



# OFFICE OF COMMUNITY OUTREACH

FALL 2023

ISSUE 2

www.greensburg.pitt.edu



Liz Jones receiving GRIT Award from Audra Lewis at Pinning Ceremony. Photo Credit: Susan Isola



Donovan Strader receiving People's Choice Award from Audra Lewis at Pinning Ceremony. Photo Credit: Susan Isola

## Two Students Recognized for Leadership

A pinning ceremony and award celebration event took place in August, celebrating the achievements and exceptional leadership skills of 20 first-year students. These remarkable individuals had completed a series of enlightening Leadership Workshops, orchestrated by Audra Lewis from the Office of Community Outreach. The workshops provided insights into leadership and aimed to empower these future leaders for the exciting journey that lay ahead.

The culmination of this journey was marked by a pinning ceremony, a symbol of honor and recognition for the dedication and hard work the students had put into their leadership de-

velopment. This ceremony not only acknowledged their accomplishments but also served as a platform to inspire and motivate them to continue their leadership journey.

At the heart of the event was the acknowledgment of two exceptional students, Liz Jones and Donovan Strader, whose remarkable performances and outstanding leadership skills had left an indelible mark.

Liz Jones was bestowed the prestigious GRIT award for leadership, a testament to her unwavering determination, resilience, and the ability to persevere in the face of challenges. Donovan Strader was honored with the

People's Choice Award, a reflection of the respect and admiration garnered from both peers and faculty.

The awards were particularly special as they were based on votes from fellow students and staff/faculty. This peer recognition added a meaningful dimension to the event, highlighting the impact and influence these students had on their community. Liz and Donovan's efforts were lauded not only for their performance during the workshops but also for their continuous support, making everyone feel welcome and included throughout the week of activities.

## Student Leaders Deliver Keynote Address at Pinning Ceremony

Makala Ruffin and Madison Spahr, two student leaders at Pitt-Greensburg were chosen as keynote speakers for the Leadership Pinning Ceremony in August. These students work inside and outside of the classroom to help their peers become better leaders and better people.

Both of these speakers encouraged our new first-year students to join clubs and participate in activities to learn new skills and make new friends.



Makala Ruffin speaks at Pinning Ceremony.  
Photo Credit: Erica Samios

### Makala Ruffin

"Crazy to think just 4 years ago I was one of you. Ready to start college, make new friends and memories but nervous about how the transition would go from high school to college especially during Covid but with this program. It prepared me a lot for my classes. As well as my time management skills."

### Madison Spahr

"The worst thing someone can ever say to you if you ask to hangout or maybe want to be friends is just simply no. That fear of rejection is what stops a lot of us from trying. Taking those chances to just say hi to someone is nearly always a good idea."



Madison Spahr speaks at Pinning Ceremony.  
Photo Credit: Erica Samios



Liz Jones and parent at Pinning Ceremony.  
Photo Credit: Susan Isola



Madison Schaner and parents at Pinning Ceremony.  
Photo Credit: Susan Isola

**S**  
**Strengths**

**W**  
**Weaknesses**

**O**  
**Opportunities**

**T**  
**Threats**

## **Incoming First-Year Students Learn Leadership Skills**

Prior to the commencement of the Fall semester, a group of 20 newly enrolled students participated in a series of enriching Leadership workshops designed to prepare them for their academic journeys ahead. These workshops served as a pivotal introduction to the world of leadership and personal development, equipping these students with valuable skills and insights.

The workshops were thoughtfully designed to empower students to evaluate their own personal traits and leadership abilities using the popular SWOT analysis framework -- Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats. Facilitating this transformative experience was Audra Lewis, a member of the Office of Community Outreach known for her dedication to fostering leadership skills among students.

One of the highlights of these workshops was Lewis's presentation of her own SWOT analysis, which served as an inspirational example for the participants. Audra shared her personal journey of growth and development, emphasizing the importance of self-awareness and continuous improvement. To make the process more engaging and personalized, students used Canva, a versatile graphic design tool. Here, they could choose from a range of templates that resonated with their individual personalities and preferences. This creative element allowed each participant to craft a unique SWOT analysis presentation that reflected their distinct leadership potential.

Throughout the duration of the workshops, students were actively encouraged to participate and put forth diligent efforts. As these students embark on their fall semester, they go forth not only with a better understanding of their own strengths and weaknesses but also with a newfound sense of purpose and direction.



Kerry Fagan and Caitlyn Slezak presenting to students.  
Photo Credit: Erica Samios

## Workforce Investment Board Presents on Paid Internships

Youth Programming Specialist Caitlyn Slezak and Contract/Data Coordinator Kerry Fagan, recently visited a group of students on campus to shed light on an extraordinary opportunity for students to embark on paid internships. The visit was aimed at enlightening students about the remarkable paid internship programs offered by the Westmoreland Fayette Workforce Investment Board (WFWIB), a dynamic initiative that's poised to make a significant impact on the academic and professional journey of Pitt-Greensburg students.

The WFWIB's internship program stands as a beacon of hope for students seeking to gain real-world experience while earning a competitive wage. The program is committed to paying interns an impressive \$15 per hour for completing previously unpaid internships.

One of the primary objectives of the WFWIB's internship program

is to offer a lifeline to students by providing them with financial support during their internship experiences. It's no secret that many internships, although rich in learning opportunities, often come with the drawback of being unpaid. The "Experience Works! PLUS" program, serves as a solution to this common challenge. By participating in this program, students can now pursue unpaid internships with confidence, knowing that WFWIB will compensate them with a fair wage for their dedication and efforts.

The "Experience Works! PLUS" program is available to students at absolutely no cost. This means that students can reap the benefits of paid internships without any financial burden or investment.

With over 110 internship positions up for grabs, students can find opportunities that align with their academic interests and career aspirations. These intern-

ships cater to both part-time and full-time schedules, accommodating the diverse needs of students. The worksites span a wide array of industries, ensuring that students from various academic disciplines can find a fitting placement.

The diversity of industries represented in this program include business, healthcare, manufacturing, IT, media, education, social work, or government.

Students can easily apply through the Westmoreland Fayette Workforce Investment Board's website at [www.westfay-wib.org/experience-works-plus/](http://www.westfay-wib.org/experience-works-plus/). The user-friendly online platform provides all the necessary information and resources to guide students through the application process, ensuring that they can take the first step towards a rewarding internship experience with ease.

## Peer Leader Hones Team-Building Skills for First-Year Students

In an effort to nurture leadership skills and foster a sense of community, a group of twenty first-year students embarked on a transformative team-building journey led by peer leader, Oakley Tyger.

The series of team-building activities set the stage for these future leaders to develop essential skills that will help them through their college experience. Activities included:

### 1. Dessert Social:

The adventure began with a sweet treat as the students gathered for a Dessert Social. Amidst ice cream and cookies, they spoke with the Westmoreland Fayette Workforce Investment Board about their paid internship opportunities, along with other services.

### 2. Game Night:

Students engaged in competitive and collaborative games like Uno, Apples to Apples, and Jenga. Beyond the fun, these games cultivated a growth mindset, critical thinking abilities, and a deeper appreciation for teamwork.

### 3. Movie Night:

A trip to a local movie theater allowed students to explore societal narratives and themes. Discussions that followed fostered thought-provoking insights and ignited a passion for cultural awareness.

### 4. Statler's Fun Center:

A trip to Statler's Fun Center provided an adrenaline-packed adventure, complete with go-cart races and mini-golf challenges. These thrilling social escapades served as a canvas for students to paint their life skills while embracing the spirit of leadership and teamwork.

### 5. Bowling Night:

A night of Bowling prompted discussions about diversity, culture, and leadership, encouraging students to appreciate differing perspectives and embrace the strength of unity.

### 6. Escape Room Challenge:

The grand finale of this transformative journey was an Escape Room challenge. Placed in a high-pressure situation, students were compelled to communicate effectively, collaborate seamlessly, and employ their newfound leadership skills to crack codes and solve puzzles within a tight 60-minute window.



Oakley Tyger at Pinning Ceremony  
Photo Credit: Erica Samios

## Oakley Tyger

An Education major with a concentration in English Literature and a minor in Creative Writing, Oakley Tyger has been a mentor for the Student Bridge Program for the last two years. He says it's a great opportunity to lead and help incoming first-year students transition to college life.

Tyger is also involved in Student PSEA and is looking forward to gaining more leadership skills.

## Financial Aid Counselors Breaks Down FAFSA For Families

Director of Financial Aid Brian John Beighley, held a workshop for incoming First-Year Students and their families to break down the FAFSA application and the financial aid process.

The overview session focused on enlightening students about the importance of FAFSA and how it influences the financial aid they receive. This included an in-depth explanation of the application process, the types of aid available, and tips for optimizing eligibility. A step-by-step guide through the FAFSA submission process was provided to ensure families have a clear understanding of how to complete this crucial form accurately. This proactive approach allowed students and families to prepare in advance for future years and align their financial plans accordingly.

A significant aspect of this session was the opportunity for parents to engage and seek clarification regarding their specific financial situations. Parents often have questions regarding the financial aid process, eligibility criteria, the expected family contribution (EFC), and how their financial decisions impact their child's education funding.



Photo Credit: Google

## Unlocking Student Success: The Power of Clubs, Connections, and Passion in Leadership

Director of Student Life, Al Thiel met with incoming first-year students to discuss the importance of participating on campus activities and clubs. Joining clubs, fostering connections, discovering passions, and developing essential skills are vital components that pave the way for students to step confidently into leadership roles. Thiel discussed more than 50 clubs available to students such as:

- Chess Club
- Film Club
- Gender & Sexuality Alliance
- Honors Societies
- Esports Team
- etc.

Thiel stressed the importance each unique opportunity offers for personal and professional growth. A range of off-campus activities available to students are designed to cater to varied interests and preferences. For those inclined towards wildlife and conservation, day trips to prominent attractions like the Pittsburgh Zoo and PPG Aquarium were organized. These outings not only offered an escape from the academic routine but also provided a platform for learning and appreciating the natural world. Overnight trips are also available to locations such as Washington D.C. and Virginia.

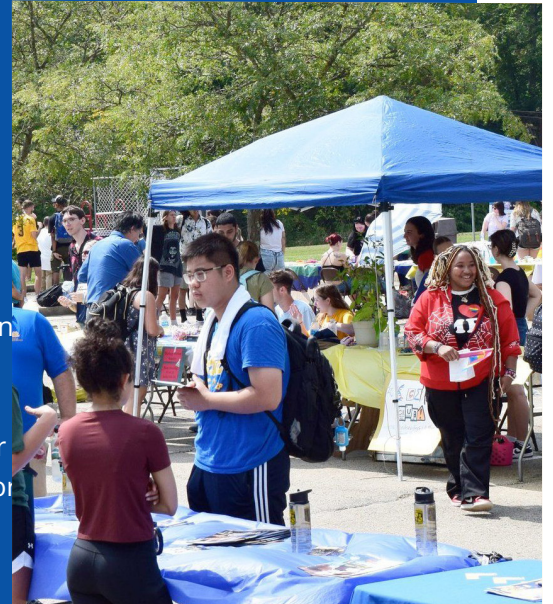


Photo Credit: University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg Media Relations

# MEET THE TEAM



Audra Lewis  
Photo Credit: Audra Lewis

## Audra Lewis

Engagement Manager

Audra Lewis has spent nearly two decades transforming the lives of learners in the seventh-largest school district in the nation as an instructional leader. She believes that all learners should have equitable access to education and that their zip code should not determine access to high-quality resources and instruction.

Lewis is a person of agency who employs a strong character and leadership in her career and in service to her community. A volunteer Girl Scout leader, she is motivated to serve because of her desire to improve the world. Her goal is to build capacity in others in order to shape a better tomorrow for all in society.

## Erica Samios

Engagement Coordinator

Erica Samios brings her expertise in strategic communications to her role as the Engagement Coordinator at Pitt-Greensburg. An alumna of Indiana University of Pennsylvania, she holds Bachelor's and Master's degrees in communications/media studies. Her experience as a former evening news producer in the broadcast news industry developed her skills as an efficient multi-tasker in a fast-paced environment.

At Pitt-Greensburg, Samios handles data collection and the creation of marketing materials for the Office of Community Outreach.



## Dr. Danielle Mehlman-Brightwell

Director of Office of Community Outreach

Assistant Professor of Public Policy & Communication

Dr. Danielle R. Mehlman-Brightwell (Ph.D., Indiana University of Pennsylvania) is an assistant professor of Public Policy and Communication at the University of Pittsburgh at Greensburg and teaches courses in argument, interpersonal communication, rhetoric and public policy, policy practicum, theories of persuasion, and public speaking. She serves as the public policy major advisor for Pitt-Greensburg.

Mehlman-Brightwell is the supervisor for the Office of Community Outreach, and the Principal Investigator for the Richard King Mellon grant.



Dr. Danielle Mehlman-Brightwell  
Photo Credit: Pitt-Greensburg Directory

# Future Events

LinkTree



- DEI "Garden Of Hope" Walk Oct. 14, 2023
- Tool Box Series October 2023
- Pre-College Leadership Fall Semester 2023
- Dual Enrollment Training November 2023
- Leadership Summit November 2023



The University of Pittsburgh-Greensburg is utilizing support from the Richard King Mellon Foundation's Postsecondary Educational Attainment Grant under Economic Mobility.

The initiative is to increase young adults aged 14-24 years old access to college-ready, career-related, and leadership development activities.