

Summer 2024

UIS TODAY

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS | SPRINGFIELD

Jay Reyes

**Modeling the spirit of
cooperation, collaboration
and consensus building**

**UIS takes an
intelligent
approach to AI**

UIS TODAY

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Jay Reyes, '97 CPAE, JD '04 UIUC, is chief counsel for the
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Photo by Lloyd DeGrane

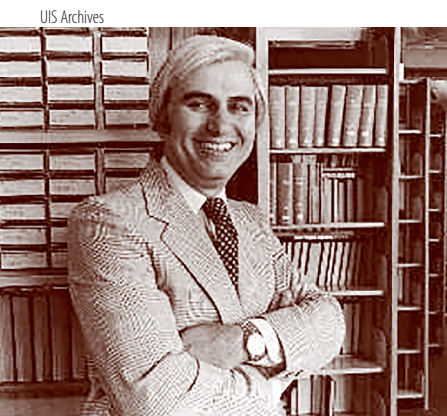


Lloyd DeGrane

Common Ground

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Janet L. Gooch

From the **Chancellor**

Good Work in Motion

Active learning proves to be a key component to preparing graduates for future endeavors

“UIS is committed to providing an environment conducive to learning, discovery and collaboration. This is where innovation comes strongly into play for us.”

Dear alumni and friends,

Happy summer! We had an exciting spring semester at UIS, and while the summer months are typically a little calmer on campus, we have plenty of good work in motion. I am eagerly anticipating the exciting developments on the horizon!

We capped off the semester with three amazing Commencement ceremonies for 1,051 students (out of 1,625 eligible graduates!) in Sangamon Auditorium. This year, we made the decision to move Commencement from downtown Springfield back to campus, and our planning committee’s hard work certainly paid off. The energy on campus was contagious! In addition to the formal ceremonies, we celebrated our 2024 grads throughout campus, with unit- and department-level festivities, activities in the Student Union, photo ops throughout campus and much more.

We are so proud of our 2024 graduates and were thrilled to see a 26-percent increase in the number of eligible graduates this year. This is a testament to the tenacity of our students to work

toward their goals and our ongoing retention efforts to support them on their chosen paths. These individuals are now proud UIS alumni and off to use their new U of I degrees for great things.

One of our University’s strongest attributes is our approach to experiential learning. As part of our mission, we work to ensure that students are provided with a student-centered educational experience, both in and out of the classroom, with active learning a key component to preparing graduates for their future endeavors.

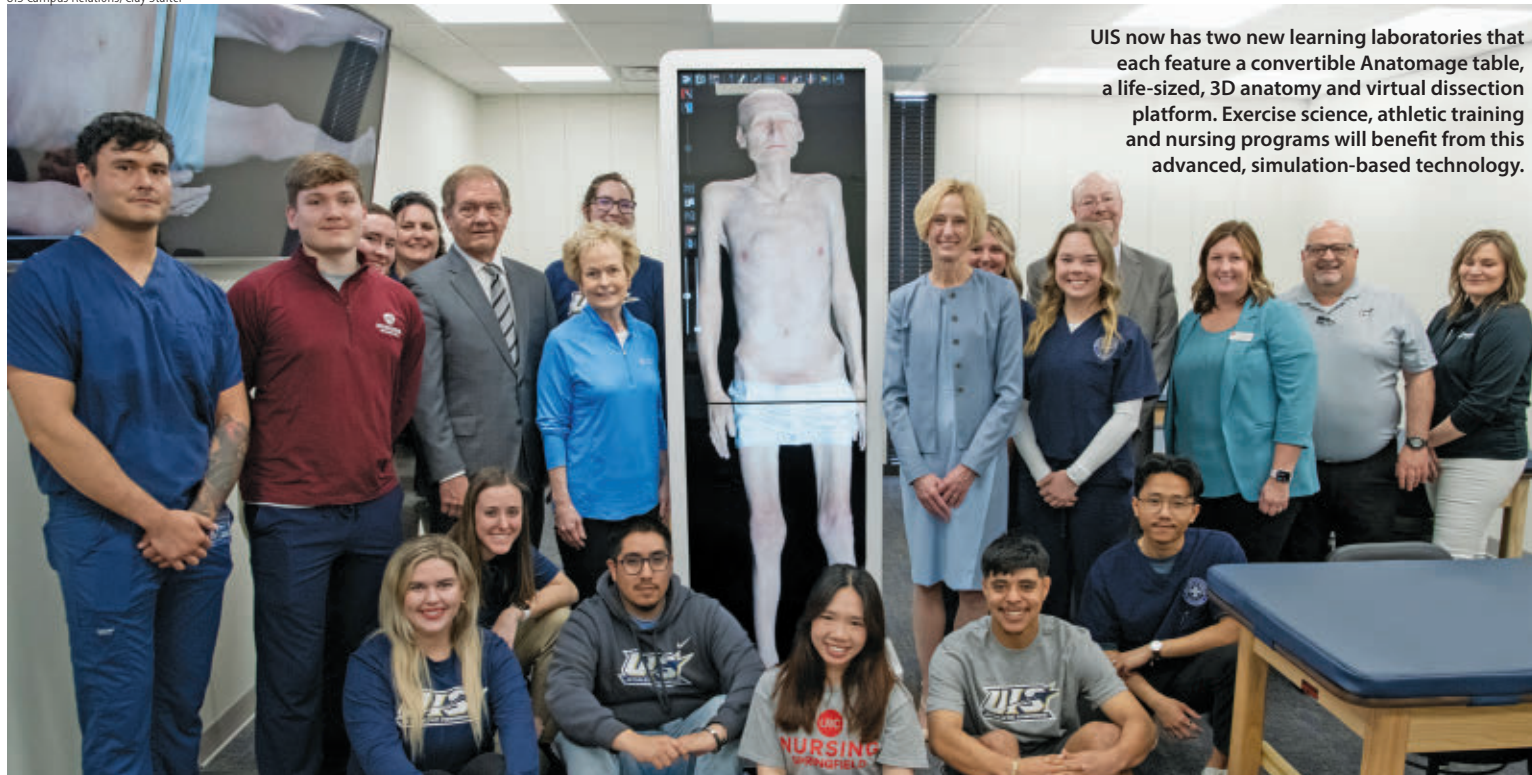
UIS is committed to providing an environment conducive to learning, discovery and collaboration. This is where innovation comes strongly into play for us. We’ve made exciting progress around our innovation programming, which is simply skyrocketing and will further support our goals to attract more students to UIS.

In January 2023, we launched the Orion Lab, a high-tech laboratory in our Health Sciences Building that serves as a vibrant hub of research, education and recreation where students can explore their ideas and bring them to life through physical objects. The space is outfitted with advanced technology and equipment—such as 3D printers, laser cutters and engravers, as well as computing resources—all intended to enhance problem-solving, creativity and critical-thinking skills. The development of this space was led by faculty and staff expertise with support from the community.

Within the community, Rob Kerr, executive director of innovation and opportunity, and **Ben Hage, MPA ’12**, director of Innovate Springfield, are leading the way with our innovation programming. Under their leadership, the successful Sangamon CEO program for aspiring high-school entrepreneurs is now part of our Innovate Springfield programming. Starting in the fall, Capital Area Career Center students will have access to a new high-tech lab in downtown Springfield—modeled after the Orion Lab—as part of a Rapid Prototyping class. By merging the

The Orion Lab, a high-tech laboratory in the Health Sciences Building, is outfitted with 3D printers, laser cutters and engravers, as well as computing resources.





UIS now has two new learning laboratories that each feature a convertible Anatomage table, a life-sized, 3D anatomy and virtual dissection platform. Exercise science, athletic training and nursing programs will benefit from this advanced, simulation-based technology.

resources and expertise of UIS and Innovate Springfield, we will prepare the next generation of innovators and problem-solvers while exposing them to our hands-on approach to teaching and learning.

Rob and Ben's vision for workforce development and economic vitality is really exciting, and I can't wait to see more of their ideas—and there are a lot of them!—become reality.

We were also excited to open our new Esports Arena last fall in Founders Residence Hall. This is yet another space made possible by employee expertise paired with community support. The arena is a state-of-the-art gaming space that allows Prairie Stars to compete virtually against other collegiate teams, as well as play recreationally—but it is so much more than a gaming room. Students who are involved with esports develop skills they can use both inside and outside the classroom, such as STEM-related strategic thinking, planning and time management skills and teamwork. We are so proud of this new space and all it has to offer, including support of our enrollment goals and increased engagement with our online students—some of whom come to campus specifically to use this space and have engaged more meaningfully with UIS than they would have otherwise.

Earlier this year, we recruited Professor John Ferry through the Distinguished Faculty

Recruitment Program. With his leadership, we are working to renovate space in the Health Sciences Building to establish a Centralized Equipment Facility for Teaching and Research in Science. This project will focus on acquiring new lab instruments that are crucial for revitalizing the hands-on aspects of the College of Health, Science and Technology's academic curriculum. Students who have the opportunity to engage with this state-of-the-art equipment throughout their coursework will acquire skills sought after by both employers and researchers.

The Centralized Equipment Facility project was part of our Strategic Investment Fund (SIF) initiative, which has helped fund other innovative ideas intended to help spur enrollment and support retention, either through curriculum reform, creation of new programs that meet workforce needs or revitalization of learning spaces to enhance experiential teaching and learning.

As part of another SIF proposal, and with support from Memorial Health, we recently completed the construction of two new learning laboratories that each feature a convertible Anatomage table, a life-sized, 3D anatomy and virtual dissection platform. Students in exercise science, athletic training and nursing programs will benefit from this simulation-based advanced technology, and it will put UIS ahead of most competitors

offering similar degree programs, making it an attractive recruitment tool.

So far, UIS has approved eight SIF projects, with more dynamic and innovative proposals under review. SIF is a system-supported initiative in response to the University's recent academic reorganization, and we are grateful for this opportunity to jump-start some truly amazing ideas intended to make UIS more attractive to an even larger pool of potential students who value hands-on learning opportunities.

Finally, I'd like to share my sincere thanks to outgoing Vice Chancellor for Advancement Jeff Lorber, who retires in July, and UIS Legal Counsel Rhonda Perry, '93 UIUC, JD '98 UIUC, who recently was promoted to deputy university counsel for the UI System. Both Jeff and Rhonda have been valuable colleagues who have spent a significant part of their careers focused on making UIS the best it can be. Under Jeff's leadership, we recently completed the most successful campaign in University history. And I can't begin to express how important Rhonda's valuable advice has been to me these past two years. I wish both of these wonderful individuals the very best in their next chapters.

Have a wonderful summer and fall,

Janet L. Gooch, Ph.D.
Chancellor



Prairie Stars
News

Paving the Way for Future Generations

"The graduates of the Class of 2024 will now join the ranks of over 44,000 living alumni. I hope they stay engaged with their Alma Mater and share their UIS experiences with future Prairie Stars. Our alumni play an important role in shaping our community and the world, embodying the values and education they received at UIS while paving the way for future generations of students. I am incredibly proud of the accomplishments of the Class of 2024. I can't wait to see where their journeys will lead." —Chancellor Janet L. Gooch, *State Journal-Register*, May 3, 2024





Thanks to the Prairie Promise, entering students from Illinois will be eligible to have the cost of their remaining tuition fees covered for up to four years, after MAP grant and other merit and/or need-based aid is considered.

The Prairie Promise

Covering tuition and mandatory fees for the state’s entering freshmen

The University of Illinois Springfield has announced a bold, new initiative. The Prairie Promise will cover tuition and mandatory fees for qualifying Illinois residents who enter the University in Fall 2024.

“The Prairie Promise symbolizes our dedication to ensuring that every qualified student in Illinois benefits from the profound impact of education,” says Chancellor Janet Gooch.

A program set to welcome new, first-time freshmen starting in Fall 2024, the Prairie Promise covers remaining tuition and mandatory fees (based on 15 credits per semester) for students who receive the MAP (Monetary Award Program) grant with AIM HIGH as well as UIS merit and/or need-based aid. Pell grants, donor scholarships and any other gift aid will be in addition to the Promise.

The program has been developed to expand access to college education while closing achievement gaps and helping more students from different backgrounds.

To qualify, students must be an Illinois resident, enroll as a first-time, first-year student, maintain full-time enrollment, have Illinois MAP Grant eligibility and receive MAP Grant funds, and be enrolled in a fully on-campus academic program.

Students will be eligible for the Prairie Promise for up to four years of continuous, full-time enrollment, as long as they meet all renewal criteria. —David A. Scott

Future Ready Teaching

The School of Education has received a \$145,000 grant from Grow Your Own Teachers (GYO) to develop a consortium to address teacher shortages in central Illinois. The grant, titled Future Ready Teaching: Thinking Critically, Acting Boldly and Inspiring Brilliance, seeks to empower and cultivate a pipeline of skilled, critically minded and committed teachers.

Partnering institutions in the GYO grant consortium include UIS, Richland Community College, Springfield District 186, Decatur District 61, Decatur Public Schools Paraprofessional Union and the Springfield Urban League. Together, the organizations share a mission to foster educational equity and inspire lifelong learning among students, particularly in historically marginalized communities.

Beginning Fall 2024, the School of Education will use the GYO funds to award up to 15 forgivable loans worth \$25,000 to UIS junior and senior teacher candidates who plan to teach in Springfield or Decatur for five years.

"Investing in education is investing in the future of our communities," says Beth Hatt, School of Education director. "This grant will not only help address critical teacher shortages, but also will empower educators to make a lasting impact on the lives of students in central Illinois."

To support participating students, the program will offer various wraparound services, including stipends to cover costs related to childcare, transportation, housing and meals. Additionally, candidates will have access to technology resources such as laptops and printing facilities. A summer bridge program will orient new students to the campus and program, helping them establish crucial networks and relationships within the School. —Blake Wood



UIS is partnering with several area educational institutions to offer Future Ready Teaching, including Springfield District 186 schools, led by UIS alumna Jennifer Gill.

Angel Investing

Innovate Springfield, the University's downtown business incubator, partnered with Illini Angels to present an educational workshop on angel investing. Angel investing involves individuals providing financial support to early-stage startups in exchange for equity, aiming for a return on investment as the company grows.

The event offered a chance to connect with fellow angels and to gain insights into early-stage investing, as well as glean advice from seasoned investors on their strategies.

Illini Angels comprises a formidable group of investors with expertise in investment practices, innovation, company development, networking and fostering impactful relationships. The organization boasts members hailing from all three universities in the UI System.

The organization aims to accelerate the growth of startups and established businesses, provide a collaborative workspace and foster a vibrant entrepreneurial community. Innovate Springfield currently supports 80 member companies that have added more than 280 jobs to the local economy. —Priyanka Deo Jain

UIS
by the
Numbers

1,051

Number of students from the University's Class of 2024 who "walked" in this year's three Commencement ceremonies.

1,625

Number of UIS students eligible to graduate as members of the Class of 2024.

27%

Increase from 2023 in the number of students eligible to participate in this year's Commencement.



Model Government

UIS students earned recognition as the outstanding large delegation at the Model Illinois Government (MIG) simulation held in March at the Illinois State Capitol and Wyndham Springfield City Centre. The UIS delegation competed against students from 14 colleges and universities across Illinois. MIG gives them the chance to serve as legislators, staffers, lobbyists, journalists and officials of the executive branch. Through committee actions, a regular legislative session and a veto session, participants learn the legislative process by actively participating in the simulation.

"This was a record year in terms of a delegation receiving awards, and I couldn't be prouder of the UIS team," says Ken Owen, MIG faculty advisor and CLASS interim associate dean. "Everyone contributed to the award, and had a remarkable commitment to learning about and understanding the democratic process."

The UIS delegation took home seven individual awards:

- Dakota Gordon of Bradley won the Outstanding Member of the House of Representatives award
- Caleb Grover of Stonington received the award for Outstanding Member of Staff
- John Kennedy of Oakdale was named the Outstanding Committee Chair in the Senate

- Joel Lemmert of Dixon was honored with the Outstanding Contribution to Model Illinois Government award
- Samuel Moore of Moweaqua received the Outstanding First Year Delegate in the Senate award
- Lucas Schilling of Valmeyer won the Outstanding Whip in the Senate award
- Tyler Vollintine of Rochester was honored with the Outstanding Whip in the House of Representatives award.

During the 2024 simulation, Lemmert served as governor and Alex Rankin of Davis Junction was the speaker of the house. In the House of Representatives, Gordon served as majority leader, Abbie Hasty of Alton was the majority whip and Vollintine acted as minority whip. In the Senate, Moore was the minority leader, Kennedy the minority assistant leader and Schilling the minority whip. Hasty and Kennedy also served as committee chairs.

"For my final year with Model Illinois Government, it was truly an honor to stand in the well of the House of Representatives and lead debate on real pieces of legislation already discussed by the real legislature," Rankin says. "To be in that hall and lead those debates with such an amazing group of people was the best way that I could ever ask to end my time with the organization." —B.W.



UIS competed against student delegations from 14 colleges and universities from across the state to win recognition as the outstanding large delegation at the 2024 Model Illinois Government simulation. Prairie Stars also held key positions such as governor, speaker of the house and minority whip.

UIS Campus Relations/Clay Stalter





Lisbeth Leños



Leños serves as special assistant for governmental and legislative affairs for Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle. "Under her leadership, we were able to pass the first really comprehensive Cook County pension bill—which now is being used as the driver for the Illinois pension fix," Leños says.

True Believer

Lisbeth Leños shows how civic engagement can solve problems—even the pension crisis

By William S. Bike

State and local government officials across the country wring their hands over pension funding crises, with the average public pension plan unable to cover a quarter of its obligations to current and former employees. In 2023, however, Illinois' Cook County developed pension reform that will increase funding to 100 percent within 30 years. Experts are calling it "historic."

UIS can claim a piece of that history, thanks to **Lisbeth Leños, '13 CPAE**, as well as lessons Leños learned in a course she took with UIS political science professor, Michael Richardson.

"He talked about the broken Illinois pension system, how it's underfunded, the technicalities of cost-of-living adjustments and revenue," Leños says. "At the time it was overwhelming."

Leños currently serves as special assistant for governmental and legislative affairs for Cook County Board President Toni Preckwinkle. She says, "When President Preckwinkle brought up pension reform to me, I already knew the issues because Prof. Richardson really took time to explain it." Leños was well-versed in "the antidotes and the technicalities behind [the issue]," and could bring them home to those involved.

"Under President Preckwinkle's leadership and our great team, we were able to pass a really comprehensive Cook County pension bill—which now is being used as the driver for the Illinois pension fix," Leños says.

Passing the county pension bill required coordination with state government. Leños' job is to serve as liaison to Preckwinkle and Chief of Staff Lanetta Haynes Turner to coordinate various initiatives and programs with the federal and state governments, as well as between other Cook County officials.

Learning Engagement at an Early Age

Leños has come a long way from her days as a public school student at Curie High in Archer Heights, a Southwest Chicago neighborhood. "I was in the non-profit Mikva Challenge, which allows inner-city students who don't have exposure to civic engagement to participate at an early age."

Leños' involvement resulted in an internship with then-State Sen. Iris Martinez. That internship prompted the daughter of Mexican immigrants to go to college and major in political science at the University of Illinois—either at Urbana or Springfield.

Former associate chancellor for constituent relations **Ed Wojcicki, MA '01**, wanted Leños to study at Springfield. "He took the time to say, 'You know Lisbeth, come down to Springfield to visit the campus. I will personally show you around. I know you will love it here,'" she says, Wojcicki was right.

"Even though it's a public university, you also get that private school experience because your professors and administrators know you," Leños says.

While at UIS, Leños interned at and was hired by the Illinois Dept. of Employment Security, where she served as legislative affairs director and eventually acting chief of staff. Leños moved on to working for Cook County in 2019.

Keeping Connections

Leños keeps her UIS connections strong. She is a member of the UIS Alumni Board and retains close ties with her friends from college days.

"I was working full time while I was a full-time student, and I gravitated toward people who resembled that," she says. "Every Friday, we had a cooking date where we would make a meal, catch up, do homework, watch a movie and de-stress. We continue to do that in a different way, still meeting for breakfast to catch up. Long-term friendships really came out of UIS and those Friday potlucks."

She also keeps her connection to her parents, José and Odilia Leños, strong. "They truly are the force that fuels me," she says. "With the pension bill, I had my ups and downs, and they reminded me that life isn't easy. Just keep going. They keep me grounded and make me a better person. They remind me that the reason I'm in public service is to help people who look like me."

Her parents made her a true believer in the credo, "if you don't like it, then fix it," Leños says. "I think now, more than ever, we're noticing the importance of civic engagement. We can't blame low-information voters without helping them to get educated. Instead of complaining, get involved. That makes you part of the conversation and gives you a seat at the table. I truly believe that is power." ■



Lesson Plans

History Buff

For Wepner Distinguished Professor of Lincoln Studies Graham Peck, the past takes shape in many modes

This is my fifth year at UIS. I taught for 17 years at St. Xavier University in Chicago. My book, *Making an Antislavery Nation: Lincoln, Douglas and the Battle over Freedom*, was published in 2017 by the University of Illinois. It was a finalist for the Lincoln Prize, which is the preeminent national and international prize for the best book on Civil War history and President Lincoln.

In my methods course, which is for history minors and majors, the focal point is Elijah Lovejoy, not Lincoln. We look at his murder in 1837. It was made abundantly clear to him that his life was in danger if he didn't stop publishing his abolitionist newspaper in Alton, Ill. They destroyed three of his presses, and he kept ordering new ones. Finally, they killed him. Why did he keep publishing the *Observer*? My students use primary sources to develop their own answers to this very interesting question. They get training in historical methods and interpretation.

I'm going to teach a new course this fall called Podcasting History for students in history and in communication and media. The students will work in two-person teams. Each team will transcribe, annotate and write an essay about a document chosen from the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum (ALPLM) archives. We will arrange for historians to do 30-minute interviews with every team. The teams will then edit this audio material and their own narration into 15-minute podcasts. There's the possibility that the ALPLM, the Center for Lincoln Studies and even National Public Radio will make some of the podcasts available digitally on their websites. That will be a great opportunity for students to produce something that goes on their CVs. People will say, "Wow. I can click this, I'm listening to NPR and it's your podcast."

In 2021, I began work on an interdisciplinary project, funded by the University of Illinois, to make original art that reflected Lincoln's contemporary legacies. We had 20 artists from across Illinois who came to monthly discussion sessions on Zoom. We exhibited the art in the fall of 2022 in Springfield. It's now on display at Northern Illinois University. The digital exhibit is on my website [civilwarprof.com/art]. Among the works are pieces by artist Nathan Peck (no relation), who transported Lincoln into photographs of the 1960s, including the famous spacesuit shot of astronaut Gordon Cooper. I've got a six-foot version of Space Abe. My wife likes it. It goes with the colors in our living room very nicely. —Mary Timmins

Edited and condensed from interviews with Graham Peck on March 21 and 22.

David Scott



Twenty Illinois artists debated Lincoln's legacy in group sessions and created works of art that reflect our 16th president in his many roles, including pop icon, emancipator and and military leader.

Editions of Abe

Lincoln inspires an art exhibit that tours Illinois

Making Our History: Artists Render Lincoln's Legacies is an exhibition of works by 20 Illinois artists that was co-curated by the University's Brytton Bjorngaard, director of visual arts and associate professor of graphic design, and Graham Peck, Wepner distinguished professor of Lincoln studies. Project funding came from a joint venture between the Center for Lincoln Studies and the University of Illinois Presidential Initiative: Expanding the Impact of the Arts and Humanities. It opened at UIS in 2022 and recently completed a March through May run in the Northern Illinois Art Museum in NIU's Altgeld Hall.

The artists' works consider Lincoln in many lights, not all glowing. For *Dodging Tool #16*, Kelly Kristin Jones photographed a statue of Lincoln *in situ*, then removed it from the final print, calling into question the over-romanticization of his legacy.

Other aspects of Abe portrayed include Lincoln as family man, politician, military leader, emancipator, icon, saint, pop culture figure and cultural artifact. The works include paintings, photographs, sculptures and videos. Each is accompanied by an essay written by Peck. —*David A. Scott*

Works pictured, clockwise from top left: *The Melancholy That Followed*, Jordan Fein; *Pillar of Light*, Judith Joseph; *Lincoln's Journey*, David Hinds; and *I Will Become All One Thing or All the Other*, Danny Houk.



Athletics



Erin Egolf has been involved with the UIS women's soccer program in three capacities: as a student athlete (left), an assistant coach and—since 2016—head coach of the Prairie Stars (right).

Outstanding Athlete and Coach

Erin Egolf looks back on 15 years with UIS women's soccer

By John Jaramillo

Erin Egolf, '13 CBM, MBA '15, is moving on to serve as an assistant head coach for women's soccer at Illinois State University.

For the last 15 years, Egolf has been involved with the UIS women's soccer program in three capacities: as a student athlete, an assistant coach and—since 2016—head coach of the Prairie Stars. From being the program's all-time leading scorer to its all-time winningest coach with 53 victories and counting, Egolf played a significant role in all but two of the team's seasons.

Born and raised in Springfield, Egolf started playing soccer when she was 3 years old. She starred at Glenwood High School in Chatham

and for the St. Louis Soccer Club.

Egolf started her college career at NCAA Division I Illinois State, where she was a Missouri Valley Conference All-Freshman Team selection. When her first semester ended, she craved a different campus experience.

UIS began the women's soccer program two years before Egolf enrolled in 2010. She found UIS to be the perfect combination of high-level competition in the Great Lakes Valley Conference and a family atmosphere on campus.

Egolf became the Prairie Stars' career leader in points (60) and goals (26) in three seasons while garnering various academic honors.

Her coaching journey started after her playing career ended. She led team activities after founding coach Pete Kowall left in spring 2013. Egolf stayed as an assistant coach for **Molly Grisham, MA '02 CPAE**, while pursuing an MBA. Three years later, Egolf took over on an interim basis (in 2016) and officially earned the job at the end of that year.

During Egolf's first full year as head coach, the Prairie Stars qualified for the 2017 GLVC tournament by defeating Rockhurst University (Kansas City, Mo.) 1-0 in the final regular season match, clinching their inaugural postseason bid in dramatic fashion.

Post-Season Play

In 2022, the Prairie Stars were picked 13th in the GLVC preseason poll. UIS finished fifth and advanced to the GLVC championship game. One goal was all that stood between the Prairie Stars and their first NCAA tournament.

Last fall, UIS returned to the postseason despite stiff competition all year.

"Teams understood we didn't finish fifth [in 2022] by accident," Egolf says. "We were no longer that underdog. We were now a team on their schedule that they knew they had to show up."

As program expectations grew, so did Egolf's coaching style.

"As I got more mature in my coaching career, I learned that people and relationships mean so much more than how good you are athletically," Egolf says. "I value communication and interaction with players, and now I like them to be a part of the process."

"It wasn't just *my* vision, it was *our* vision."

Egolf says a top-four GLVC finish and regional ranking, which would strengthen UIS' chances to qualify for the NCAA tournament in 2024, have become within reach.

Holistic Lifestyle

Beyond the field, the holistic lifestyle Egolf experienced as a student made UIS unique. She came to that experience for her student athletes.

"The family atmosphere, the number of resources for mental and physical health, academics, career services, and internships for the entire student body"—these are on Egolf's list of UIS strengths. "For a campus its size, UIS does a really good job of supporting its students in all aspects."

"I had a great experience as a student athlete here, and I see other student athletes experiencing that same thing," Egolf says. "There will always be a special place in my heart for UIS." 📍

Sibling Stars

Junior **Jordan Rice** and freshman **Kayla Rice** are a rarity: a brother and sister who both play basketball for the same university—and play well. Jordan earned All-Tournament honors at the 2022 Nexus Classic and entered this season with 373 career points. Kayla recently broke the UIS record for most steals in a single game.

Q: Did you two play basketball together growing up?

Kayla: We have a basketball gym in our house, so we were always playing against each other. We are very competitive, so we always go against each other in anything we do.

Jordan: I picked her to be on my team in pick-up games at our local fitness center. In co-ed organizations, we were always on different teams. We always practiced with one another, trying to make each other better in every way.

Q: How did you end up at UIS?

Jordan: UIS had me come for a few visits, and they made me feel as if I was at home. They welcomed me, in every way possible, to their program and to a legacy in the making.

Kayla: Because my brother already went to UIS, I was familiar with the campus and students. I knew I could join the team and make an impact.

Q: Are you rivals or do you inspire each other?

Jordan: We feed off each other's energy. She is 110 percent my rival, and I love it. We keep each other's motor going, which helps us to play at such a high level.

Kayla: When I see my brother play hard and have a good game, it gives me confidence, and I want to play like him. He always pushes me to do my best.

Q: Why are you this good?

Kayla: In order to continue being successful, we have to work at everything we do—academics included. I work with trainers in the summer and during the off-season.

Jordan: We have one-on-one battles where she fouls me, which makes me better by playing through physicality. This makes her better as well, being able to work on her defense.

Q: What are you studying and what careers do you want?

Kayla: Biology/pre-med. I want to be an anesthesiologist. I want to help a lot of people, give back to my community and mentor younger girls who may not think they can do certain things. If you work hard, anything is possible.

Jordan: Business, but I have always wanted to play basketball professionally. I may be considered short for a basketball player, and may even be looked over by some, but I have the heart of a lion and nobody can take that away from me. —William S. Bike

Philanthropy Update



Jeff Lorber

External Entities

Our corporate and foundation friends consistently work to solve problems, big and small. Multiple perspectives help to resolve difficult issues. UIS is placing increasing emphasis on presenting gift opportunities to corporations and foundations that involve multi-, cross- and inter-disciplinary programs, allowing them to invest in the betterment of local, statewide, national and international communities.

Such support is often demonstrated through:

- Scholarships
- Innovative and relevant academic programs
- Facilities, equipment and technology
- Training and experiential learning for future workforce employees.

UIS is grateful for the generosity of external entities that allow us to enhance already meaningful efforts to help develop productive citizens. Please know that we are committed to broadening our group of friends and developing alignments to ensure future growth.

We look forward to being engaged in this ongoing progress! Our collective future is bright!

Jeff Lorber, Ed.D.
Vice Chancellor for Advancement,
University of Illinois Springfield
Senior Vice President,
University of Illinois Foundation



The Kiwanis Club of Springfield–Downtown's relationship with Prairie Stars soccer began in 1979 and continues today.

The Perfect Partnership

The Kiwanis Club of Springfield–Downtown and the University have teamed up to improve the community for 50 years

It started with a stadium. In 1977, Kiwanis Club of Springfield–Downtown began a joint effort with Sangamon State University to build a new soccer stadium that would serve youth throughout the community. The field was named Kiwanis Field in 1979 to recognize the instrumental role the club played in fundraising for the project. In the 1980s, Kiwanis provided additional funds for lighting the field.

Fifty years later, the relationship between the club and UIS continues to evolve. As part of the club's 100th anniversary in 2022, Kiwanis Club

of Springfield–Downtown decided to fund four community projects, including a \$40,000 pledge for improvements to the stadium.

While it's common to see Kiwanis members volunteering their time at different community events across central Illinois, the partnership with UIS has encouraged students to become more involved.

The club has worked closely with UIS soccer teams. For example, in 2023 the Kiwanis Club of Springfield–Downtown started Kids Bash, a free day of activities open to children in the



In 2023, the Kiwanis Club of Springfield–Downtown started Kids Bash, a free day of activities open to children in the community. During the Superhero 5K Hustle held this spring on campus, runners of all ages raced across campus with superhero capes flowing behind them.



community. Players from the UIS women's and men's soccer teams volunteered to teach skills to a new generation of athletes.

"Many times, when we have donors, we don't get an opportunity to interact with them," says **Erin Egolf, '13 CBM, MBA '15**, former women's soccer head coach. "Having the opportunity to work side-by-side on volunteer projects is unique."

"It was very inspiring to connect with younger kids and play soccer with them," says junior soccer player Megan Little. "It was a full-circle moment. We once were just like them—learning how to play soccer and looking up to the older kids."

Little notes that, thanks to Kiwanis, the team has many opportunities to volunteer and give back to the community, which is a huge part of the UIS women's soccer culture. "Laughing with the kids was a very memorable experience," she says. "I was able to share my love for soccer with them."

The strength of this partnership comes from the mutual support and desire from

both organizations to better the community—both now and for future generations. "To see the students take pride in their field and their team, to really value the donation and give back to our events is huge," says Kiwanis Club of Springfield–Downtown member Jerry Daniels.

The relationship between Kiwanis and UIS goes beyond the soccer field, with some students joining the club as members. **Amanda Brown, '23 CPAE**, developed a program to create children's libraries in local laundromats. She received financial support from Kiwanis Club of Springfield–Downtown to purchase bookcases and other supplies.

"It was something I really wanted to create because reading is so important for children, and not all children have access to books," Brown says.

In April, Kiwanis of Springfield–Downtown held the Superhero Hustle 5K on campus. Runners of all ages raced across campus with superhero capes flowing behind

"I love this partnership and how we're going to continue building each other up."

**—Kiwanis Club member
Dave Newton**

them. This race presented an opportunity to bring the community together while raising funds for the programs that the club supports.

"I love this partnership and how we're going to continue building each other up," says Dave Newton, a member of Kiwanis Club of Springfield–Downtown.

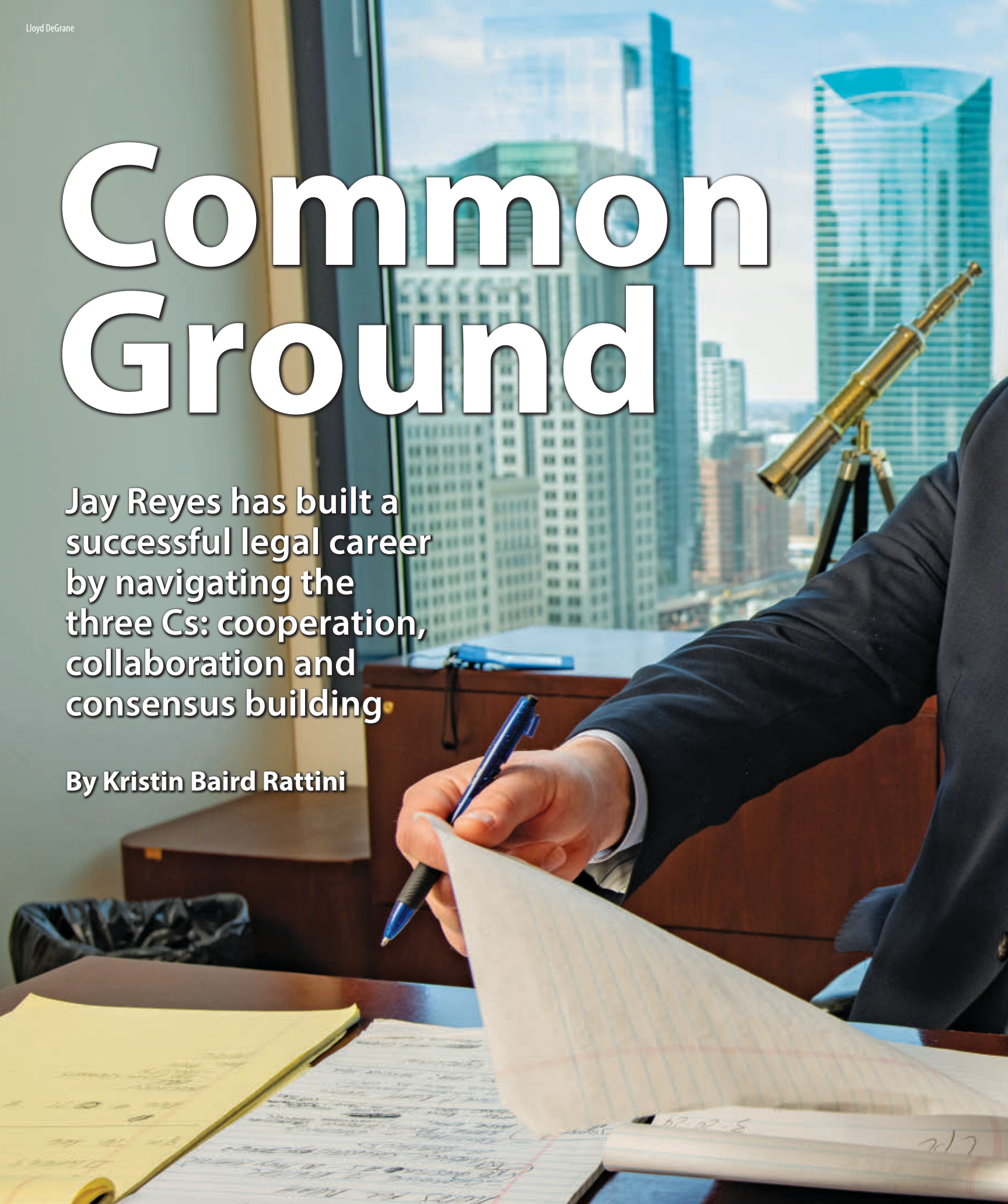
—Ashley Earnest

Philanthropy Update continues on pg. 23.

Common Ground

Jay Reyes has built a successful legal career by navigating the three Cs: cooperation, collaboration and consensus building.

By Kristin Baird Rattini





In his role as chief counsel for the million-member strong American Bar Association, Jay Reyes evaluates the rules for lawyer trust accounts, looks at malpractice insurance issues and discusses the ABA's ethics-related continuing education offerings—to name but a few of his responsibilities. "It's a big responsibility," he says. "You're regulating the legal profession."



Reyes met then-Illinois treasurer Judy Baar Topinka while serving as president of the student association at Triton College. Topinka would later play a pivotal role in his career.

“In this tumultuous and divisive world, Jay possesses the intellect and the class to work with others to build common ground for the greater good.”

—Brian Cross

There are 102 counties in Illinois; **Jay Reyes, '97 CPAE, JD '04 UTC**, has been to all of them. His earlier legal career in Illinois politics and government took him from state border to border and all the way from A (Adams County) to W (Wayne County).

Over the years, Reyes has come to know countless people across the Land of Lincoln and across the ideological spectrum. He has always modeled a spirit of cooperation, collaboration and consensus building, whether on the campaign trail or slogging through the unglamorous nuts and bolts work of legislation.

Reyes is now drawing on those three Cs—not only in his role as chief counsel for the million-member strong American Bar Association, but also in his heartfelt volunteer work, as he strives to expand opportunities for the next generation of students at UIS and beyond.

“You can’t complain if you don’t get involved”

By the time Reyes arrived at UIS in 1995 as a political science major, he was already all-in on Illinois politics. From a young age, his family had imparted to him a sense of obligation to participate in the political process. “There was the idea that we all need to do what we can to improve what’s around us,” he says. “You can’t complain if you don’t get involved. So, I got involved.”

He started volunteering for election campaigns when he was 18, licking envelopes and knocking on doors for candidates in Chicago’s western suburbs. “It’s great to see firsthand the process of an election and see democracy at work,” he says.

While serving as president of the student association at Triton College in River Grove, Ill., Reyes met then-Illinois treasurer Judy Baar Topinka, who would later play a pivotal

role in his career. He also competed on Triton's team for Model Illinois Government, an intercollegiate simulation that provides students with an in-depth look at the workings of state government and politics. He was so blown away by the prowess of the UIS team that he transferred there. "They were so impressive and well spoken; they were rock stars," he says.

Reyes distinguished himself on the UIS team, earning an award for outstanding House of Representatives member and the post of House Republican leader in his senior year. "I never wanted to run for any of the constitutional offices; I always liked the rough-and-tumble fun of the House and creating bills," he says. His teammate from across the aisle, **Brian Cross, '95 CPAE**, became not only his roommate, but also his lifelong friend.

"One of the funniest things about us living together was that Jay was chairman of the College Republicans for Campus, and I was state chairman of the College Democrats of Illinois," Cross says. "One of my roles was to follow GOP candidates and try to berate them, so to say. Jay received many calls or messages regarding candidate appearances. I utilized this intelligence to meet my ends on meeting the GOP candidates on our turf. Sometimes Jay would get the messages, sometimes not."

Reyes admits he was not always as driven in the classroom as he was on the Model Illinois Government team. He credits Steve Schwark, now professor emeritus in the School of Politics and International Affairs, and political science instructor Craig Brown for shepherding him through his studies. "I think they saw more in me than I saw in myself," Reyes says. "I was young and didn't really have my priorities in order the way I should have; I was certainly no scholar. It was their urging, pushing, prodding and just dragging me across the bachelor's degree finish line that was so admirable. They were not going to let me fail and fall through the cracks. Seeing their investment in me in that way awakened a passion for education in me."

Building a practice and building relationships

After graduation, Reyes got deep in the weeds of lawmaking by working as a policy analyst in the Illinois House of Representatives for two years. After his first legislative cycle, as he learned the nuts and bolts of the legislative



Courtesy of Jay Reyes

Brian Cross (left) roomed with Reyes at UIS and became his lifelong friend. "One of the funniest things about us living together was that Jay was campus chairman of the College Republicans, and I was state chairman of the College Democrats," Cross says.

process, he noticed that it helps to be a lawyer to understand the intricate details of how things work. Reyes says, "I was not a strong student. But I decided I had to prove that I could cut it in law school and deserved to get in." He took classes on logical reasoning in preparation for the LSAT. He was admitted to Chicago's John Marshall Law School (now the University of Illinois Chicago School of Law), where he finished his first year in the top ten and made the law review.

While he continued volunteering for political campaigns, Reyes gravitated naturally toward a career in real estate law; both his family and his wife's family were in the construction and remodeling business. He started at Day & Roberts Law Firm, a specialty property law firm in Naperville, Ill. "There are a ton of people who can buy and sell real estate; that's all fun," Reyes says. "We got the hard cases."

For one case, owners of a historic round barn associated with the 1898 Chicago World's Fair wanted to move it to a piece of government-owned property. Reyes found

that the people skills he'd been honing on campaigns were a tremendous asset as he worked with local municipalities on complex issues such as land valuation and historic property regulations. He parlayed those skills and his growing real estate expertise into his own private practice, Riverside Law Group, which he opened in 2006.

"I realized that I was good at building relationships," he says. "You figure out how to make friends with people, whether you like them or not, whether you agree with them or not, whether they're rowing in the same direction as you or not. Your constituency is counting on you getting something done. At the end of the day, you have to perform and add value to what you're undertaking on their behalf."

Joining Team Topinka

In addition to being a UIS alumnus, Reyes is proud to call himself a "JBT alumni," a former staff member for Judy Baar Topinka. After she won election as the Illinois comptroller in 2010, Reyes joined her team as legal counsel.



Reyes got his start in government and politics as a student at UIS. He was part of the University's Model Illinois Government delegation and he served as UIS chairman of the College Republicans for Campus. As a student, he interacted with House Republican Leader and Speaker of the Illinois House Lee Daniels (left) and former Illinois Congressman John Shimkus (right).



"There weren't a lot of people who looked like me in the various roles I had in Illinois government," Reyes says. "But people like Judy saw past the blanket label that others might put on me and looked at my skill set and what I could bring."

The comptroller's office is responsible for ensuring that all of the state's nearly 7,000 municipalities comply with more than 20 financial statutes, such as tax increment financing laws. "Judy recognized that government had a role to play, and she was going to make sure that every dollar was appropriately and efficiently spent," he says.

Reyes guided the regulatory team in instituting financial audits to make municipalities more accountable to their taxpayers. "By the time we left, we had a 96 percent compliance rate, which was a tall order," he says. "Under our watch, Illinois became a little cleaner place."

Reyes drew inspiration from not only Topinka's financial leadership, but also from her genuine care for and interest in others—how she sent cards and thank-you notes and always remembered people's names and their stories. He traveled with Topinka across the state, dining at hundreds of small-

town barbecue dinners and mom-and-pop restaurants across Illinois. (To this day, friends turn to him for restaurant advice; he keeps a list of some 400-plus vetted dining options on his phone.) "Those places really help you understand the community: Who are the people here? How do they live? How do they see the world?" he says.

Finding Common Ground in Springfield and Beyond

Team Topinka's watch ended abruptly and tragically when Topinka died of a stroke in December 2014, just a month after winning reelection. "Those were dark days," Reyes says.

He pivoted to a position as deputy general counsel with the Illinois Dept. of Financial and Professional Regulation (IDFPR). There, he managed a staff of 40 and guided the department's efforts to eliminate or streamline dozens of regulatory and license restrictions on Illinois businesses. "Some of the essential industries in Illinois—particularly real estate—were struggling from overregulation," he says. "Generally, across all professions that we regulated, we reduced a lot of fines and fees and tried to introduce new criteria for

what those should be."

There was not always consensus about what those criteria should be, but Reyes nimbly navigated the negotiations that led to nearly 40 legislative reforms, including creating a pathway for certain individuals who had prior criminal convictions to apply for professional licenses. "Jay knows how to utilize his knowledge, priorities and interpersonal skills to enable him to thrive within diverse situations between different personalities and conflicting agendas," says John Webb, former IDFPR legislative director.

Reyes made one more tour of the small-town barbecue circuit during the 2018 gubernatorial campaign in his role as general counsel for the office of Lt. Gov. Evelyn Sanguinetti, JD '98 UIC. He related to Sanguinetti's bootstrap story as a daughter of Spanish-speaking immigrants who became the first Latina lieutenant governor in the country. "I could identify with her struggles; she was so real to me," he says. "I was like, 'Sign me up.'"

"Jay worked so well with all constituencies throughout this diverse state," Sanguinetti says. "He truly enjoyed meeting and interacting with others and always seemed so at home in any circumstance."

Raising the Bar

Having already worked extensively at the local and state level, Reyes was eager to level up. A staff counsel position for the Chicago-based American Bar Association—the largest association of attorneys in the world—provided him with the ideal opportunity to apply his skills on a national level.

“Association work is a lot like politics,” Reyes says. “You’re building coalitions and working together to accomplish goals. Sometimes it happens quickly; at other times, it takes a while to develop those relationships.”

Reyes has been networking at national ABA meetings, doing his part to help boost rising membership numbers after a decline during the early COVID-19 pandemic. He serves as the point person for the ABA’s Center for Professional Responsibility, a big umbrella that covers everything from legal ethics and liability to the association’s Model Rules of Professional Conduct. On any given day, he might be evaluating the rules for lawyer trust accounts, looking at malpractice insurance issues or discussing the ABA’s ethics-related continuing education offerings. “It’s a big responsibility,” he says. “You’re developing the rules that regulate the legal profession.”

In particular, Reyes is excited about efforts

to change model rule 5.5, which would allow attorneys to practice across state lines. The effort echoes his experiences at IDFPR in trying to reduce barriers to entry and practice. “The practice of law, especially since COVID, has become more remote-based,” he says. “We think there’s interest in expanding the law that way and making it more like having a driver’s license, where if I’m licensed in Illinois I can still drive in Florida. There are some access-to-justice issues there, as well as benefits and opportunities.”

“Education is the great equalizer”

Reyes remains grateful for the benefits his UIS education has provided him, and he devotes his time to advancing educational opportunities for the next generation of students. At the ABA, he is in charge of an annual ethics writing competition that awards a \$5,000 scholarship to a law student or young lawyer who is navigating his or her early career. “It’s a great platform for helping build up these young professionals,” he says.

Reyes spent several years on the Board of Trustees for Triton College and lent his legal expertise when the college acquired a

nearly 20-acre parcel of land to expand its facilities. “At the community college level, you’re working with some 20 communities that are all geographically, ethnically and socioeconomically diverse,” he says. “They require different things and have different goals. You really have to have your finger on the pulse to understand who needs what.”

Reyes felt honored when his former UIS roommate, Brian Cross, invited him to join him on the UIS Alumni Board. “In this tumultuous and divisive world, Jay possesses the intellect and the class to work with others to build common ground for the greater good,” Cross says.

Reyes was thrilled to join hundreds of other UI System alumni for Lobby Day at the Illinois Capitol in April, working to advocate for greater support of the U of I network and its priorities. He is now drawing on the connections he’s made over the course of his career, in Springfield and across all 102 counties, as he advises UIS on its legislative and policy initiatives.

“Education is the great equalizer,” Reyes says. “There are a lot of problems in our country, in our state, in our communities. But there aren’t a lot that don’t solve themselves with a solid educational foundation.”

Courtesy of Jay Reyes



“There weren’t a lot of people who looked like me in the various roles I had in Illinois government,” Reyes says. “But people like Judy Baar Topinka saw past the blanket label that others might put on me and looked at my skill set and what I could bring.”

Lloyd DeGrane



Reyes gravitated naturally toward a career in real estate law; both his family and his wife’s family were in the construction and remodeling business.

Back to the Future



A trove of archived essays—written in 1971 and predicting life in the next millennium—reveals that Prairie Stars have always kept an eye on tomorrow

By David A. Scott

1971. The time was ripe to prognosticate. While it would be six years before Fleetwood Mac would encourage us to “don’t stop thinking about tomorrow,” students at Sangamon State University had already started. The newly emerged SSU invited science fiction writer Arthur C. Clarke to campus for its first University Week; he spoke on “The Year 2001,” the topic that informed his bestselling look into the future, *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

SSU professor George Cullom Davis, MA ’61 UIUC, PHD ’69 UIUC, had his mind on tomorrow as well. Dovetailing neatly with the Clarke lecture coup, he developed a special-topics course to explore “alternative futures for the 21st century.” Davis populated his classroom and syllabus with fascinating invited guests—from a member of a local commune to SSU administrators to research and development experts from companies such as IBM.

Davis charged his students with creating informed, well-researched essays about what life at SSU, in Illinois and around the world might be like in the next millennium. Topics included “The Family of the Future,” “Utopia University,” “Sangamon State in 2000 A.D.,” and “Women in the Year 2000.” Essays touched on agriculture, education, government, public policy, travel, urbanism and youth culture.

Gleaning from this treasure trove of essays was an adventure all its own. I learned about them offhandedly from University Archivist Katrina Burch. She had happened upon them when she was surveying the lay of the land in her new position. She offered me a look at them, I eagerly accepted...and then she dropped the other shoe: They had yet to be digitized.

I would be dealing with an archival technology that, in the age of the internet and



Cullom Davis

flatscreen gadgets, was akin to unscrolling papyrus. Not even microfilm, but *microfiche*. I hadn’t encountered that since high school, and my 50th reunion is coming up.

If you recall microfiche readers, navigation is not unlike *Alice in Wonderland*: up is down, left is right. Yet, the most intriguing mental time warp was how the essays gave evidence to the changes computers have brought to ways we research, write, present ideas and even think.

So how did the students of SSU do at predicting the future? Thanks to the experts Davis had on hand, they were privy to developments that were in the pipeline in the early 1970s. The essays “predicted” things such as cell phones, computerized shopping and banking, electronic sensors in fields to issue crop reports and even the Roomba robot vacuum.

Things were less pat when it came to how SSU might develop. One essay predicted statewide educational systems would emulate the Sangamon State model of providing two-years of specialized classes to students who had received their basic education at “feeder”




Arthur C. Clarke

community colleges. The same essay did have an eerie insight to the “temporary” buildings (still standing) that SSU built to house its first classes. The author was pretty sure they’d still be around in 2030.

Other predictions ended up being fairly far out there. A World Fashion Council would dictate what everyone wore. Jets would streak between New York City and Paris in 20 minutes. One could call up on the phone and order rain.

And some things—right or wrong or otherwise askew—seem all too topical in 2024. America would have a woman president. Same sex marriage would be common and welcomed. Issues over reproductive rights would prove unresolvable and tear the nation apart.

We’ll leave on this eerily prescient note, that says a lot about then and now. One essay assured its readers that computers would advance to become personal assistants (Siri, is that you?), and they would speak with female voices because “people would more likely buy those.”

But no one suggested microfiche would survive. 



UIS Campus Relations/Clay Salter

The UIC Nursing–Springfield Campus class of 2024. Since 2014, nearly \$2.2 million in scholarship support has been provided to UIS pre-nursing students.



New Anatomage tables allow students in multiple fields to use innovative imaging technology in their studies.

Together for Nursing

Nearly 10 years ago, University of Illinois Springfield, University of Illinois Chicago College of Nursing and Memorial Health established a partnership to develop the next generation of baccalaureate nurses. The first cohort of students began their upper-division nursing courses in the fall of 2016.

Since that time, 223 students have completed the program, with approximately 25 to 40 percent of new graduating classes starting their nursing career at Memorial Health.

“None of this would be possible without such strong community support,” says Chancellor Janet Gooch. “Memorial Health’s mission is to improve lives and build stronger communities through better health, and its support of UIC Nursing at UIS is nothing short of mission-driven—for all of us.”

This spring, two Anatomage tables were installed in the program’s labs. These 3D anatomy tables allow students in multiple fields, such as nursing and exercise science, to use innovative imaging technology in their studies.

“Memorial has been essential in getting our state-of-the-art simulation lab established, which has been vital for nursing education,” says Dr. Sara McPherson, director of UIC Nursing–Springfield Campus.

A major component of this partnership

has been providing scholarships to students so they can focus on their education. Since 2014, nearly \$2.2 million has been provided to UIS pre-nursing students.

“Partnerships like this one benefit not only Memorial Health, UIS and UIC Nursing, but the entire central Illinois region,” says **Ed Curtis, HON ’17, MBA ’90 UIUC**, president and CEO of Memorial Health. “The steps we are taking now will ensure Memorial and other health care organizations can continue caring for local residents in the decades to come. We’re pleased to have both UIS and UIC Nursing as partners in this important work to improve the health of the communities we serve.”

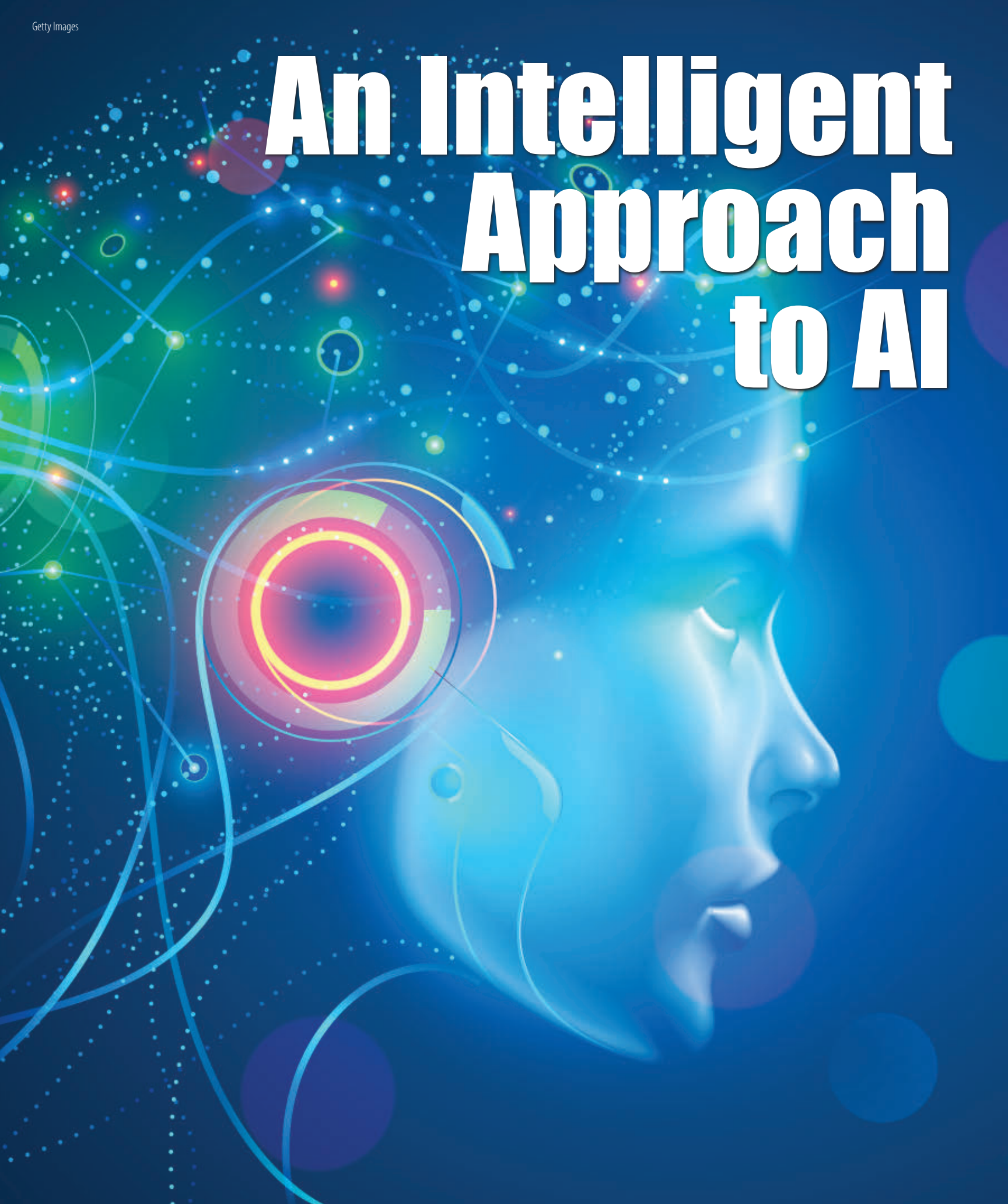
UIC nursing major Nicholas Doerfler began working at Memorial Hospital in high school as a patient safety monitor and his interest in nursing grew. This summer, he will have a new role as a nurse intern in the cardiac intensive care unit and the oncology department.

“The Memorial Health scholarship has taken the stress of tuition away from me and so many other students,” says Doerfler, a junior. “It allows us to really focus on learning, experiencing and growing as much as we can while we’re in this program. At the end of the day, we’re here to build those experiences that we’ll be able to put onto our patients in the future.” —*Ashley Earnest*

“Partnerships like this one benefit not only Memorial Health, UIS and UIC Nursing, but the entire central Illinois region.”

**—Ed Curtis,
president and CEO
of Memorial Health**

An Intelligent Approach to AI



As artificial intelligence transforms the educational environment—not to mention the labor market—UIS takes a leading role in innovation, engagement and education

By Cindy Kuzma

A faculty member encourages a Socratic-style dialogue between a student—and a computer. Web developers find errors in their code faster than ever before. And a student bridges math and art by using a large language model to write poetry, then analyze it.

Artificial intelligence—especially generative AI, which produces content like text, images and audio—is already changing the landscape of higher education. So, on a forward-thinking campus like UIS, it's no surprise that faculty, staff and students are pioneers in the use of AI technologies.

But, of course, they're not doing so blindly. While AI holds tremendous potential, it also poses risks and challenges, from privacy violations to plagiarism to perpetuating harmful biases.

Long before the launch of ChatGPT in November 2022 brought AI to public prominence, the UIS community was probing the possibilities and pitfalls of this important technology. Now, UIS remains at the leading edge of this fast-moving field through efforts that include a steering committee, faculty research and a campus learning community.

"We are doing exactly what an educational institution should be doing," says Associate Professor Hei-Chi Chan, '92 UIUC, chair of the mathematical sciences department and co-founder of the UIS Artificial Intelligence Campus Learning Community (AICLC). "As educators, we want to bring awareness to and advocate for the appropriate use of AI. That way, as a society, we can mitigate risks and harness the power of this tool to do good."

AI in Practice

Though it's only now making headlines, AI isn't exactly new, says Associate Professor of Management Information Systems (MIS) Neetu Singh, co-founder of AICLC. She first encountered AI's underlying theories while earning her undergraduate degree more than two decades ago. On the UIS campus, courses in computer science and similar fields have covered these AI topics for years.

"What's changed in the last couple of years is that you no longer have to be a computer scientist to leverage AI," says Kara McElwrath, UIS director of technology operations. "That's opened it up to everybody."

Now, AI topics such as machine learning, neural networks and deep learning are taught across campus. For example, Singh teaches data mining for business analytics, which includes machine learning and AI algorithms. UIS is updating courses to reflect the AI development in cybersecurity management. As soon as this fall, MIS will offer a Business Applications of Artificial Intelligence certificate. Students earning degrees in the field (see sidebar, p. 27) learn how AI can both drive cyberattacks and safeguard digital systems.

Besides leading technology operations, McElwrath is an adjunct instructor in educational leadership and the Teacher Education Program. In her courses, she demonstrates how AI can save time and improve lessons. For example, a fourth-grade teacher might have some students reading at a second-grade level and others at a seventh-grade level. Generative AI can scale the same lesson up or down, as well as devise real-life



UIS Campus Relations/Clay Slater



Professor Hei-Chi Chan (left) is co-founder of the UIS Artificial Intelligence Campus Learning Community (ALCIC). "As educators, we want to bring awareness to the appropriate use of AI. That way, we can harness the power of this tool to do good," he says. Chan was joined recently on campus by alumnus Doug Hamilton who heads up AI research at Nasdaq. They spoke on the current state of artificial intelligence and ethical considerations.

scenarios for complex concepts, so students better connect to the material.

AI tools also can engage UIS students, says Xiaoqing Li, professor and MIS department head. In his online and on-campus courses, Li prompts ChatGPT to act like a professor using the Socratic method, asking students questions to promote a deeper understanding. Or, he might assign students to work with ChatGPT on a project about the impact of AI on the business world. The chatbot plays two people: One argues that AI will create new job opportunities and the other argues that it threatens workers. Students can then work as if they had collaborators with unique viewpoints.

Outside the classroom, AI is improving University operations. For example, AI tools allow web developers for the UIS site to find bugs or errors quickly. Jessica Baumberger, director of web and digital strategy, has called this a game-changer for improving workflow. Her team also is developing a chatbot to answer questions from students and parents, and using another AI-based module to translate content for prospective students in other countries.

Meanwhile, in the school's Orion Lab—which opened last year in the computer science department—students receive guidance on using AI for a wide variety of projects. A soon-to-be-launched AI Liberal Arts Lab also will offer the UIS community opportunities to focus on the intersection between AI, the humanities, and social and natural sciences.

After all, AI applications aren't limited to technological fields. Just ask Helena Soares, a student of Chan's who is double majoring in math and English. While poetry might seem difficult to measure, she is working on a project comparing verses composed by ChatGPT to human poetry by assigning values to traits like form, syntax and creativity. "Our students are doing fascinating work with AI," Chan says.

Safety, Privacy and Integrity

These expanding uses require awareness and discussion of the technology's downsides. Plagiarism and cheating rank among the most common concerns. Students shouldn't pass off AI-generated content as their own, Singh says. Not only is it unethical, tools like

ChatGPT aren't foolproof; they're based on probabilities rather than knowledge, and they sometimes "hallucinate" or invent facts. "Use AI to initiate your ideas, but not to replace your work," Singh says. "And if you're going to use it to learn about a topic, use your critical thinking skills."

What's more, because AI is trained on existing content, it can amplify existing biases and perpetuate racism, gender discrimination and inequity. Concerns about privacy and security also abound. And while those issues matter to everyone, they're crucial to universities, which must safeguard students' data under laws such as the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

Every new technology poses similar challenges, but AI has accelerated the rate of change. So, UIS is diligent about setting standards and policies, McElwrath says. For example, Microsoft Copilot—an AI tool like ChatGPT—was carefully vetted. Administrators made sure that the way data was used and stored aligned with the University's legal and ethical obligations before making it available to the UIS community.



ALCIC co-founder Neetu Singh notes that artificial intelligence has been in development for years. She first encountered AI's underlying theories while earning her undergraduate degree more than two decades ago. On the UIS campus, courses in computer science and similar fields have long covered these topics.

Last year, the UI System identified a group of people from all three universities—UIUC, UIC and UIS—to provide guidance and advice on the use of generative AI. Singh served as a part of that group, whose online findings will be continually revisited.

UIS also has its own AI Steering Committee, co-chaired by Baumberger and McElwrath. “The goal was to create an interdisciplinary group across campus, getting all the right minds to the table to discuss AI and focus on the impacts,” Baumberger says. Special interest groups within the committee hone in on AI in teaching; ethics and policy; student engagement; and community collaboration. In meetings every other month—and ongoing collaboration between members—the committee has prepared a draft policy on AI that is currently under review by University governance.

Continuing the Conversation

UIS experts also are looking beyond campus, fostering broader discussions through initiatives like AICLC. This group was created by Singh and Chan as part of their faculty fellowships through Online, Professional and Engaged Learning. Their mission is threefold, Chan says: to engage stakeholders, educate the UIS community and equip them to use AI appropriately.

To accomplish this, they record and post video interviews with faculty such as Li, students such as Soares, and community members and alumni with expertise in using AI in different contexts. AICLC also has hosted hybrid (Zoom and in-person) panels on topics like AI data literacy and bias. And in collaboration with Innovate Springfield—a non-profit, University-led startup incubator—they’re planning a larger conference on AI in the coming year.

While the group hopes to make an impact far and wide, they know their primary responsibility is to prepare graduates for an AI-driven future. “Our goal is student-centered,” Singh says. “We equip students with both technology and knowledge about the ethical and responsible use of AI. When these students get into the workforce, they’ll know how to use it as a companion in innovation.” 📖

To learn more about AI on the UIS campus, visit uis.edu/ai.



From top:
Xiaoqing Li,
Kara
McElwrath
and Jessica
Baumberger

Fighting Future Threats

While the UIS community aims to harness AI for good, bad actors employ it to wreak havoc on digital infrastructure. For example, AI now powers more frequent and powerful ransomware attacks on hospitals, governments and other organizations. Criminals use malware to hold data or devices hostage, demanding payment to free them.

Responsibility for thwarting such efforts might fall to a cybersecurity manager, IT director or chief information security officer. These roles require more than technological know-how, says Xiaoqing Li, professor and department head of MIS.

Cybersecurity managers must understand legal and compliance issues, as well as how to set policies to keep data secure. If an attack occurs, they need to understand digital forensics in order to preserve evidence for further investigation. They also need management skills to organize and lead teams.

“Many people already work in the IT department or a similar area of their organization, and they have a lot of experience—but now they need a more comprehensive understanding of this field,” Li says.

Fortunately, they can gain this knowledge through the UIS Master of Science in Cybersecurity Management Program.

The degree, launched in the fall of 2022, requires 30 hours to complete; 16 people have already graduated, and 75 students are currently enrolled in online or on-campus options. Courses balance theory and hands-on applications. Students, for example, learn about penetration testing—security exercises that find weak spots in an organization's systems. And, they practice continuity planning, which ensures that operations continue during a disruption.

The program is unique among universities, Li notes, due to its broad focus on the management side of cybersecurity. “Now, many schools that are starting cybersecurity management programs come to see our program and meet with our faculty,” he says. “We’re innovative and at the forefront.” —C.K.



Charles J. Schrage

UIS Alumni Association

Open Doors

“Education is a transformative power, creating opportunities and pathways in pursuit of life’s dreams, passions and ambitions.”

Graduation is a huge milestone in life. The demanding work undertaken to achieve a degree should be celebrated—whether having earned a bachelor’s, graduate or doctoral degree. As a graduate, you define yourself as a critical thinker who has demonstrated dedication and discipline—someone who embraces learning, challenges and new knowledge.

Thanks to higher education, doors open—doors that otherwise might not even have existed—and they will continue to open. I often cite this perspective when asked about the value of higher education. For whatever reason, society and the media often focus on doors that have slammed shut. Higher education, as the embodiment of empowerment, is the solution.

Education is a transformative power, creating opportunities and pathways in pursuit of life’s dreams, passions and ambitions. As former UI System President B. Joseph White once stated, earning a college degree is not a guarantee for success, but it is a darn good bet on you!

Here are six tips for alumni to follow to make sure the doors of education stay open for future Prairie Stars:

- **Embrace life’s journey.** Share your Prairie Star power. Create new opportunities for yourself and open doors for others.

- **Proudly display your diploma.** You earned it—be proud and show the world that you are a graduate of UIS, and what it means to you.
- **Recruit a new student to UIS.** The value of a UIS degree will continue to grow with intelligent, hardworking students from diverse backgrounds entering our Alma Mater, whether via a door handle or the click of a mouse.
- **Join UIS Unite** (unite.uis.edu), the online community that connects UIS alumni and students to help them attain career success and community.
- **Make a gift to UIS** (www.uis.edu/give) in honor of someone who has supported you.
- **Join the Illinois Connection** legislative advocacy network (www.uillinois.edu/erc/advocacy).

As we congratulate and celebrate the Class of 2024, it also is time to reflect upon our graduation(s) and embrace the possibilities before us.

Work hard. Be bold. Stay true. Celebrate UIS.

Charles J. Schrage, MA ’05 CPAE

Associate Vice Chancellor for Alumni Engagement

It takes a star to know a star

Volunteer! No one knows UIS better than its own stars, and UIS Admission wants to train interested alumni to be volunteer Alumni Admission Ambassadors. If you work in education, are active in your community and/or are willing to share your positive Prairie Star experience with prospective students, you can help our enrollment management effort. Contact us today!

Undergraduate alumni can apply to 20 master’s degree programs with no GRE/GMAT requirement.

Get ’er done. Millions of Americans have college credit and no degree. Refer returning students among your friends, colleagues, neighbors and family to UIS for one of its online bachelor’s degree completion programs.

Gallery



Campus Camps

The University of Illinois Springfield's role as a community partner and resource heats up during the "slower" months between Commencement and fall orientation. The University plays host to a number of summer camps where area youth can develop their sports skills, build and program robotic cars and even learn crime scene investigation techniques. Best of all, campers get to work with UIS faculty, students and staff. Who wouldn't want to rub elbows with their favorite Prairie Star student athlete?

UIS Campus Relations Photos



Courtesy of Rianne Hawkins

Health Care Advocate

Rianne Hawkins assures Illinoisans have full access to reproductive health

Rianne Hawkins, '01 CPAE, MA '09 CPAE, is a driving force behind one of the most vital issues in the state of Illinois, and one that has become a flash point for present-day politics across the U.S.—reproductive health.

Hawkins serves as senior director of public policy and advocacy at Planned Parenthood of Illinois and Planned Parenthood Illinois Action, a group that enables Illinoisans to access comprehensive sexual and reproductive health care education and information.

“I am fortunate to lead a talented team that works with supporters, policy makers and elected officials at all levels of government to advocate for policies that ensure everyone has full access to sexual and reproductive health care in Illinois,” Hawkins says. The scope of her work is all-encompassing. “Each day, I do something different.”

Since joining Planned Parenthood in 2016, Hawkins has been involved in passing many reproductive health care initiatives. They include passage of the Reproductive

Health Act and passage of the state’s Equal Rights Amendment. Both were accomplished in close collaboration with the League of Women Voters of Illinois.

Hawkins addresses policy strength through legislation and finance. “I am working to make sure that a variety of initiatives receive the proper funding,” she says. “Right now, one of our key initiatives is supporting a plan by Gov. Pritzker to improve Black maternal health outcomes throughout the state.”

No stranger to public service, Hawkins worked in many areas dedicated to community good before her time with Planned Parenthood, including serving as City of Springfield deputy clerk, campaign coordinator for Illinois AFL-CIO and membership coordinator for Network Knowledge Public Television in Springfield. She also works for the Springfield Parks Foundation and served on the board of the City of Springfield Urban Forestry Commission.

“Working in Springfield, I have been a part of so many different things,” Hawkins says. “I have worked at all levels of government. I have made so many connections and lifelong friends. And I have had a chance to make a lasting impact on my community.”

Hawkins has been a volunteer in every election since she was 18. She says working to “elect people into office who are going to implement public policy goals” is important to her. Hawkins, who was the only student from Mattoon (Ill.) High School to attend UIS, credits much of her career success to her UIS education.

“The education that I received at UIS is an important part of my career and work,” Hawkins says. “It provided me with a foundation that I was able to build from as I first started my career. Through the UIS alumni network and my former classmates, I have made many connections all throughout state government. Those connections helped to start my career and, in many ways, help sustain it to this day.”

Hawkins continues to focus on her current work and future goals. “While we have made great progress in making Illinois a pro-sexual and reproductive health care haven in the Midwest, there is always more to do to make sure our state is always looking forward and striving to be the best place it can be for people of all walks of life to call home.

“My goal is to be in the thick of it all, helping make that happen.” —*Noah Nelson*

1980s

Donna A. Brown, '86 CLASS, was named the Good as Gold Distinguished Volunteer for 2024 by the University. Brown is founder and board president of iMagicNation, a Springfield-area nonprofit that works to improve reading skills for low-income children.

Joan M. Sestak, '89 CPAE, has been awarded the Chancellor's Academic Professional Excellence Award. Sestak serves UIS as director of community and government relations.

2000s

Jeffrey T. Stenger, '02 CPAE, has rejoined Hanson Professional Services as a senior project manager. Working from the Springfield headquarters, he manages the appraisal process for land acquisition services and provides direct appraisal and appraisal review services. Stenger, who worked previously for Hanson from 1999 to 2004, has more than 30 years of experience in land acquisition, most recently as the owner and chief appraiser of Stenger Professional Services, a firm he founded in 2004 in Shelbyville, Ill.

2010s

Priyanka Deo Jain, '10 CPAE, now serves as assistant director of media strategy in the Dept. of Media Strategy. Deo Jain, a distinguished professional with an impressive international background, joins UIS from The Times of India Group in New Delhi where she played a key role in the chief operating officer's office and hosted her own digital show. With a robust career at Associated Broadcasting as an anchor and deputy editor, she was also invited to be part of the communications team for Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the 2019 Lok Sabha national elections.

The University recently implemented a reorganized academic structure featuring a premier educational experience and alignment with future job-market needs. Consequently, you'll see updated college names and degree program affiliations in our online stories and *UIS Today* magazine.

We rely on you to tell us what's going on!

So please, share your news. Tell us about births, deaths, weddings, voyages, adventures, transformation, astonishment, woe, delight, fellowship, discovery, mischief, reflection, or whatever else has been occupying your time recently.

 uisalumni@uillinois.edu  *UIS Today*, 200 South Wacker Dr., 19th Floor, Chicago, IL 60606.

PAR Hall of Fame

UIS recently inducted five new members into its Bill Miller Public Affairs Reporting Hall of Fame, bringing the total number of PAR honorees to 25. The Class of 2024 includes:

- **Jeremy R. Finley, MA '96 CLASS**, chief investigative reporter for WSMV4 in Nashville, Tenn., and bestselling author
- **Daralene M. Jones, MA '03 CPAE**, anchor for WFTV Channel 9 in Orlando, Fla., and an Emmy award-winning investigative reporter
- **Philip F. Jurik, MA '83 CLASS**, managing editor of the *Chicago Tribune*
- **J. Jacqueline McLean, MA '79 CLASS**, a veteran investigative reporter who has won an Edward R. Murrow award and eight Emmy awards
- **Christine Tressel, MA '88 CLASS**, an investigative journalist for WLS-TV in Chicago.

The Hall of Fame was established in 2006 to recognize the contribution the University's PAR program journalists have to the state of Illinois, as well as to honor program graduates who have had distinguished careers in journalism.

Bill Miller, the Hall of Fame's namesake, was director of the PAR program at Sangamon State University/UIS for 19 years until his retirement in 1993. Prior to PAR, Miller was an award-winning reporter with WTAX radio in Springfield and launched the Capitol Information Bureau, a predecessor of Illinois Radio Network. He died in 2003.

UIS Campus Relations/Dan Stalter



Richard and Hannah McDaniel, recipients of the 2024 William E. Winter Award for Outstanding Advocate Leadership

Winter Award Recipients

Richard McDaniel, DDS '65 UIC, MS '71 UIC, and Hannah McDaniel, '64 UIC, received the 2024 William E. Winter Award for Outstanding Advocate Leadership at the annual UIS Celebration of Philanthropy on May 1.

Presented by the University of Illinois Foundation, the award recognizes individuals outside the UI System who play active roles in securing private support for UIUC, UIC and UIS.

The award is named after William E. Winter, CEO emeritus of the 7-Up company and member of the UIF Board of Directors, who headed the volunteer component of the UI System's first major campaign in the 1980s.

The McDaniels support of NPR Illinois and Public Radio has been remarkably steadfast for five decades. They can always be counted on for support during the station's fund drives, and often have provided a match to inspire other listeners to give, too. The couple has funded underwriting spots to promote events for local arts groups and often used sponsorships to celebrate each other on birthdays and anniversaries. They are proud owners of a complete collection of WUIS mugs and, for decades, have had auto-select dials in their vehicles tuned without fail to 91.9 FM!

In Memoriam

Jack Nika, MA '71 CHST, died on Nov. 18, 2023 in Springfield. He worked for the State of Illinois Disability Determination Services for five years and later for the Dept. of Revenue, retiring in 2001.

Joan (Carlson) Gardner, '72 ED, MA '76 CLASS, passed away on Dec. 19, 2023 in Springfield. She was a fiber artist, dyeing and creating silk garments.

Roseann E. "Roe" Madonia, '72 CLASS, died on Jan. 17 in Bloomington, Ill. She was a realtor and worked for the Illinois Secretary of State for 20 years.

Larry H. "Willie" Wilcox, '72 CLASS, MA '95 CBM, passed away on Dec. 12, 2023 in Pawnee, Ill. He was a CPA and an auditor.

William H. Spitler, MA '73 CPAE, died on Jan. 15 in Mebane, N.C. He served as director of the Illinois Central Health Planning Agency and, in 1976, he became an administrator at Perry Memorial Hospital in Princeton, Ill., where he later became the CEO until his retirement in 1999. He then consulted for the Illinois Critical Access Hospital Network.

Edward A. Brooks, MA '74, '50 UIUC, passed away on Dec. 11, 2023 in Springfield. Brooks worked as a highway engineer with the Illinois Dept. of Transportation, retiring after 37 years.

William Evans, MA '74 CLASS, died on Jan. 10 in Riverton, Ill. He taught social studies in Paxton, Ill., before moving to Springfield High School and serving as the social studies department chair. Evans was a 20-year volunteer tour guide at the Dana Thomas House.

Ronald E. Stone, MA '76 CPAE, passed away on Dec. 29, 2023 in Springfield. Stone taught high school and served with the Health Systems Agency, United Cerebral Palsy and Mental Health Associations and the Agency on

Aging, as well as a director of senior services.

Bruce A. Campbell, MA '77 CPAE, '51 UIUC, died on March 7 in Tucson, Ariz. He worked for American Life Insurance and Illinois Bell Telephone, where he developed the company's economic development organization strategy.

Christine L. Rigney, '77 CPAE, passed away on Dec. 5, 2023 in Springfield. She worked for the Illinois Secretary of State as a motor vehicle regulation technician.

Martha A. Kichinko, MA '78 CLASS, died on Nov. 28, 2023 in Chandler, Ariz. She taught art in Springfield-area schools for 35 years.

Arlene Winkler, MA '81 EHS, passed away on Nov. 24, 2023 in Springfield. Sister Winkler served as a teacher, nurse, occupational therapist and sacristan at St. Francis Convent. She also served as a nurse and hospice volunteer in hospitals in the Illinois communities of Highland, Litchfield and Springfield.

Vincent A. Koers, '83 CBM, died on Nov. 3, 2023 in Danville, Ill. He worked for the Indiana State Highway Department, American Hoist and Derrick, Sand-Tech/Core Lube and General Motors.

Lorene (Reed) Lewis, '83 CBM, passed away on Feb. 5 in Springfield. She was a teacher and a social worker.

Steven J. Mundhenke, '84 CBM, died on Feb. 24 in Springfield. He was a loan officer for First National Bank.

Rosemary (Leinweber) Jokisch, '87 EHS, passed away on Dec. 4, 2023 in Jacksonville, Ill. She began a career in gerontology as a caseworker for the Prairie Council on Aging, and she went on to lead the organization as executive director.



Ellen (McIernon) Murray, MA '88 CPAE, died on March 5 in Springfield. She was active in the American Association of University Women, as well as the Springfield theater and arts community.

Dawn M. Spires, '89 CPAE, passed away on Oct. 24, 2023 in Chatham, Ill.

William B. "Will" Burpee, MA '93 CPAE, died on Jan. 7 in Springfield. He was a freelance writer.

Candice J. Blackert-Hairgrove, '94 EHS, MS '97 UIUC, passed away on Jan. 24 in Morton, Ill. She worked as a nurse for OSF Saint Francis Medical Center and taught nursing at Bradley University and OSF College of Nursing.

Karen M. Mollett '95 CLASS, '95 CPAE, MA '00 CLASS, MA '00 CPAE, died on Jan. 14 in Chatham, Ill. She worked at UIS in student billing and owned Critter Sitter Pet Care. She also taught as an adjunct professor at Lincoln Land Community College. An avid writer, Mollett won an award for story of the month in *Highlights Magazine* in 1987. She was the past president of the Springfield Poets and Writers Organization.

Marybeth A. Anderson, '99 CHST, died on Feb. 14 in Springfield, Ill.

Gregory W. Small, '99 CBM, passed away on Oct. 31, 2023 in Springfield. He worked for Illinois

Bell Telephone, Commonwealth Edison, Dominion Energy and Dynegy, as well as an emergency medical technician.

Teresa (Heisel) Smoot, '99 CPAE, died on Feb. 28 in Springfield. She served as a 911 dispatcher and a labor representative for the Police Benevolent Labor Committee. She also worked for several years as an HR specialist for SIU's School of Medicine. Most recently, she worked as the director of labor relations for the Illinois Dept. of Veteran's Affairs.

Jeffrey M. Reim, '00 CLASS, passed away on Feb. 2 in Springfield. He worked as an arborist for the City of Springfield before moving to the Illinois Dept. of Transportation.

Suzanne B. Woods, '02 CLASS, MA '05 CLASS, died on Dec. 12, 2023 in Springfield.

Cary D. Franks, MS '03 CBM, passed away on Dec. 26, 2023 in Sherman, Ill. He worked as an auditor.

Barbara K. Eldridge, '05 CPAE, died on Jan. 13 in Chatham, Ill. She worked for four decades as a grant administrator for the State of Illinois.

Daniel J. Wirsing, '11 CPAE, passed away on Jan. 26 in Springfield. He served in the U.S. Army and as a deli food service manager for Road Ranger in Springfield.

Splish Splash

Summer heat is no match for a UIS fountain! Kids from the Cox Children's Center—the University's on-site child daycare program—enjoy the gushing, cooling fun. The children's center was established in 1970 as a resource for students, faculty, staff and community clients. It also provides lab, practicum and work experiences for UIS students and students of other higher education programs.

UIS Alumni Association
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