal of becoming a more well-rounded scientist and academic. Askow has published more than 25 peer-reviewed articles in a variety of journals and has been a co-investigator on a \$2.5 million Department of Defense grant. After graduation, Askow hopes to join a group he collaborates with at the Mayo Clinic in La Crosse, Wisconsin, as a principal investigator. His research interest is in identifying strategies for promoting functional independence and physical performance across the lifespan. In his free time, Askow enjoys working with his hands building, renovating and fixing things.



John Kim

“I am a fifth-year graduate student in Kinesiology and Community Health, working on a dissertation about health behavior’s impact on neurocognitive function. I am deeply grateful for your support and the opportunities it affords me to explore new ideas. Your generosity motivates me to pursue groundbreaking research. While I cannot say that my efforts will yield life-changing findings, I can say that these awards motivate me to work harder and venture into new territories. After graduating, I aim to continue studying the connection between body and mind.”

Upon obtaining his Ph.D., Kim hopes to continue in academia to understand the complex effects of health behavior patterns on neurocognitive health and function. During his off time, Kim enjoys reading and working out. He says he is fortunate to belong to an institution such as Illinois and the KCH department whose friends and alumni support the growth and development of graduate students such as him.



Yuliana Soto



Stephanie Voss

Benjamin H. Massey Memorial Award



Weiwei Li

Laura J. Huelster Award continued

“Being honored with this award is a powerful symbol of personal growth for me. Amid the challenges of a doctoral program, there are moments when we may find ourselves entrenched in survival mode, feeling as though our progress has stalled. Yet, I firmly believe that with unwavering passion and deliberate focus, the path to thriving becomes inevitable. My heartfelt gratitude goes out to all those who have contributed to the realization of this awards program. Your support has made this achievement possible, and I am truly grateful for the opportunity to be recognized in this way.”

Soto plans to complete her Ph.D. in Kinesiology in June 2024, prioritize physical activity engagement among underserved individuals, and lead her own physical activity and health equity research laboratory. Working with KCH Assistant Professor Susan Aguiñaga and HDFS Director/Professor Jacinda K. Dariotis, Soto’s research interests include promoting under-utilized forms of physical activity, such as yoga and mindful movement among Latinx youth. Yoga and mindfulness have shown positive results in decreasing depressive symptoms in adolescents, including additional physical and cognitive benefits for mental health. However, there is limited research on the impact of yoga and mindfulness on psychological distress and resilience among Latinx youth. In her free time, she enjoys learning new skills, varying from sewing to taekwondo kicks; spending time with family and friends; and training her fur baby, Kiba (a highly energetic white shepherd dog).

“It is a tremendous honor to be selected for the Laura J. Huelster award and I am immensely grateful for the financial support this award provides. This award will provide me the financial relief to complete my dissertation, and I am honored to have my work recognized. It is a humbling reminder that we do this work not just for ourselves, but to improve the health and wellbeing of all those who may be impacted by our research and I am immensely grateful to be a part of that journey.”

Voss is a doctoral candidate in kinesiology and is co-advised by Neha Gothe and KCH Professor Steven Petruzzello. She plans to complete her Ph.D. in spring 2025 and aims to pursue a career as a researcher and a clinician integrating the use of yoga and mind-body practices for chronic pain. Voss is also a licensed and practicing occupational therapist and certified yoga instructor, where she specializes in chronic pain management and has received additional training in the therapeutic applications of yoga. Her research interests are heavily informed by her clinical experiences in which she recognized the potential of complex multimodal practices, such as yoga, for managing chronic illness. These experiences sparked an interest in researching the underlying physical and psychological processes contributing to the health benefits of yoga-based practices in order to provide tailored intervention approaches to clinical populations. In her free time, Voss enjoys baking, practicing yoga, going on long walks/hikes, and reading.

This award was established by the family of Dr. Benjamin Massey, who was a faculty member in the Department of Kinesiology from 1969 until his death in 1990.

During his tenure he served as director of the Physical Fitness Research Laboratory and director of graduate studies, often helping his students financially.

Through this endowment, Professor Massey’s dedication to graduate students continues.

“This award not only recognizes my academic achievements, but also demonstrates my potential to contribute to rehabilitation by helping to regain the independence and self-confidence of individuals with disabilities. I really appreciate it.”

Li joined the DPQoL laboratory in fall 2022 and is pursuing a Ph.D. in Kinesiology. She received her bachelor’s degree in health science from Truman State University and her master’s degree in occupational science and therapy from Grand Valley State University. Her research aims to analyze physical engagement as a behavioral modification for stroke recovery and its long-term effect on the quality of life for stroke survivors, which includes social participation, community engagement and the ability to functional movement. Her goal is to conduct high-quality research for people with disabilities and advance scientific-based knowledge in clinical practice for underserved communities. Ultimately, eliminating health inequities, increasing community engagement and creating equitable outcomes in health education lead to self-advocating communities. In her free time, she loves spending time with her dog.



Ana Laura Selzer
Ninomiya

Benjamin H. Massey Memorial Award continued

“Receiving this award brings encouragement to continue doing research and recognizes all the hard work we do to advance the literature. It is an honor to be contemplated with this award, and this represents all the hard work my mentors, colleagues and I have done in the last year. I am very grateful to all donors for making it possible for my colleagues and me to be awarded this year. This is a celebration of good research being done and an incentive for much more to come.”

Selzer Ninomiya is a Brazilian Ph.D. student in the Kinesiology program. Her research focuses on promoting physical activity in vulnerable populations, with the partnership of community health workers. In Brazil, these workers are an integral part of the healthcare system and have an important role in addressing health inequities. Selzer Ninomiya hopes to share her expertise in this model with the U.S. healthcare system and help develop strategies for healthier communities, such as promoting physical activity. Her research interest focuses on strategies to increase physical activity levels to promote health equity. She is particularly interested in collaborating with community health workers to promote health education and healthier lifestyles in vulnerable populations, thus helping prevent chronic diseases in vulnerable populations. In her free time, she likes to go hiking and travel to explore new cultures.

Floyd and Etta McAfee Award

This award supports undergraduate students in the College of Applied Health Sciences who demonstrate a commitment to multicultural issues. The McAfee award was created by the family of Floyd (PEM 1957) and Etta McAfee to honor their parents’ 50th wedding anniversary and to recognize their parents’ lifelong commitment to helping students reach their potential.



Kristel Ong

“Getting this award is very significant for me because it means that I can help reduce tuition costs for my parents. I am extremely fortunate to have parents who are willing to support me not only emotionally, but also financially. Ever since I began attending college, the majority of their income has been going toward my tuition. It is extremely validating for friends and alumni of the department to recognize my experiences and achievements by giving me this award.”

Ong plans on graduating in May 2025 with her B.S. in Community Health with concentrations in health education and health planning and administration with a minor in Spanish. Prior to attending medical school, she will pursue a Master of Public Health to become more knowledgeable about improving the health of communities. She is passionate about addressing social determinants of health and strives to become a physician who helps in advancing health equity. Ong has been a hospitality and patient advocate volunteer at the Champaign County Christian Health Center since her sophomore year and was a previous outreach volunteer at Avicenna Community Health Center. She is very involved in her cultural RSO: the Philippine Student Association, where she is the vice president-external; co-director and co-founder of PSA Harana; FACT Hospitality chair; and FCN Kamayan co-director. In her free time, Ong enjoys spending time with family and friends, listening to music and playing video games.

Pam and Betty Milchrist Scholarship

Dr. Pamela Milchrist (Physical Education BS, 1965; PhD, 1979) is a retired professor emeritus and higher education administrator. Early in her career, she spent two years in Thailand as part of the Peace Corps (1966-68) and also volunteered in Cambodian refugee camps (1980). These experiences provided a foundation of cross-cultural experiences that helped define her life's work. She established the scholarship in honor of her mother, Betty Milchrist, to support graduate students pursuing Kinesiology Master's or Ph.D. degrees. Recipients are students who focus on physical activity and quality of life for aging populations. Preference is given to students who focus on cognitive health and/or social cognitive factors resulting from elderly participation in meaningful movement activities.



Imani Canton

"I am extremely honored to have been selected for the Pam and Betty Milchrist Scholarship. To receive the support of friends and alumni of the department feels like I have another community, in addition to family, friends, mentors and colleagues, rooting for my success. It is extremely encouraging to be recognized for my research in health equity through community-engaged research. It demonstrates to me that this type of research is deeply valued by the department and donors. It pushes me to keep tackling pressing societal issues, like health disparities, throughout my career and beyond."

Canton, whose adviser is Assistant Professor Susan Aguiñaga in KCH, is working toward her Ph.D. in Kinesiology, with an anticipated graduation in May. Upon graduation, she will attend an MPH program at Yale University, with full funding provided by the National Cancer Institute (NCI). Subsequently, she will begin as an NCI Cancer Prevention Fellow the following year. Canton's research focuses on increasing health equity through the design of culturally tailored, community-based physical activity interventions that target African American women. Her dissertation titled, "Tending to Our Roots to Increase Our Wellness" (TRIOWell), was an eight-week culturally tailored community gardening intervention to increase physical activity levels and improve psychological well-being among middle-aged African American women. In her free time, Canton enjoys taking walks while listening to true crime podcasts, reading, going out dancing, learning new makeup techniques, and watching reality TV.

Roger Winfield Morse Memorial Scholarship

This scholarship was made possible by an estate gift from Catherine G. Morse in memory of Roger Winfield Morse, who graduated with a degree in Physical Education in 1934. The scholarship is awarded to students showing academic and professional promise.



Sydni Branch

"I want to thank the alumni, donors and faculty members of the Department of Kinesiology and Community Health for contributing to the awards program and for directly showing support to the students to pursue their passions. I chose kinesiology because I enjoy learning about human body movement and function in relation to how it impacts quality of life. This scholarship motivates me to stay committed on the path of mentorship, community service and becoming a healthcare professional. Thank you for your support in my future endeavors!"

Branch's ambition is to continue her education with career plans of becoming a physician. She aspires to pursue further education with a goal of becoming a physician. It has been a goal of hers since her early introduction to health and science. Driven by her early exposure to health and science, Branch wants to contribute to making healthcare more accessible to those in underserved populations. For the past year, Branch has dedicated her time as a student volunteer at Carle Hospital. Additionally, she has actively assisted in the Teaching Kinesiology Laboratory, focusing on the scholarship of teaching and learning. In her free time, Branch enjoys traveling, working out and spending time with her friends and family.



Tammara
Quevedo

Roger Winfield Morse Memorial Scholarship continued

“Being the daughter of two Mexican immigrants meant traveling between our home country, Mexico, and the U.S. This experience allowed me the opportunity to be surrounded by extreme poverty, where witnessing individuals with missing limbs is the norm. That was the moment I knew that in the future, I wanted to help individuals with disabilities live more prosperous lives. I feel so blessed and grateful to have been given the support of friends and alumni who have helped students, like myself, to never give up on achieving dreams that will one day be a reality.”

Quevedo is a first generation Mexican-American who has always been active in sports, academics and volunteer work. During her time at Illinois, Quevedo has been conducting research on the use of “inclusion” in various articles to discuss individuals with disabilities and their participation. As a James Scholar, she has been able to do research on caffeine’s effect on athletic performance, adapted rowing for individuals with spinal cord injuries and different types of prosthetic legs. She also works as a Richard Chavez Ambassador of La Casa Cultura Latina to expand the Latinx community on campus. She also hopes to further her research on prosthetics in adaptability in sports at Northwestern University. She would like to eventually create her own nonprofit to provide prosthetics across Latin America. In her free time, she enjoys swimming, rowing, spending time with friends and family, being outdoors, painting and reading.



Jake
Whitver

“I am grateful beyond words to be receiving the Roger Winfield Morse Memorial Scholarship, and I am very grateful to be in the position I am in at the University of Illinois. This scholarship provides immense financial support and also reassurance that my hard work and dedication is worth it. I am honored to be selected for this scholarship and will use it to fund my education and career moving forward. I am from Chicago Heights and I chose to study kinesiology because I’ve always had a passion for sports and physical activity. This scholarship means so much to me, and provides a lot of support for me and my family.”

Whitver is an undergraduate student from Chicago Heights, Illinois, majoring in kinesiology and planning to graduate in May 2025. After graduating, he plans to attend PA school, with a career goal of becoming a physician’s assistant, having a speciality in orthopedics or sports medicine. Whitver recently had the privilege of attending a study abroad trip in Cape Town, South Africa, where he and a group of fellow students had the opportunity to shadow and volunteer in a health clinic. While there, they assisted doctors and nurses in basic medical procedures, while being able to learn and absorb knowledge about the medical field. This knowledge will be ample in his continued pursuits of becoming a PA. In his free time, Whitver loves spending time with friends and family. He plays a lot of sports such as basketball and volleyball, and also lifts weights. He loves being outside, and also spends a lot of time enjoying food.

Ann E. Penstone Scholarship

The Ann E. Penstone Scholarship is a testament to alumna Anni Penstone’s gratitude for her time at the University of Illinois. This prestigious scholarship recognizes and supports undergraduate and graduate students in the Department of Kinesiology and Community Health. Anni created the scholarship to enable future Illini who are willing to be challenged and work hard to realize all their potential.



Meghan Vanasco

“Getting this award has helped take some of the financial burden off of my future goals of pursuing my master’s degree. I am incredibly grateful for the award and the recognition of my hard work that it represents. Continuing on to graduate school presents not just increased schooling, but also the potential barrier of remaining a student for years to come, and having this scholarship has taken some of that stress off my future plans.”

Vanasco will graduate in May with a bachelor’s degree in interdisciplinary health sciences. After graduating this May, she plans to continue working as a patient care technician at Northshore Evanston Hospital while applying for graduate school to become a physician assistant. Vanasco has been an AHS James Scholar since 2022. As a freshman, she was a SPARK scholar in the Body Composition and Nutritional Neuroscience Lab, where she was able to present research in the Undergraduate Research Symposium. In college she has served as an intern at Promise Health Care as a medical assistant and volunteered on the outreach committee for Avicenna Community Health Center. Working with these clinics allowed her to experience working with diverse health communities and supporting non-profit work in healthcare. In the future, she hopes to pursue a career as a physician assistant in order to continue working with diverse communities while blending health education with patient care. In her free time, Vanasco likes to read or engage in self-care.

Karin A. Rosenblatt Community Health Graduate Scholarship

Dr. Karin Rosenblatt (1954-2021) was a longtime faculty member in the Department of Kinesiology and Community Health. Her research focused on environmental causes of gynecologic cancer and led to multiple publications and national presentations. She especially enjoyed teaching at both the undergraduate and graduate level. The fund was established through a generous estate gift from Dr. Karin Rosenblatt to support graduate students in the field of community health.



Sadia Anjum
Ashrafi

“I am extremely thankful to the funders for their donations. Their extremely valuable contributions have played a crucial role in supporting my works and enabling me to make a meaningful impact in this field. I come from Bangladesh and want to help my country, which doesn’t have enough community health experts. This scholarship is a huge encouragement for me in this phase of my life. I really want to thank the funder for encouraging my attempts to promote health among the underserved via this opportunity. This award will inspire me to continue my efforts to promote health equity.”

Ashrafi is set to defend her Ph.D. in spring 2024. She has a strong passion for research, mentoring and teaching and aims to pursue her career in academia after finishing her Ph.D. Ashrafi is affiliated with the Aging and Diversity Lab, where her research is supervised by KCH Associate Professor Andriara Schwingel. Ashrafi is committed to advancing cultural competency in chronic kidney disease care through her research efforts. Her dissertation research was awarded the prestigious Innovation Fund grant in 2022 by the National Kidney Foundation in Illinois. She holds the distinction of being the inaugural recipient of the Karin A. Rosenblatt Community Health Award in KCH, a recognition she has successfully upheld for two consecutive years. Ashrafi is a pharmacist by profession, and besides research, she is also involved in health promotion and programming through McKinley Health Center and the Family and Graduate Housing. In her free time, she loves to cook, eat, travel, volunteer and spend time with her family.



Benjamin M.
Campbell

“Being a first-generation college student, I often struggle with imposter syndrome in many spaces. Receiving the support of friends and alumni of the department, however, is immensely powerful for me, as I hear those around me affirming and encouraging my path. I view this award as a confirmation that I am on the right path, I am learning what I am meant to learn, and that my future is bright.”

Campbell is a Ph.D. student in Kinesiology and Community Health who will be working with State Rep. Carol Ammons. Campbell is studying youth substance use, nature access and health policy. Campbell’s research focuses on the intersection of policy, community and youth substance use. His project focuses on policies that affect youth substance use and policies that impact the social determinants of health and their effects on substance use. In addition to his studies, Campbell holds a Policy and Research Legislative Fellowship through the Center for Social and Behavioral Sciences. Through this fellowship, he works with an elected state representative to provide policy expertise and research in multiple areas, most notably higher education enrollment, pre-K-12 education, criminal justice and budgeting projects. Through this opportunity, Campbell has presented to legislative caucuses and helped shape active legislation that is currently under consideration. In the future, he wants to work on ways to make policy participation more accessible for everyone, especially youth and all who are systematically denied access while being the most impacted by policy. In his free time, he enjoys hiking and gardening, cooking and baking, reading and spending time with his dogs and his partner.



Keyana
Diaz

“I chose to pursue a Ph.D. in Community Health because I want to make a long-term positive impact in the mental health field, specifically for Black children and adolescents who have experienced adverse childhood experiences. I would like to thank the donors of this scholarship for helping me further advance my research graduate student career with this award, because of you all, I am more motivated and inspired to pursue my dreams in research and academia.”

Diaz is a first-year Community Health doctoral student with plans to complete her Ph.D. by May 2028. She wants to teach and mentor students in academia and create a positive long-term impact in the mental health field. Under the guidance of KCH Associate Professor Robyn L. Gobin, Diaz is interested in how Black children and adolescents are impacted by and cope with adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). She is conducting research regarding the expansion of the ACEs framework, measurement and assessment. In her free time, Diaz volunteers at the Crisis Nursery, a facility that is dedicated to preventing child abuse and neglect through providing an “Island of Safety” to children and families in the Champaign-Urbana community. When she is not doing research, homework or grading, she watches football, works out, volunteers with kids, goes on walks and hangs out with friends.

Robert L. Sprague Graduate Student Award

This award is supported through generous gifts made by Dr. and Mrs. Robert Sprague. Dr. Sprague joined the faculty in 1964 and retired after 36 years of service in 2000. In creating this award, Professor Emeritus Sprague and Mrs. Sprague help defray thesis expenses of graduate students in Kinesiology.



Shreya Verma

“Receiving the Robert L. Sprague Graduate Student Award feels incredibly gratifying and motivating. This recognition not only validates our efforts and dedication but also instills a deep sense of pride to be associated with such a nurturing and supportive community. I am extremely grateful to the sponsors of this award for their support and for honoring our efforts. Despite personal challenges last year, including my father’s cancer diagnosis, receiving this award has eased financial stress and renewed my motivation to excel in my field. I’m deeply grateful to the sponsors for their support.”

Verma is a second-year Ph.D. student in Kinesiology and a research assistant in the Neurocognitive Health Behavior Lab led by KCH Associate Professor Naiman Khan. During her time in the lab, she has been primarily involved in the data collection and analysis of the study investigating the relationship between stress, arterial health and cognition. She also assisted Khan on the conceptualization and development of a research proposal focused on predicting health outcomes using machine learning approaches, which has gained funding from the Personalized Nutrition Initiative. Her research interests include understanding the vascular underpinnings of brain health, as well as, developing AI-empowered precision interventions (diet/physical activity) to improve brain function. Beyond her research, she enjoys practicing Hatha and Kundalini yoga, listening to podcasts, watching documentaries and spending time with family and friends.

Seward C. Staley Scholarship

This award is intended to support undergraduate students who are enrolled in a curriculum in Kinesiology studying physical education. Scholarship recipients are selected on the basis of academic merit with priority given to those students who show a special interest in the field of Physical Education and to those students demonstrating a financial need.



Trinity Brown

“Getting this award means a lot to me. It gets me on the right track financially and mentally because now I don’t have to carry the stress of school bills. Receiving the support of friends and alumni of the department gives me hope that one day I could be in the position to give back like ones did for me at my university. I am very thankful for the support of friends and the alumni of the department.”

Brown is a dedicated student whose passion for her future and commitment to success are evident in her pursuits. She is on track to graduate with a B.S. in Kinesiology by May 2026. With a clear vision of becoming a physical therapist, she demonstrates unwavering determination and diligence in her endeavors. Brown is a student who is very passionate about her success and future. She plans to pursue her dreams as a physical therapist with hard work and dedication, of course. While at the University of Illinois, she has become a Department of General Studies ambassador and a member of the PT program. Brown is driven to have a drive for helping people in need, regardless of the circumstances. In her free time, she likes to write in a journal because it keeps her mind from overflowing, and it gives her peace.



Julia H. Cox



Thalia Skoulikaris

Ronald G. and Patricia L. Stopka Scholarship



Stella Emezue

Seward C. Staley Scholarship continued

“This award means so much to me that I can find some financial relief and pour more time into my education and the opportunities that this university has to offer. I am overwhelmed with gratitude for the alumni and others of the department who have made this opportunity possible. Your support means the world to me.”

Cox intends to graduate with a B.S. in Kinesiology in May 2027 and plans to pursue a career in the health and wellness industry. She is a part of the Kinesiology Student Association, which strives to promote physical activity and its benefits to the community, as well as a James Scholar. Back at home she volunteers at Cornerstone Farms which uses equine therapy to help underserved communities in the greater St. Louis area. This work has inspired her in the power of movement and led her to study kinesiology at the University of Illinois. She is excited to see where her education leads her. In her free time, Cox enjoys hiking and other outdoor activities with friends as well as reading. She is especially passionate about helping her loved ones find the medium of exercise that is most enjoyable to them.

“Receiving this award alleviates my family of six from financial hardships as we work to put four children through college. I am beyond grateful to have received this award and feel motivated to continue to pursue my goals at the University of Illinois. It feels incredible to be supported and valued by the kinesiology department and its alumni. With their help, I am able to thrive and be inspired by a community full of supporters.”

Skoulikaris is a sophomore on the pre-physical therapy track, majoring in kinesiology and minoring in modern Greek. Upon her undergraduate graduation, she plans to attend graduate school with the goal of becoming a physical therapist who specializes in sports medicine. This semester, Skoulikaris volunteers as a student observer at Athletico Physical Therapy in Champaign. She enjoys witnessing treatments and understanding the path to full health and rehabilitation. With her background as a USA Gymnastics competitive gymnast, Skoulikaris is also a gymnastics coach and third-year certified lifeguard. She holds immense value in the power of athletics and the community it creates. Outside of studies and work, Skoulikaris values her Greek upbringing as a member of her university’s Orthodox Christian Fellowship, Hellenic Student Association and the Pancretan Youth Association of America. She also enjoys camp counseling in the summer at her local Greek Orthodox camp.

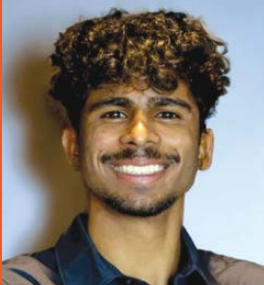
Ronald Stopka received his Bachelors (’62) and Masters of Science (’64) in Physical Education from the College of Applied Health Sciences at the University of Illinois. He and Patricia established this scholarship to support students in the College of Applied Health Sciences.

“Receiving this award means more than words can describe. It serves as tangible evidence that the effort I’ve invested has not been in vain and affirms my potential to achieve my aspirations. Receiving the support of friends and alumni of the department is an incredibly uplifting experience. Their support goes beyond financial assistance; it symbolizes a community rallying behind my educational pursuits.”

Emezue is on track to complete her bachelor’s in interdisciplinary health sciences this May and aims to further her education by obtaining a M.S. in Public Health in May 2025. Her professional aspirations center around becoming an OBGYN, driven by a commitment to bridge the healthcare gap and enhance public health outcomes in underserved communities. Serving as the secretary of the African Cultural Association and a member of the National Association of Colored Women’s Club, Emezue actively contributes to community engagement. Her volunteer work at Carle showcases her dedication to hands-on involvement in healthcare settings. Additionally, as a research assistant working with School of Social Work Professor Karen Tabb Dina, Emezue has delved into diverse research methodologies, collected data and conducted surveys in the field of public health. In her free time, Emezue manages her own makeup business, “Stella’s Touch,” catering to clients in the Urbana-Champaign and Chicagoland areas. What initially began as a hobby has blossomed into a thriving venture.

Marianna F. Trekell Scholarship

This scholarship was established by Richard F. Schweig (Kinesiology, 1981) to honor his mentor Marianna Trekell (1926-2004), a faculty member in the Department of Physical Education. Professor Trekell was well known for her expertise in oral history research and the history of sport, teaching and mentoring countless students throughout her 30-year career.



Kevin Saju

“I am very honored and grateful to have received this award. This is a very big accomplishment of mine to be recognized for all of my hard work. I am very grateful to receive this amount of support from friends and alumni. This award will help me stay inspired and thrive in my future education. Without the support of friends and alumni, this would not have been possible.”

Originally from Kerala, India, Saju made the transition to Naperville, Illinois, in 2016. He is pursuing admission to a chiropractor school with a keen interest in specializing in youth sports development. Having previously worked with the high school track team, he brings a wealth of experience to the table. His outstanding athletic achievements, including being thrice recognized as an All-State athlete in IHSA Track and Field, highlights his dedication and skill in the realm of sports. Additionally, his role as the social coordinator for the Illinois Track Club showcases his commitment to fostering community within the sporting realm. In his free time, Saju likes to play sports, video games, cook, fish, watch movies, go shopping, drive around, lift weights, play card games with his friends and go out to eat.

Agnes Radich Vidovic Award

Agnes Radich Vidovic received a B.S. in Physical Education from the University of Illinois in 1951. She taught physical education from 1952 to 1990 when she retired from teaching. Mrs. Vidovic has been an active member of the College of Applied Health Sciences and University of Illinois Alumni Boards throughout her career. The Agnes Radich Vidovic Award is presented to an outstanding junior or senior student in the Department of Kinesiology and Community Health who has shown scholarly merit, professional promise, and financial need.



Amy Ni

“Receiving this award helps me to continue pursuing my education and goals. With this scholarship, I feel like it symbolizes all the hard work from the past years. This award meant that people saw potential in me, and I will use that as my motivator to continue dedicating myself to healthcare. I am extremely appreciative to those who supported my academic career and the mentors who guided that process. I want to thank the alumni of our department who helped me with my professional goals.”

Ni is planning to finish her BS-MPH degree and hopes to work in epidemiology after graduation. Her goal is to work on more meaningful research, public health initiatives and push for adequate healthcare. She hopes to close the gap between healthcare and communities in her career. In the past year, Ni worked on redesigning visualizations for chronic conditions in the Human Factors and Aging Lab. She also volunteered as a student educator at the McKinley Health Center and worked on distributing on-campus resources for those facing food insecurities. In her free time, Ni enjoys journaling and designing. Additionally she likes cooking and making coffee.

Kenneth L. Watkin Scholarship

Dr. Kenneth Watkin was the founding Director of the Center on Health, Aging and Disability, a faculty member at the College of Applied Health Sciences, and also held appointments in the Beckman Institute and the College of Medicine before retiring in 2016. Dr. Watkin's research interests included the development of nanoparticles for drug delivery, imaging contrast agents for image guided therapy, and cyber-physical systems for health monitoring and therapy; high resolution 3-D multimodal brain imaging; and nanomedicine. This memorial scholarship was established by his wife, Dr. Tanya Gallagher, the former dean of the College of Applied Health Sciences.



Brandon Snipe

“Being selected for this award has motivated me even more to continue pursuing my passions. During times when I doubt myself or my abilities, this will serve as a reminder that there are people who believe in me. I am incredibly honored to receive this award and have always deeply appreciated everyone involved in the department. AHS has provided a place for me to grow, and I am grateful to be surrounded by such a supportive community.”

Snipe is pursuing a bachelor's in community health and a master's in public health with plans to attend medical school. He has a passion for bridging gaps created by systemic inequities and hopes to provide care that is both affordable and accessible in the future. He serves on the leadership team of Avicenna Community Health Center, a clinic that provides free services to underinsured and uninsured individuals. He has explored research interests regarding health equity at Mayo Clinic through the HERE program and works under KCH Assistant Professor Shannon Mejía in ADAPT Lab. He interns for Integrated Health Disparities within Illinois Extension and looks forward to seeing how this experience will further shape his perspective. In his free time, Snipe has grown as a self-taught dancer over the past seven years, posting videos online and hoping to continue this alongside his professional pursuits. On campus, he leads K-Project, a K-pop performance group, as head artistic director and president.

APPLIED
HEALTH
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Edmund J. James Scholars

The The Edmund J. James Scholars Program, named for the fourth president of the University of Illinois, is the honors program within the College of Applied Health Sciences. The program recognizes undergraduates who have achieved academic excellence and provides them with unique learning opportunities. The following students in the Department of Kinesiology and Community Health are 2023-24 James Scholars.

Community Health

Afnaan Afsar Ali
Aliviyah Allen
Shayna Andrews
Grace Antonesi
Anushri Bhanderi
Melanie Buynack
Jiayin Cai
Lauren Couri
Alexandria DeVinney
Eden Drajpuch
Eghonghon Eromosele
Matthew Franzen
Lillian Gilles
Evan Gower
Yoel Gros
Savannah Guo
Claire Hull
Saa'im Jamal
Nelson Jimenez
Nicole Khoma
Parker Knippa
Alyssa Kosek
Lauren Kruchten
Caitlyn Lam
Joyce Li
Sofia Logacho
Sofia Marin
Zara Mkrtychian
Fiona O'Brien
Rose O'Grady
Favour Ojerinde
Aditi Patel
Ami Patel
Juliana Petrov
Aarushi Raathor
Ramiro Ramirez
Matthew Rodi
Emily Rodriguez
Isabel Roman
Fernanda Romero

Sabeen Sadruddin
Jocelyn Salazar
Zachary Sievers
Brandon Snipe
Taylor Spiff
Emily Springer
Manasi Tanikella
Regan Toole
Anika Urbonas
Anna Vanisko
Suhasni Venkatsubrahmmian
Deeya Wadhvani
Jadyn Walker
Emily Wang
Dianne Winterbottom
Nitya Yelakanti
Kelly Yu
Nicole Zagone
Angela Vladimirova

Kinesiology

Shadya Abdelrahman
Celina Abdi
Zachary Abrams
Mia Adeoti
Sydney Aguila
Vanessa Aguilar
Fatemah Ahmed
Mariam Ajeigbe
Syed Ajmal
Leena Ali
Arshiya Anand
Angela Anum
Syed Sinan Anwar
Suzanne Arizmendi
Licona
Hadassah Asama
Christopher Atadero
Abby Bass
Grace Bernholdt

Saiesha Bollapragada
Amber Bou
Olivia Burns
Emily Butryn
Angela Chahine
Natalya Cheema
Elijah Chi
Kristin Cho
Jina Choi
Dona May Chong
Elenna Claudio-Deutsch
Elle Couri
Renee Crawley
Dhruthi Daggubati
Simone Daly
Sohini Dash
Monserrat De Leon
Brenda De Souza
Soares Da Rosa
Georgia Diamond
Stella Emezue
Aija Espinoza
Lillian Fransen
Alanis Garcia
Lucy Goldsmith
Maya Gregoire
Kate Gronlund
Claire Grossen
Wain Guo
Janaina Herrera
Jocelyn Hipolito
Katherine Hopkins
Jennifer Hou
Jade Huang
Andrew Hurst
Emma Huseman
Nia Innis
Sonali Jain
Christian Joseph
Anne Kienle

Grace Kim
Katherine Kondelis
Manav Kordia
Madison Lamphear
Emily Lata
Peter Lauer
Phoebe Lee
Timothy Lin
Hiba Mirza
Caroline Moskalewicz
Kamalika Nandyala
Fatima Naveed
Kasey Nguyen
Drake Niles-Cox
Hannah Nordquist
Alan Oliva
Noah Olivero
Kaitlin Olsen
Allison Page
Iris Page
Abigail Paik
Renee Gen Pantaleon
Ava Pappas
Anjali Patel
Victoria Perkowski
Nicole Piekarski
Lauren Pugeda
Moises R Cuevas
Hanvita Ramineni
Lizbeth Ramos
Annalisa Ranallo
Sophia-Rose Raval
Madison Reeder
Isaac Roller
Cecilia Rosa
Brielle Ross
Delilah Salzinski
Mackenzie Schuler
Kristina Serrano
Arya Shah
Sheza Shaikh

Dana Shuaibi
Avneet Singh
Brianna Sirdich
Mali Sullivan
Eldrick Surheyao
Jaeda Thompson
Savannah Trax
Meghan Vanasco
Julia Vexelman
Valerie Weinschenker
Kaitlin Wengler
Alexa Worthley
Elyssa Wuerrfel
Haroon Yasir
Sarena Yeung
Pedro Young
Maxim Zagorski
Daniela Zamarron Diaz
Jennifer Zhao
Ella Zick

Interdisciplinary Health Sciences

Fangyu Cao
Jacqueline O'Brochta
Mohamad Abdeh
Samuel Adeoye
Jennifer Aguilera-Martinez
Alexis Anaya
Ethan Ashley-Ferguson
Sophia Bach
Cole Basden
Isabel Bemont
Carson Berg
Megan Berry
Kelly-Anne Bickhart
Allison Braaten
Genavieve Braden
Mary Bresnahan
Sarah Bruch
Jayna Burger

Additional Recognition

Lydia Burger
Emily Catsaros
Aubrey Cervantes
Gangyuan Chen
Rafia Choudhry
Julia Cichowski
Jack Colgan
Logan Covolo
Julia Cox
Carson Crum
Gabriel Da Silva Ostrander
Alexander Dekker
John DeNardo
Eesha Dhingra
Mia DiBraccio
Natalia Duarte
Moudar Dweydari
Joel Emil
Kaitlyn Ewald
Jillian Fanning
Ayaan Faruqui
Damian Garcia
Maeve Geraghty
Nathaniel Gordeuk
Dong-In Han
Matthew Hargrave
Samaria Harris
Sydney Hartwig
Nico Henley
Ashland Henson
Alex Hernandez
Austin Hickey
Sean Holbrook
Victoria Hostetler
Megan Houlihan
Stephanie Hu
Bree Hubacher
River Hudon
Meagan Hughes

Ellie Isermann
Collin Janusz
Claire Kakac
Ashley Kim
Jacob Kirk
Juliana Knies
Michael Knipp
Lydia Kohlenberger
Olivia Kosla
McKayla Kuznieski
Veronica LaSota
Janna Elyssa Laxamana
Madison Lockhart
Briana Luna
Kendell MacDonald
Shae Madula
Jennifer Maguire
Elizabeth Martinez
Josmi Mathew
Elizabeth Matimore
Trent Matthews
Caroline McDevitt
Gary Mei
Jenna Meisinger
Johan Montag
Katherine Moy
Saahas Muthineni
Katherine Naveja
Abigail Nawa
Haley Neudorf-Alshanski
Brianna Osmon
Ayden Packard
Jacqueline Palmer
Vincent Palumbo
Jina Patel
Emily Paulus
Kathryn Petersen
Liam Potenberg
Lillian Prendergast

Daniela Pule
Tammara Quevedo
Audrey Rexford
Camryn Rodrigues
Savanna Rudy
Rahil Sadruddin
Ariana Sanchez
Caleb Santiago
Julianna Schenkel
Audrey Schissler
Trevor Sexton
Sydney Shannon
Jakob Sheppelman
Kira Skoufos
Kyle Smorynski
Seongju Song
Lainey Spiewak
Julia Stelter
Asha Suresh
Nicole Tellez
Katherine Thompsen
Sharon Tolliver
Artur Trela
Eleni Tryfonopoulos
Kathryn Wendt
Leah Wilson
Hubert Wirtel
Jeremy Wong
Emily Wood-Smith

Master of Health Administration

Applied Practice Experience Leadership Award

Austen Bozarth
Kendall Reams-Parham

Carle Capstone Award

Olivia Scheibly

Master of Science in Health Technology

Class of 2023 Michael Vitoux Capstone Excellence Award

Faith Washington, first place
Carson Smith, honorable mention

Class of 2024 James K. & Karen S. McKechnie Fellowship in Applied Health Sciences

Michael Varzino

Class of 2024 Michael Vitoux Health Technology Scholarship

Laelaf Hailu

Health Technology Innovator Scholarship

Okoro Jude Chinyere
Laelaf Hailu
Charles Lotspeich
Camryn Lynn
Yuritzy Tello Rocha

Master of Public Health

May 2023 Graduates

Outstanding Applied Practice Experience Award

Tsatsral Enkhbayar

Outstanding Integrative Learning Experience Award

Rebecca Craddock
Evan Gustafson
Blashko Milenkovski
Moin Vahora
Max Wallace
Nic Wyatt

August 2023 Graduates

Outstanding Applied Practice Experience Award

Farina Alam
Ashley Cathro

Outstanding Integrative Learning Experience Award

Aalishba Ahmad
Ife Atunnise
Jeremy Brown
Kate Green
Rebecca Madden
Maris Wszalek

December 2023 Graduates

Outstanding Applied Practice Experience Award

Kacie Vlach

Outstanding Integrative Learning Experience Award

Josh Silvestre
Ashley Cathro

Applied Health Sciences Student Council

Emily Butryn, *President, (Interdisciplinary Health Sciences)*
Tasdiq Kahn, *Vice President, (Community Health)*
Crizaber Cruz, *Communications Chair, (CHLH, student graduated in December 2024)*
Anika Thota, *Programming Chair, (CHLH)*
Dana Shuaibi, *Service Chair, (IHLT)*
Mei Beechen, *Apparel Chair, (CHLH)*
Maritza Concepción, *(CHLH)*
Camilo Jaime-Rivera, *(Kinesiology)*
Renee Crawley, *(IHLT)*

James Scholar Advisory Board

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Jennifer Zhao, (IHLT)
Rahil Sadruddin, (KIN)

KCH Awards and Honors Committee

Laura Rice, chair
Mina Raj, co-chair
Chung-Yi Chiu
Kristen DiFillippo
Beth Frasca
Patty Hudek
Sandraluz Lara-Cinisomo
Amy O'Neill
Andrea Wisdom

I-LEAP Advisory Board

Fall 2023

Rahil Sadruddin (KIN)
Aubrey Cervantes (KIN)
Tera Sparks (IHLT)
Denise Diaz (CHLH)
Alexandra Carbajal (SHS)
Montserrat Ponce (CHLH)
Bea Benavent (KIN)
Jae'da Thompson (IHLT)
Samyla Williams (IHLT)
Nicole Roddan (IHLT)
Julia Wronska (CHLH)
Ishan Patel (KIN)
Talitha Akoto (CHLH)
Tasdiq Khan (CHLH)
Emily Butryn (IHLT)

Spring 2024

Clarissa Harrington (CHLH)
Jesiah Bradshaw (KIN)
Natalia Duarte (KIN)
Stephanie Hu (KIN)
Jada Johnson (CHLH)
Kedzie Griffin (RST)
Tolu Aremu (IHLT)
Sam Adeoye (KIN)



**College of Applied
Health Sciences**

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS URBANA-CHAMPAIGN