Seeing ‘the Vulgarity of Reality’

COVID-19 pandemic highlights importance of Creighton’s health sciences ethics education
The uplighting of Creighton Hall brings visibility to this historic building and serves as a beacon for alumni to find their way home.

Message from the President

The first semester of the 2020-2021 academic year has drawn to a close, and forever will be etched in our consciousness for its unique nature due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As most of you know, we opened the campus in August and compressed the semester in order to conclude by Thanksgiving.

Our students, faculty, staff, and administrators worked together to create as safe an environment as we possibly could. Our COVID-19 Community Standards detailed guidelines regarding face coverings, social distancing, hand hygiene, and more, and we kept everyone informed on the latest developments regarding the University’s response to the pandemic.

After producing two online editions of Creighton magazine, we are pleased to be able to print this slightly smaller edition. In it you will discover that your University accomplished our goal of Staying Creighton, in some cases because of the pandemic, and in others, despite the unprecedented situation.

The worldwide health crisis shined a spotlight on the differentiators that distinguish a Creighton education. For example, this issue’s cover story “Seeing the Vulgarity of Reality,” explores how a Creighton health sciences education, with its critical ethical and humanities components, is needed now more than ever. Health care providers are having to wrestle with ethical dilemmas involving shortages of personal protective equipment, treatments, cultural disparities, and more. What was once a classroom hypothetical suddenly has become a stark reality and we believe Creighton students are particularly suited to deal with those realities.

While many events and experiences that would normally take place had to be altered, a great deal was accomplished this semester Creighton students, faculty, and researchers learned, explored, and excelled. I was glad that we were able to recognize Sade Kosoko-Lasaki, MD, MBA ’05, associate vice provost for Health Sciences, with the Kingfisher Award during a virtual campus Town Hall. Dr. Kosoko-Lasaki, a professor at the School of Medicine, has led our minority health sciences outreach programs for 20 years. She and her colleagues work to improve health outcomes in minority communities and introduce thousands of young people to Creighton through educational pipelines that begin in elementary school.

And what could be more Creighton than 24th Street and Creighton Hall? The historic corridor and iconic building have both undergone exciting changes that you will enjoy reading about—and will enjoy even more in person the next time you visit campus.

As we move into the joyous Christmas season, my thoughts and prayers contain gratitude for each of you. I hope and pray that, though this year’s holidays will look and feel different, you still will find God’s blessings in quiet moments, fond memories, health, and expressions of kindness and love.

Rev. Daniel S. Hendrickson, SJ, PhD
President

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Contents

10

Contents

8 Lesson Plan

The Haddix Ignatian Advising Program in the College of Arts and Sciences helps undergraduate students discover their path through four years of mentorship.

37 Alumni Notes

16 STREET OF DREAMS

At the intersection of history and hope stands 24th Street, a major corridor through campus. A significant transformation project brings together the University, the city and North and South Omaha community members.

20 SHINING A LIGHT ON CREIGHTON HALL

The structural beauty of the oldest building on campus is now on magnificent display, as Creighton Hall is brilliantly lit to showcase its iconic nature.

22 CREIGHTON HIRES FIRST FULL-TIME PSYCHIATRIST

A Creighton alumna, who is both a child and adult psychiatrist, brings her special skills to help today’s college students deal with stress, anxiety and depression.

28 SCULPTURE CELEBRATES CREIGHTON’S GLOBAL REACH


31 JESUITS IN FORMATION ENRICH CAMPUS EXPERIENCE

Two Jesuits in formation bring their unique perspectives to the campus and Creighton students.

33 HISTORIC BEAUTY

An architectural masterpiece, St. John’s Church is getting a fresh appearance as its hefty wooden doors are being painstakingly refinished to their original state.

37 Alumni Notes

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Sade Kosoko-Lasaki, MD, MBChB, associate vice provost for Health Sciences, received the Kingfisher Award from Creighton’s president during a virtual campus Town Hall in September. The award is given in partnership with the University’s Kingfisher Institute for the Liberal Arts and Professions.

For 20 years, Kosoko-Lasaki, a professor at the School of Medicine and an ophthalmologist, has led minority outreach programs through the Health Sciences Multicultural and Community Affairs (HS-MACA) office. HS-MACA’s mission is to improve health outcomes in minority communities while introducing thousands of young people to Creighton through educational pipelines that begin in elementary school.

“Dr. Kosoko-Lasaki’s important work fulfills the vision of the Kingfisher Institute,” said Creighton President the Rev. Daniel S. Hendrickson, SJ, PhD “which calls for a transformative educational experience, grounded in the Jesuit tradition, that prepares members of the Creighton community to confront challenges that transcend disciplinary and professional boundaries.”

Fr. Hendrickson said Kosoko-Lasaki “embodies Creighton’s desire to serve underrepresented and disadvantaged students; an important expression of Creighton’s humanitarian calling.”

Under Kosoko-Lasaki’s leadership, HS-MACA has built and supported student recruitment pipelines; organized and supported health-related activities in the Omaha area; raised more than $15.5 million in grants and awards; and, most recently, received a $250,000 grant to study health care disparities related to COVID-19 in Omaha.

“With humility, I accept this Kingfisher Award on behalf of the diverse students at Creighton, the hard-working staff of HS-MACA, and all our partners and collaborators in the community that we serve,” Kosoko-Lasaki said in an acceptance speech during the virtual Town Hall.

“Together, we have achieved substantial strides and success on diversity and inclusion.”

She added, “The work of diversity involves everyone. We must be bold and forthright, and embrace each other as brothers and sisters.”

Kosoko-Lasaki’s work is both local and global. She created “Preventing Glaucoma Blindness in Nebraska: A Creighton University Initiative,” and has taken this screening program to underserved communities in Nebraska, Iowa, Kansas and Missouri and the U.S. Virgin Islands. She also leads HS-MACA’s annual trip to the Dominican Republic, where she and her team of medical professionals and students battle vitamin A deficiency, a leading cause of blindness in children and of glaucoma in adults.

Kosoko-Lasaki, a native of Nigeria, has served as a consultant to UNICEF, USAID and Helen Keller International. In 2005, she added an MBA from Creighton to her academic credentials.

The Kingfisher Award includes a $5,000 grant for research and scholarship, along with a Kingfisher statue created by renowned wildlife sculptor Dan Ostermiller.

Creighton’s Kingfisher Institute is founded on a bold vision for the future of higher education, and Jesuit and Catholic higher education in particular: a vision that integrates arts and professional education complement and reinforce one another. Through the formation of faculty and staff, the institute aims to influence all students in Creighton’s nine schools and colleges.

Tierney Named Chair of Department of Clinical Research

The School of Medicine has named Maureen Tierney, MD, chair of the Department of Clinical Research, assistant dean for clinical research and public health, and associate professor of medicine. In addition, Tierney will serve as medical director of clinical research at CHI Health.

“I am thrilled to become a part of the Creighton School of Medicine and CHI Health. I was introduced to Creighton education at Fordham University in my home-town of New York City and both my sons recently graduated from Creighton, so being able to contribute to the Jesuit mission of magis and serving others is so important to me,” said Tierney.

Under Tierney’s guidance, the Department of Clinical Research will facilitate the process of conducting clinical research from inception through completion, including concept review, trial feasibility and design, funding acquisition, statistical review and publication. The ultimate goal is scientific discovery to facilitate prevention, diagnosis and treatment of disease and to improve health care, including health care equity. Tierney will also lead an initiative to review clinical research activities of School of Medicine faculty at Creighton’s Phoenix campus and develop plans to support faculty in their research efforts.

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“The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the importance of well performed, high quality clinical research. Doing high quality academic investigation is hard,” Tierney said. “My goal is to help the School of Medicine and CHI Health’s clinical research infrastructure merge to create an even more productive infrastructure that supports and enables clinical investigators to pursue academic research questions.”

Her research interests include public health, medical ethics, antimicrobial resistance, and the epidemiology of COVID-19 and ways to reduce its transmission.

Prior to joining Creighton, Tierney held academic appointments at Harvard Medical School and Cornell University Medical College. She spent several years as a senior medical reviewer at the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and later as the head of the Healthcare Associated Infections and Antimicrobial Resistance Program at the Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). She was recently named the inaugural awardee of the McKnight Prize for Healthcare Outbreak Heroes.

At Nebraska DHHS, she and her team created an antimicrobial resistance task force, developed a real-time state antibiogram and established a containment program for multidrug-resistant organisms (MDROs). From February through May 2020, she authored and hosted frequent public health and clinical COVID-19 update webinars for the Nebraska medical community.

She holds certification from the American Board of Internal Medicine with a subspecialty of infectious disease. She earned her Doctor of Medicine degree from Cornell University Medical College and a Master of Science in Health Service Administration, Kalsby Program for Research Training in Clinical Effectiveness from the Harvard School of Public Health.
Dravid to Lead NIH Pain Research Project

A Creighton professor will lead a multi-university team of researchers charged with finding pain therapies that will reduce the need for highly addictive opioids.

Shashank Dravid, PhD, MBK’12, an associate professor of pharmacology and neuroscience at the School of Medicine, brings his expertise in both disciplines to the wide-ranging assault on opioids that is the focus of a five-year $2.7 million grant from the National Institute of Health (NIH).

A project summary published by the NIH states that pain impacts more than 100 million Americans, costing several hundred billion dollars in healthcare costs and lost productivity.

“Persistent pain may produce long-term disability and lead to pre- cipitation of depression, anxiety and cognitive impairment,” the summary said. “Currently used medications for chronic pain are not always effective and have limitations in terms of tolerance and abuse liability. Thus, identify- ing novel therapeutic targets is essential to address this clinical burden.”

Dravid said the well-publicized danger of opioid addiction is an important driver of the research. “We are working on finding treatments for chronic pain that will avoid the need for opioids,” Dravid said.

“This is a very big grant, with several co-investigators from other universities. This is a new area for me, so I have collaborators who are pain experts. We all bring our own expertise.”

Dravid and his collaborators will focus on pain-signaling mechanisms in the amygdala, which is an almond-shaped mass of gray matter found in both of the brain’s central hemispheres. The amygdala is believed to play an important role in responding to such emotions as fear, anger, anxiety, depression and pain sensation.

“In order to understand pain,” he said, “we have to understand how signals that target, or trying to inhibit these pro- teins, might be a good way to prevent or treat skin cancer.” She says, “Since normal skin cells survive the signaling, it’s a potential therapy that could be specific to the cancer cells, and while that sort of specificity is highly desirable, it also has implications for other diseases.”

Hansen says she and Lovas, both professors at the School of Medicine, submitted the grant application to the NIH in October 2019.

“The upcoming lab work we have to do is to understand how these proteins interact with the target proteins we have identified, how they talk to each other, and how they regulate the behavior of skin cancer cells,” she says.

A key role will be played by Lovas, whose work developing effective pep tide inhibitor proteins is key to the success of the research.

He will seek to refine the peptides to be even more specific, thus enabling effective interventions at lower concentrations.

“If we will take his inhibitors along with some commercial inhibitors of related proteins that we are inter- ested in, and see how effective we can get this therapy to be both in preventing malignant progression of premalignant lesions, and in treating those lesions as well,” Hansen says.

The Stonecatchers Program earns Ignition Medal for Diversity, Social Justice

The Stonecatchers Diversity and Inclusion Training Program at Creighton University received the Ignition Medal for Outstanding Commitment to Diversity and Social Justice, presented by the Jesuit Association of Student Personnel Administrators (JASPA).

The award is given annually to a program or initiative “aimed at an individual or a group who demonstrate a strong commitment to issues of diversity and social justice in Jesuit higher education.”

“Being acknowledged by peers within the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU) network is affirming that we as a Jesuit student affairs profession uplift diversity and inclusion work as a core value,” says Michele Bogard, PhD, associate vice provost for student engagement.

“Creating an inclusive and welcoming community is everyone’s work, especially as members of the Creighton community, which calls us to respect and welcome the dignity of all people. Stonecatchers helps empower people with skills to help do the work of creating inclusive communities.”

The Stonecatchers program, an ini- tiative of the Division of Student Life, trains students, faculty and staff on strategies to specific situations, often in real-life, on-campus scenarios.

The effectiveness of this program is unmatched in comparison to a great number of presentations I received as a student for four years,” she wrote in a letter to the JASPA selection team. “In light of the recent news regarding the tragic death of George Floyd, I thought through possible reactions, and the Stonecatchers presentation came into that thought process — reminding me that I can take a stand against racial injustice by sharing Christ’s love and light with others.”

The curriculum was developed and is presented by Bogard and Becky Nickerson, M.S., director of the Demonstrative Learning Center. The pair have trained other departments and student organizations on campus, including resident advisors, fraternity and sorority life executives, new student orientation leaders and others. Based on the initiative’s popularity, a second ver- sion, Stonecatchers 2.0, was developed as a more personal and reflective effort to examine the role individuals play in incidents of bias and hate.

“Stonecatchers was created as an institutional response to injustices and hateful acts in the world and to teach skills for each of us to actively live out our core values of honoring the inalienable worth of each individ- ual and promoting the ethical and cul- tural diversity,” Nickerson says. “These aren’t just words. We need to put them into action.”

Donna Shabazz, BS ’99, Creighton Students Union president in 2019, par- ticipated in the Stonecatchers program for the first time as a member of the Freshman Leadership Program.

“My stone sat on my desk all four years of college and read ‘Be the light.’ The effectiveness of this program is unmatched in comparison to a great number of presentations I received as a student for four years.” she wrote in a letter to the JASPA selection team. “In light of the recent news regarding the tragic death of George Floyd, I thought through possible reactions, and the Stonecatchers presentation came into that thought process — reminding me that I can take a stand against racial injustice by sharing Christ’s love and light with others.”
For freshmen, coming to college can be overwhelming. There are textbooks to buy, people to meet, often a residence hall room to decorate. And somewhere, among all of that, new students have to decide what classes to take.

Enter the academic advisor. But at Creighton, undergraduates in the College of Arts and Sciences are getting more than a few cursory meetings about scheduling. Funded by a gift from George Haddix, PhD, MA'66, and his wife, Susan, the Haddix Ignatian Advising Program provides students with four years of personalized guidance and support, helping them discern how they can use their gifts to grow in college and beyond.

“We’re thinking about it as an integrated four-year program,” says Dean Bridget Keegan, PhD. “As an advisor in Arts and Sciences, you’re going to have to have a long-term relationship with students. You’re going to accompany them through their different courses and help them approach their education holistically. This intentional, connected, four-year vision for academic advising helps us fulfill our mission in a unique way.”

The goal of the program: incorporate the spirit of St. Ignatius’ educational philosophy, which emphasizes critical self-reflection, into a student’s advising experience. Working with faculty members who serve in an advising and mentoring role, students are encouraged to ask themselves certain questions and meet certain goals throughout each year of their undergraduate program.

FRESHMAN YEAR

**DISCOVER**

Through the Ratio Studiorum Program (RSP, Latin for “plan of study”), freshmen take a one-credit course on Creighton’s mission and values taught by a faculty member who will serve as the student’s academic advisor. Students explore available majors and begin putting together a four-year plan; Arts and Sciences students meet with their RSP advisor and class for the entire year, ensuring that they have support and guidance both semesters.

**FIVE PILLARS**

Grounded in the Jesuit charism of cura personalis, or care for the whole person, the Ignatian Advising Program focuses on five key pillars, always tailoring these to each student’s unique needs and interests:

1. Informed academic planning
2. Experiential learning
3. Intentional post-graduate preparation
4. Diversity and inclusion
5. Ignatian reflection and discernment

**SOPHOMORE YEAR**

**REFLECT**

Meet with RSP advisors and update four-year plan to include high-impact learning experiences such as research, study abroad and internships. By the end of the year, students should have applied for their major (and minor). Sophomores are encouraged to pursue service trips and volunteer opportunities, and attend multicultural and Campus Ministry events to enrich their understanding of Ignatian spirituality.

**SENIOR YEAR**

**ADVANCE**

Seniors are encouraged to finalize their post-graduate plans with their mentors and focus on gaining the practical skills needed to enter the workforce or continue on to graduate or professional school. Students continue to build their resumes, complete capstone projects, and reflect upon and prepare for the transition to the next stage in their journey.

**ILLUSTRATION BY JACQUI LANGLAND**
The questions emerged in hospitals — and then the press — with a sudden and tragic speed.

- In a hospital overwhelmed with severe cases, who gets a ventilator?
- As a physician, at what point should I prioritize my own health and safety and that of my loved ones?
- What is society’s duty to protect its most vulnerable populations?
- What about its duty to protect me as someone providing care?

COVID-19 pandemic highlights importance of Creighton’s health sciences ethics education

SEEING ‘the vulgarity of reality’

BY BLAKE URSCH

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- In a hospital overwhelmed with severe cases, who gets a ventilator?
- As a physician, at what point should I prioritize my own health and safety and that of my loved ones?
- What is society’s duty to protect its most vulnerable populations?
- What about its duty to protect me as someone providing care?
As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to ravage the United States, it has left the nation’s health care providers to wrestle with a number of ethical problems. In the early weeks and months, shortages of ventilators and other important equipment meant physicians and hospital administrators were forced to make difficult decisions about which patients received lifesaving treatment.

Now, as development of a vaccine continues at a rapid pace, ethicists are contending with a whole new set of issues. Who gets access to the vaccine first? And once vaccines are widely available, should they be mandatory?

Creighton University has long challenged its health sciences students to ponder difficult ethical questions as part of its curriculum. The University’s commitment to providing a well-rounded liberal arts education — and its Jesuit, Catholic mission — means that students in all of its schools and colleges are taught that all human life is sacred and cannot be reduced to a checklist of symptoms or a balance sheet of numbers and statistics.

For the University’s health sciences students, many of whom are poised to enter a workforce forever changed by COVID-19, the pandemic has made ethical exercises that once seemed distant and hypothetical all too real.

“When I’m handing out a case study to students, there’s something interesting and exciting and strangely comforting when it’s just there on the page. But what happens when the world is falling apart right in front of your eyes?” says Mark Robinson, PhD, assistant professor in the Graduate School’s Master of Science in Bioethics program. “That’s what’s happening right now. As an institution, all of us are trying to understand, given the immediate relevance in front of us.”

“These ethics and humanities pieces are interspersed throughout those other blocks,” Fr. FitzGerald says. “The idea being that, when you are studying this particular organ system, these types of diseases, that’s what the ethics cases are referring to. So, the students aren’t just learning ethical theories; they’re learning how to do ethical decision-making in health care.”

Last spring, as the full scale of the pandemic began to make itself apparent and courses across the University shifted to online learning, Fr. FitzGerald and Piemonte recognized the need to change the ethical scenarios they had planned to address for the rest of the semester. To do so, Fr. FitzGerald says, he didn’t have to look any further than the day’s headlines.

“One thing that was happening in the spring was the concern that emergency rooms and ICUs would be overwhelmed, and we’d run out of equipment such as ventilators,” says Fr. FitzGerald, reiterating the crisis in New York City, which, in the early months of the pandemic, overtaxed the city’s health care infrastructure and resulted in thousands of deaths.

So, Fr. FitzGerald presented the students with a problem: Two patients arrive at the emergency room exhibiting severe symptoms of COVID-19. Both are in need of intensive care and organ support, but one patient has a good insurance policy and the other has bad insurance policy.

“I was so hesitant to value any one life more than another,” says Michaela Hoffmann, a second-year student in Creighton’s physician assistant program who took Fr. FitzGerald’s ethics training last spring. “The point of these exercises, Fr. FitzGerald says, is that there is no right answer. As an institution, all Creighton can do is train its students to think critically about what the best answer is, factoring in the Jesuit values they’ve been taught as part of their medical education.

“I think COVID has helped us introduce the importance of the humanities in a way that students can conceptually understand, given the immediate relevance in front of them.”

NICOLE PIEMONTE, PHD
Assistant Dean for Medical Education
Assistant Professor of Medical Humanities
Creighton University Health Sciences – Phoenix Campus
and the Jesuit intellectual tradition, you are trying to comprehend this human being in front of you as the gift from God that this person is, in the midst of that person's socioeconomic background and family history," says Fr. Fitzgerald.

"This person is before you now in a health care setting, and something is wrong that you have to help them address in whatever way is going to best allow them to continue to be the gift that they are. This person is not a broken heart. This person is not a bad set of lungs. This is a human being."

As the scale of the pandemic reached global proportions last spring, Creighton's Master of Science in Bioethics faculty were hard at work developing a new course — HGS 610 Introduction to Bioethics — that would not only provide a foundational knowledge to students seeking the degree, but would also be an elective for other graduate students interested in the field.

"One of the things we struggled with at the time was, we knew how big this was going to be, but we couldn't know what direction it was going to go," says Helen Chapple, PhD. BSN'08, MSN'12, professor in the Graduate School's Bioethics program. The following months, of course, would give them more perspective.

The course — due to be offered in fall 2021 — now heavily addresses the ethical issues posed by COVID-19.

Chapple says, "COVID comes in sort of everywhere," she says. "It's the intersectionality of those problems — the weaknesses in the health care system and the terrible fragmentation that this virus has revealed."

"It's not new," she says. "It's just newly visible to the world. The problems that are showing up are very old."

The pandemic, Chapple says, has exposed racial and socioeconomic disparities that have long festered in the U.S. health care system. In Douglas County (where Creighton's campus is located), the vast majority of people who tested positive for COVID-19 are white West Omaha.

The amount of interest in the field, Chapple says, has exploded since the scale of the pandemic became apparent. It only grew in the wake of the widespread social unrest in the U.S. following the killing of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police, which renewed conversations about structural racism embedded in national institutions, public and private.

"The explosion of interest in some of these issues has also been overwhelming," Chapple says. "The data that has been coming our way, the articles that have been popping up on every front regarding this have been difficult to keep up with."

These types of health disparities are addressed throughout Creighton's bioethics program, led by program director Sarah Lux, PhD. The degree program seeks to provide students with the education needed to address moral and ethical challenges — such as end-of-life care, pain and suffering, research ethics, and health disparities — in all health care areas.

"Bioethics in the United States began as a kind of offshoot of philosophy and religion, and its roots are still there," Chapple says. "It started out as a kind of quandary ethics — 'What do we do about this particular patient when there's more than one right answer?' It's a sort of decision-making tool, in which you look at moral authorities and draw on them in terms of deciding which things are right."

In the new material addressing the pandemic, faculty plan to emphasize that in-depth guidelines to mitigate the impact of widespread disease have been developed by several health organizations — including the World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Robinson, assistant professor in the program, says the U.S., under previous presidential administrations, has had bioethicists on hand to consult in the event of a pandemic.

The current situation in the U.S., Robinson says, starkly illustrates the importance of preliminary planning — having written procedures in place in the event of an emergency — as well as critical thinking around issues such as health disparities and access to health care.

"This is a moment in history in which many moral decisions are being made that will have enormous effects on a lot of people for a long time," Robinson says. "It's also a unique moment in which engaging in conversations with other experts — national leaders, policy experts — about developing an algorithm to help physicians make decisions about allocating resources is an enormous task."

The shorthand for this is cura personalis and 'finding God in all things.' The idea that in Jesuit spirituality and the Jesuit intellectual tradition, you are trying to comprehend this human being in front of you as the gift from God that this person is, in the midst of that person's socioeconomic background and family history." KEVIN FITZGERALD, SJ, PhD, PhD Chair, Department of Medical Humanities

SECRETES

What data should such an algorithm consider? How should it be applied — by the physicians treating the patients, or by a board of objective observers tasked with making the final call?

These are questions the bioethics faculty aren’t trying to solve for their students, but are rather encouraging them to consider throughout their degree program. Each situation, each hospital, each locality, will have different criteria to consider, and ethicists evaluating them will have to draw their own unique conclusions based on the best available data.

"In that sense, our curriculum really does work, really does matter. But what we do outside the classroom matters more — our engagement with the community, with other departments, other initiatives," Robinson says. "I can’t imagine teaching this course at any other time in my life, at any other place in the world. It’s just the perfect course for the situation that we’re in right now."
At the intersection of history and hope stands 24th Street — and a major renovation project bringing together Creighton, the city of Omaha and two well-established communities.

Creighton University’s transformation of 24th Street from Cass Street north to Cuming Street is its latest contribution to one of Omaha’s most historic and iconic thoroughfares.

For generations of immigrants, since the founding of the city of Omaha in 1854 and its formal incorporation in 1857, 24th Street was the place where Poles, Czechs, Italians, Germans and Jews found refuge from European serfdom, and where today Latino and other immigrants, and their descendants, have added to vibrant expressions of community, hope, and racial and cultural pride.

But 24th Street is a tale of two worlds — divided, as divisions so often are, into north and south. The world of the rising European rustic became known as South 24th Street, in contrast to North 24th Street, which was older, inhabited by the pioneers and aristocrats of Omaha’s burgeoning civitas but which gradually through redlining, race-restrictive covenants and white flight, became home to a majority of the city’s African American population.

The dividing line of these north-south worlds is Cuming Street, named for Thomas Cuming, the second governor of Nebraska Territory. Some argue that Burt Street, one block south of Cuming Street and named for the first governor of Nebraska Territory, is the proper demarcation line. Whether Cuming or Burt, two things are clear: The naming of the streets in honor of Nebraska’s first governors demonstrates clearly where Omaha finds its roots, and Creighton University bridges these two portrayals or faces of 24th Street.

The memoirs of the Rev. William Rigge, SJ, who arrived at Creighton in 1878 as one of five original Jesuit faculty members, record the birth of Creighton’s relationship with 24th Street. It was, by his account, a muddy affair memorably preserved in a contemporary quatrain by poet John G. Saxe:

“Hast’s ever been to Omaha
Where rolls the dark Missouri down,
Where six strong horses scarce can pull
An empty wagon through the town?”

California Street, which today follows roughly the campus mall, was not paved until 1888, and 24th Street not until 1911, almost a year after Creighton’s still-standing concrete retaining wall was completed. By then, Fr. Rigge recorded, 24th Street was steaming toward its destiny:

“Twenty-fourth Street is fulfilling the expectation that it will become an intensely busy thoroughfare,” he wrote. “It is probably the longest and straightest street in the city, and the proposal to widen it to 100 feet has been mooted for years.”

The transformational redesign of the 24th Street corridor includes Haddix Circle, a four-exit roundabout, named in honor of Creighton alumnus and trustee emeritus George Haddix, PhD, MA ’66, and his wife, Susan, a Creighton trustee.
When Mary Lucretia Creighton stipulated in her will that a college be established in memory of her husband, Edward, a prominent Omaha businessman, and when she bequeathed the $300,000 that in 1878 made the dream a reality, she could not have known that her spousal memorial at 24th and California streets would one day become a major university of national standing, nor that it would eventually sit at the very cusp of Omaha’s Black community.

But history does what it does, and Creighton’s proximity to predominantly Black North Omaha has been the story, in small, of America’s slow, painful and ongoing progress toward racial equality.

Creighton, like other American institutions, walked a path of learning during the 20th century, emerging from a world where racial prejudice went largely unchallenged to today, when the University maintains outreach programs to the Black community and other communities of color.

The Rev. Daniel S. Hendrickson, SJ, PhD, president of Creighton, noted the kinship between the University and 24th Street on Sept. 24 during ceremonies marking the rededication of its stretch of 24th Street that runs through the Creighton campus. A joint, $6.8 million project between the University and the city of Omaha is transforming a nondescript stretch of 24th Street into an elegant boulevard, complete with a stylish roundabout at Cass Street, a median teeming with flowers and plants, bicycle lanes, bus stops and numerous monument signs declaring the presence of Creighton University.

“Traffic calming has been achieved by reducing the lanes from four to two — one in each direction to a standard of the iconic walk signal voice that will continue to declare at Dagley Square (no longer Dagley Circle) that the ‘Walk signal to cross 24th Street is now on.’

The roundabout at Cass Street, deemed ‘the new front door of the University’ by Creighton President the Rev. Daniel S. Hendrickson, SJ, PhD, has been named Haddix Circle in recognition of longstanding and ongoing contributions to Creighton by trustee emeritus George Haddix, PhD, MA’66, and his wife, Susan, a Creighton trustee. On it will rest one of the monument signs announcing the University.”

“By changing the high-traffic corridor from four lanes to two, adding bike lanes, and enhancing it with green space, the beautiful roundabout at Cass Street, and so much more, we now have a safer, much more attractive hub to our campus, a true gateway to historic North Omaha, and, indeed, a bridge between Omaha’s south and north neighbor heads,” he said.

Although the stretch of 24th Street from Cass to Cuming streets is now open to traffic, the beautification work isn’t complete and won’t be until next spring.

Derek Scott, assistant vice president for Facilities Management, says construction began this past spring, following a long period of preparation and design.

“This project has been a desire of the University for years,” he says.

Scott says seven monument signs will be erected. Four will be considered secondary signs and will sit at Chicago Street, one on each side of the California Street Mall, and one at the Vinland Center (Old 48th Street). Three larger, lighted monument signs are also to be installed. Two will sit on the corners of the intersection of 24th and Cuming streets and the other in the Haddix Circle roundabout at Cass Street.

Some plantings will have to wait until the spring. Scott says, since the chosen plants are currently out of season. Some detail work on the monument signs also will wait until spring.
FOR A BRIEF MOMENT THIS FALL, anyone walking through Creighton University’s Skinner Mall caught a rare sight: The heavy wooden doors of St. John’s Church suspended in air.

In September, construction crews used a crane to remove the doors from the entrance of the historic church as part of a restoration project. The doors, estimated to weigh between 600 and 700 pounds apiece, will be stripped of paint and refinished, restoring them to their original appearance.

The project came about at the suggestion of Creighton President the Rev. Daniel S. Hendrickson, SJ, PhD. While meeting with Derek Scott, assistant vice president in Creighton’s Department of Facilities Management, Fr. Hendrickson suggested restoring the doors to their original state. Scott began stripping away the layer of paint on the door and knew right away that it was the direction to go.

“This is a wonderful opportunity to renew and restore the historic beauty of these doors,” Fr. Hendrickson says. “St. John’s Church sits at the heart of our campus, in so many ways. It is a warm and welcoming place, a place of spiritual renewal and inner reflection. It is appropriate that these doors be revived for their past splendor to welcome future generations.”

The removal, performed by Omaha’s Prairie Construction, went smoothly, says Brian Besack, senior project manager at Creighton. Gerst Painting, based in Elkhorn, Nebraska, is handling the stripping and refinishing.

“I’ve been on campus for 28 years and nothing’s been done to them other than a fresh coat of paint. They’ve been painted for at least 30 years,” Besack says.

As the church is a historic building, Creighton obtained approval from History Nebraska, the state historical society, for the restoration.

St. John’s was dedicated on May 6, 1888, less than a year after the cornerstone was laid. The Jesuit community had intended the church to be dedicated to St. John the Baptist, the patron of John A. Creighton. However, Bishop James O’Connor, having not been informed of this, instead dedicated the church to St. John the Evangelist.

The church, built in the English Gothic style, remained unfinished for decades, due to lack of funds at the time of construction. In 1922, a building committee was formed and began finishing the church as originally planned.

In September 1923, the church’s completed addition was dedicated. Improvements, additions and changes continued to be made for the next several decades: The stained-glass windows were added between 1946 and 1949, and the right tower steeple was installed in 1976. Significant renovations were completed in 2007, which included changes to the altar configuration and installation of the Crucifix that now hangs from the ceiling near the altar.

The front entrance, Besack says, was due for some attention. The heavy wooden doors had sustained their share of damage over the years, with areas of splitting and missing pieces of wood revealing their age.

The restoration work involves stripping the doors entirely down to bare wood and refinishing them, restoring them to their original color. The south doors of the two bell towers will receive the same restoration treatment.

“We knew we needed to do something to freshen up the look of the south entrance of the church, and that kind of evolved into this opportunity once painters exposed a bit of the original finish,” Besack says. “We don’t want them to look brand new; we want them to show some age and character and preserve what that original look was.”
The University’s oldest building got a much-awaited facelift this summer. Shining a light on Creighton Hall.
“Creighton Hall can now be seen from Interstate 480, bringing visibility to our historic building,” Fr. Hendrickson said.

“The lighting of Creighton Hall is a symbolic spotlight on our Jesuit mission, a reminder to our students of our history and traditions, and a beacon for our alumni to find their way home.”

The illumination project showcases Creighton Hall and its 190-foot seamless façade of Bedford stone, featuring Creighton, Catholic and Nebraska emblems. Ninety-three energy-efficient LED lights, controlled by an automated system, provide illumination based on the time of day, enhancing the building’s beauty and improving safety around the landmark structure.

“This is a project that I know my father and Don (Keough) would be very proud of,” said Scott Heider of Omaha, a member of the University Board of Trustees and leader of his family’s charitable foundation. “They both graduated from Creighton in 1949 and went on to great accomplishments. All through their lives, they never failed to remember their Jesuit educations received at Creighton University. They led their lives by example, and the new plaza and uplighting will be a great reminder to us all.”

The Marilyn and Donald, BS’49, HON’82, Keough Plaza extends a pathway connecting Creighton’s main thoroughfare — 24th Street — with St. John’s Church. As an active pedestrian corridor, Keough Plaza better accommodates people with disabilities and offers a signature greenspace for students, faculty, alumni and visitors to participate in open-air learning and socializing, in close proximity to Creighton Hall.

Kathy Keough Soto said her parents would be pleased their names are associated with Creighton Hall and the Keough Plaza. “Daddy was always very proud of his Creighton degree. I’m extremely proud of my nursing degree from Creighton,” she said. “We are strong, strong believers in Catholic education, and I’m pleased and grateful to Momma and Daddy that they gave us the wherewithal to do this.”

Built in 1877, Creighton Hall is the oldest building on the campus. It was the academic home of the first students at what was then known as Creighton College. At Sarah Emily Creighton’s request, a new south wing opened in 1889, increasing space for the growing Jesuit community living there. New southwest and north wings opened in 1902, followed by the 1911 completion of a project extending 24th Street and a retaining wall, still maintained today.

For years, it served as the Administration Building and as home to the College of Arts and Sciences California Street, running in front of the building, was closed to traffic in 1976 and Degelman Circle (recently renamed Degelman Square) was constructed. The Heider family provided funding for new Creighton Hall building doors in 2007.
It doesn’t need to be said that there’s no shortage of stressors weighing on the minds of today’s college students.


In this world, under these circumstances, mental health professionals such as Supriya Bhatia, MD, BA’01, are all the more critical.

This year, Bhatia joins Creighton University as its first full-time campus psychiatrist. In this role, she will meet with students who seek counseling and mental health care through Student Counseling Services.

She attended medical school at the University of Nebraska Medical Center and later completed a psychiatry residency at the University of California, Davis near Sacramento. She eventually returned to Omaha and has spent the last four years working in child and adolescent psychiatry at Boys Town.

“In medicine, what I had always enjoyed was making connections with people and then developing a long-term relationship with them,” Bhatia says. “No two people have the same story and what they want out of life.”

Leaving the families and children she’s come to know through her work at Boys Town is difficult, she says. But, “on the other hand, I felt like the transition to Creighton is going to be a good fit for me, because I’ll be able to work with people in a different phase of their lives, working on figuring out how to thrive in the current world.”

Young adults, Bhatia says, are in a difficult position when it comes to mental health care. Too old for child psychiatrists, but not yet adults, many college-aged students often get lost in the shuffle, relying on primary care doctors for mental health services, or simply not receiving care because they don’t know where to go, she says.

Especially given the challenging economic, environmental and social circumstances, Bhatia says she sees many young people experiencing depression and, particularly due to the COVID-19 pandemic, social isolation.

“A lot of times, the circumstances are triggering something that’s already there. Some insecurity or sadness,” Bhatia says. “Because they’re already feeling lonely or more disconnected socially, they’re feeling more anxious, because of the lack of control they have around them.”

Which makes thorough and consistent care all the more important, Peter says. “We are thrilled that Dr. Bhatia has joined our team,” she says. “She has a strong tradition in Creighton herself and understands firsthand the stress and challenges our students face. Dr. Bhatia understands Creighton’s mission and values and what it’s like to be part of our community. Having her with us full-time will allow our team to continue to work collaboratively to make sure we are caring for our students optimally.”

“I’m just really excited to re-engage with the Creighton community,” Bhatia says. “It’s great to have the opportunity to help these students thrive. I’m really looking forward to it.”
Sculpture Celebrates Creighton’s Global Reach

BY JAYNE VONNAHME SCHRAM, BA’87, MA’09
PHOTOS BY DAVE WEAVER
Littleton Alston, MFA

classical manner. It's a beautiful understanding of the world, almost in a classical manner.

The Globe' has a blue inner light, Creighton blue. It's a beautiful understanding of the world, almost in a classical manner.

Littleton Alston, MFA
Dzao Vu and Jeff Sullivan, BA’03, both well advanced on the path to become Jesuit, Catholic priests, are spending part of their formation process at Creighton University.

Vu, a native of Vietnam who immigrated to the United States at a young age with his parents, will be here until May with a view to beginning his theology studies in the fall of 2021. The study of theology is one of the final steps before ordination.

Sullivan, a native of Indiana, is in the fourth year of his theology studies and was recently ordained a transitional deacon, the final step before ordination to the full priesthood, which he expects to occur next summer. Sullivan has been at Creighton for two years and says no end to his time at the University has been set.

These stories, Vu says, impressed upon him the vigor of the Catholic faith during the first 17 years of his life spent growing up in revolutionary Vietnam. Under the watchful eye of a communist government that monitored closely all expressions of religious faith, there matured within him convictions that eventually led him to the Society of Jesus, a path that currently, and for a little while longer, sees him serving as an instructor at the Creighton School of Pharmacy and Health Professions. There he serves as chaplain to first-year physical therapy students and leads them in their studies of anatomy.

Dzao Vu, SJ, PharmD, now in the regency period of his Jesuit formation, lives with the Jesuit community at Creighton Hall. Ahead lie studies in theology, ordination to the transitional diaconate and then, in approximately three years, ordination to the priesthood.

Much has happened along the way, including an experience Vu says he values greatly — his missioning after first vows to Loyola University Chicago where he studied public health, a credential that permits him to co-teach third-year pharmacy students at Creighton in a required public health course.

It’s a world away from what he knew.

In a country where a combination of Catholic and South Vietnamese identity was enough to bar entry to a university, it would have been easier to go along to get along. But, Vu said, he found he could not forget those grandmotherly testimonies, deny his faith, or embrace communist culture.

“I would sit and listen to these heroic women telling these stories about how people practiced their faith until they were killed,” he says. “That is how the seeds of Catholic faith blossomed in Vietnam. Hearing about our ancestors, I just didn’t want to give up. If the government oppressed me, then I would stand up, I would not surrender my Catholic faith.”

Vu, now 44, came to the United States in 1992 with his mother, his carpenter father who spent eight years in a Vietnamese “re-education” camp, and one other sibling. Two older siblings would join them later, courtesy of a family reunification program sponsored by the late U.S. Sen. John McCain, R-Ariz. A third
sibling remains in Vietnam, where she is married. His father’s prison camp years were another formative influence. Vu says, “During those years my mother single-handedly raised five children, he says. “She had to support my father too. At first, we didn’t know if he would ever be released, so we visited him and stayed in touch.”

When the Vu family arrived in Houston in 1992 as beneficiaries of an agreement between Vietnam and the U.S. that permitted Vietnamese emigration, they immediately joined one of ten Vietnamese parishes. The search for employment soon led the family to Omaha where Vu’s parents, now 80 and 83, still reside.

The road from that day to Vu’s commitment to the Jesuit path in 2014 has been winding. He attended Omaha Central High School, where he often passed over Creighton’s campus never dreaming his future lie there. He earned his pharmacy doctorate at the University of Nebraska Medical Center. Then, a memorable conversation with Creighton Jesuit the Rev. Larry Gillick, SJ, assisted by friendships with Vietnamese Jesuit scholastics, followed by work as a pharmacist in Las Vegas, led him to a decision that the priestly life really was his calling.

“I had established a career as a pharmacist, but I thought to myself, ‘Well, what is the purpose of my life?’ I felt a call to a deeper vocation. I decided to maximize my gifts by becoming a Jesuit — to educate, to serve and to help the less fortunate.”

A CALLING REALIZED

JEFF SULLIVAN SAYS HIS FRIENDS always figured he’d be a Jesuit.

Sullivan himself wasn’t so sure. It was not, after all, until six years after he graduated from Creighton in 2003 with a BA in English that he formally joined the Society of Jesus. But those intervening six years confirmed that life as a Jesuit beckoned.

From 2003 to 2004, he worked with Legal Action of Wisconsin as a Jesuit volunteer, and then until 2006 as staff. From 2006 to 2008, he worked with the Working Boys Center, now known as the Center for Working Families, a Jesuit mission in Quito, Ecuador, and then from 2008 to 2009 at the Red Cloud Indian School, a Jesuit institution on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota.

That’s a lot of Jesuit for someone who wasn’t actually a Jesuit.

“Even though I eventually joined, and really am a Jesuit now, I didn’t have much of a bias. I was still a little resistant, he says. “I wanted all the joy of being a Jesuit but without the responsibilities.”

Sullivan speaks those words with an easy laugh, as he does often, and about much. A native of Indianapolis and the son of prac- ticing Catholics, he has had the benefit of loving parents, now 80 and 83, still reside.

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A CALLING REALIZED

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Pursue Excellence

“At Creighton, there’s a high level of thoughtfulness to be the best at what you’re doing and pursue excellence. My first experience pursuing my master’s at Creighton was so powerful that I ultimately decided to stay for my doctorate. I understood the people. I felt about it. Share your memories and milestones by emailing us at alumninews@creighton.edu.

— Charles Thomas Jr., MS’09, EdD’14
Master of Science in Negotiation and Conflict Resolution
Doctor of Education in Interdisciplinary Leadership

ALUMNI NOTES

Send Us Your News
Pen your long-awaited notes? Toward around the world? Received that awesome promotion? Earned a prestigious honor? If so, we want to hear about it. Share your memories and milestones by emailing us at alumninews@creighton.edu.

62 John G. Manois, MD, Fargo, North Dakota, has a new book available at Amazon books, Tails & Tales, a collection of his cat poems.

68 Patrick J. Ryan, MD, Cambridge, California, and his wife, Nora, were recipients of the Mage Anthony Broovers Award at the Annual Heart for the World Gala in Los Angeles on March 7, 2020. The award, presented by the Mission Doctors Association, recognized their faith and service to their community and world.

73 David G. Sabott, DDS, Erie, Colorado, was installed as president-elect of the American Board of Orthodontics (ABO) on May 1, 2020. He will become ABO president in the 2022-2023 year. Sabott maintains a private practice in Brighton, Colorado.

76 Daniel E. Monnat, JD, Wichita, Kansas, of Monnat & Spernice, Chartered, was named to the Best Lawyers in America 2021 list in four practice areas: criminal defense-general practice; criminal defense-white collar; but-the-company litigation; and appellate practice. Monnat has been honored by the publication for 33 consecutive years. Monnat also was named to the Who’s Who Legal as one of the world’s leading practitioners in the investigations sector.

77 John P. Heilhoff, JD, Council Bluffs, Iowa, recently published the children’s book, Heather Boots.

82 Molly Byron Hill, BA, Minneapolis, Minnesota, is the founding editor of an online literary journal for students (ages 13-22) called Blue Marble Review. The journal has been publishing online for five years and its first print anthology was printed this fall from Wise Ink Press. The current project is a COVID Stories section where students were invited to submit short essays about their experience coping with the current virus crisis. You can read more about the project and the essays at bluemarblereview.com/COVIDstories. Darrell D. Klein, JD, Lincoln, Nebraska, retired in May 2020 as deputy director of public health for the state of Nebraska after 31 years of service. Klein’s primary responsibility as deputy director was regulation of Nebraska’s health care facilities, health care professions and environmental health professions. He also assisted with responsibility for community and rural health planning, health promotion, lifespan health services, public health preparedness and emergency response, epidemiology and informatics, and vital records.

83 James D. Dari, JD, Naples, Florida, was selected for inclusion in Best Lawyers in America 2021 in real estate law. Dari is an attorney in the Naples office of Bond, Schoeneck & King.

88 Robert P. Manisco Jr., MBA, Omaha, was inducted into the Nebraska Baseball Hall of Fame. Manisco played at Iowa State from 1980-1983. He was named Academic All-Big Eight. All District and All American. He played professionally in Italy and also semi-professional baseball. He is chairman of the Greater Omaha Sports Committee. Thomas Monnat, MBA, St. Louis, was elected to serve as the next chair of Husch Blackwell in St. Louis. Formerly U.S. attorney for the Eastern District of Missouri and speaker of Missouri’s House of Representatives, Hanaway joined Husch Blackwell in 2013 and played a key role in forming — and then leading — the firm’s Government Solutions group. She will be the firm’s first female chair beginning in April 2021.
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BIRTHS
07 Nicholas J. Langlois, BSA, and Pamela Ziegler Langlois, BA, Omaha, a daughter, Olivia Ziegler, Feb. 28, 2020.
08 Dr. Patrick Mulherin and Megan Kuntuzos Becker, BSA’17, Minneapolis, a daughter, Charlotte Darlene, June 14, 2020.

DEATHS
05 Joseph R. Bezousek, BSBA, JD, Omaha, a daughter, Olivia Ziegler, Aug. 6, 2020.
06 Megan Kuntuzos Becker, BSN, Omaha, a daughter, Adelaide Rose Graham, Feb. 10, 2020.
09 Dr. Patrick Mulherin, BSN, and Dr. Karen Reisie Sherrard, Oregon, a daughter, Adelaide Rose Graham, Feb. 10, 2020.
10 Dr. Patrick Mulherin and Megan Kuntuzos Becker, BSA’17, Minneapolis, a daughter, Charlotte Darlene, June 14, 2020.
13 Drew Thompson and Katie Hays Thompson, PharmD, Omaha, a son, Hayden Paul, April 26, 2020.

Pacis Bana, M5’19 Master of Science in Business Intelligence and Analytics
Luke Christiansen, MBA’11 Master of Business Administration
Kelsey Haswell, MBA’18 Master of Business Administration Council Director of Interdisciplinary Leadership Programs
Mindy Simon, MBA’16 Master of Business Administration
Donny Suh, M.D., MBA’19 Executive Health Care MBA

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Reunion Weekend 2021 will be a time to come together virtually, have fun and reconnect with Creighton. We’re preparing a festive weekend full of entertainment for you and your classmates. Save the date, and stay tuned for more details.

creighton alumni
creighton.edu/reunionweekend

Reunion Weekend 2021 is being planned with your health and safety in mind. We will keep you updated on any changes.