Provost Update: SJSU Commencement Celebrates Student Success;
VIDEO: Spartans Prep Middle School Students for College; Graduate Equity Fellowship Fosters Mentorship; College of Science Students Share Research; Social Science Students Address Critical Issues; Student Success Centers Support Advising; Grant Fosters STEM Course Redesign; and Subscribe to the Academic Spotlight blog.

As provost, I am inspired by the pride I see in the eyes of our graduates as they don their caps and gowns each May. This month, we celebrate the dedication of our students, having attained their degrees with support from family, friends and our campus community. We will honor 9,861 undergraduate and graduate students at Commencement on May 28.
When they leave SJSU, they will be well prepared to become leaders in Silicon Valley and beyond while remaining an important part of the Spartan community as alumni.

While we celebrate so many Spartans obtaining their degrees, I am especially pleased that our campus ends the year with a comprehensive plan to support future graduates. SJSU’s Four Pillars of Student Success: College Readiness, Advising, Student Engagement and Clearing Bottlenecks is available online.

For the past year, I have worked closely with Vice President for Student Affairs Reggie Blaylock to develop this plan. We have collaborated and gathered information from faculty, staff, students and other experts to develop a data-driven campus-wide student success strategy with one goal: to significantly increase our retention and graduation rates for all students while improving the quality of their educational experience. Our 57 percent six-year and 10 percent four-year graduation rates, and a double-digit underrepresented minority student graduation rate gap are not acceptable. We owe it to our students, their families, taxpayers, employers and our community to improve.

As we end the semester, I am pleased to highlight examples from each of our four pillars: an outreach program for middle and high school students; a scholarship program that provides mentors to graduate students; events that highlight student research, scholarship and creative activity (RSCA); advising centers embedded in each college; and a grant that is redesigning the way we teach lower-division STEM classes.

I wish you all a wonderful summer and I look forward to working with you to enhance the success of every San Jose State student.

Andy Feinstein
Provost and VP for Academic Affairs
VIDEO: Spartans Prep Middle School Students for College

Spartans offer advice to high school and middle school students on how to prepare for college and make the most of their time at San Jose State.

Alissa Macklin, a freshman art major, volunteered to share her Spartan story with dozens of middle school students at the African American College Readiness Summit on Feb. 13.

“I had a rough start in middle school,” she said, noting that her grades dropped and her GPA bottomed out at 1.167 when her parents divorced. “I was going through a lot, but I learned you can’t let a situation with your family end your education.”

Macklin said she worked extra hard in high school to increase her GPA by taking classes from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. While she considered universities in Chicago, she opted for San Jose State to be close to family members who live in the East Bay.

“Chicago is cold and it was far from my family,” she said. “I wanted to be close so I could go to my parents’ (homes) to eat.”
Macklin was one of many SJSU students, alumni and community members who talked to hundreds of middle school students from schools in Santa Clara County about how they can prepare for college. The two African American College Readiness summits – a fall event for high school students and a spring event for middle school students – served at least 1,000 students this year.

The program is one of many hosted at San Jose State with K-12 schools and community partners to foster a college-going culture in Santa Clara County. As part of SJSU’s Four Pillars of Student Success, university leaders are focused on working with partners to increase college readiness. The plan calls for increasing participation in the college readiness summits from 1,000 to 1,500; increasing College Day participation from 1,400 to 2,000; and increasing participation in the Advancing Latino/a Achievement and Success conference from 1,000 to 1,500 students, among other initiatives. The pillar aims to ensure high school students are eligible for CSU admission and prepared for college-level courses.

Macklin, who wants to be a teacher and an artist, advised students to seek out help to understand financial aid, stay positive about their ability to thrive in college and to make connections on campus.

“I got involved in a lot of clubs such as the Black Student Union,” she said. “Only four percent (of SJSU students are African American), but we are close knit.”

Katasha Blade, a teacher with one of the visiting middle schools, also talked about her journey to college.

“I wanted to become a teacher because I was in foster care with one sister,” she said. “I didn’t grow up with parents. I wanted to be a teacher to help other people.”

Blade, who attended historically-black Hampton University, in Virginia, said she focused on keeping her grades high, preparing for college entrance exams and engaging in extracurricular activities. While in college, she said she had two jobs and took 18 credits a semester.

“You have to know that you can do it,” she told the room full of middle school students. “Never settle. You need to push yourself harder.”
Graduate Equity Fellowship
Fosters Mentorship

Karly Comfort, right, poses for a photo with her internship advisors. She received a Graduate Equity Fellowship to support her completion of a master’s in social work.

As a working mom and full-time student, Xochlit Garcia said it was a sacrifice to enroll in graduate school. Garcia is one of several SJSU students who received 2015-16 Graduate Equity Fellowships. The program provides a scholarship of $1,000 to $3,000 to offset the cost of tuition and also provides a faculty mentor component to help students focus on their career objectives.

“Between family, school and interning, it has helped me keep my mind on track and focus,” she said. “I’m not worried about paying additional tuition.”

Garcia, who works on the weekends, is finishing her master’s in counseling education in the Connie L. Lurie College of Education this semester and working towards a Pupil Personnel and Services credential that requires 600
“One of my biggest challenges has been trying to support my family in terms of time and money – juggling both those things,” she said. “The scholarship makes life a lot easier.”

She also appreciates the faculty mentor component of the program and has worked closely with Dr. Jason Laker.

“It’s good to have a mentor to discuss academic plans and the steps to achieve that,” said Garcia, who graduates in May.

Karly Comfort, a master’s of social work student in the College of Applied Sciences and Arts, also completes her degree this spring. She especially appreciated having a faculty mentor. She worked with Dr. Peter Allen Lee, who helped her think critically about how the work done in classes applies to real-world situations. Comfort said the fellowship allowed her to put in many internship hours that have provided practical experience. SJSU’s Four Pillars of Student Success student engagement pillar aims to increase high-impact practices such as mentor programs and internships.

“It was a huge part of my professional development,” she said. “A lot of school learning is theoretical, but when we get to be in the field we really learn the skills you need to be a social worker.”

Comfort interned with a mental health family enrichment program working with children ages 0 to 5 on building parent-child relationships through play and with Lucile Packard Children’s Hospital, where she rotated through different departments. Her experiences at SJSU prepared her for a position at a health clinic in east San Jose where she will begin working in June.

Applications are now being accepted for the 2016-2017 Graduate Equity Fellowship awards through June 24.
Biological sciences majors Bianca Opara, left, and Dania Abid share their findings at the College of Science Student Research Day.

On May 6 at the 12\textsuperscript{th} Annual College of Science Student Research Day more than 60 undergraduate and graduate students presented work from a variety of disciplines.

Bianca Opara, ’18 Biological Sciences, and Dania Abid, ’17 Biological Sciences, both worked in Professor Shelley Cargill’s hands-on physiology lab. Abid wants to pursue a medical degree, while Opara is interested in combining research and medicine. At the recent event, they presented the process they are using to discover the effects of a high-fat diet on follicle count ratios in mice.

Opara, who is part of the Research Initiative for Scientific Enhancement (RISE) Program, said she was first approached by program director Karen Singmaster when she was a sophomore. While Opara was at first hesitant to join the program due to timing, she decided to take Singmaster’s advice to apply when she heard from other students involved in RISE.

“I am so excited they let me in,” she said. “It helped me figure out that I like hands-on procedures.”

Carlos Rojas, ’16 Geology, with a minor in Business, used connections near his
hometown of Hollister to gain access to private property for geochemistry research on the Quien Sabe volcanics of west Central California. His faculty advisor Ellen Metzger and other student researchers had completed an analysis of areas north and south of the spot he studied.

Rojas, a Marine Corps veteran, said he has loved rocks since he was a kid and was interested in learning how the landscape was created.

“It was really exciting, exploring the area and finding new results,” he said. “It is a beautiful area.”

Organic Chemistry Professor Roy Okuda has helped to organize the Student Research Day each year since its inception. He said it originally started because he realized many students were attending off-site meetings to present their posters but the work wasn’t being shared on campus. Its location in the breezeway of Duncan Hall allows lower division students to mingle with upper division and graduate students between classes.

“It gets so busy and so noisy with everyone talking,” Okuda said. “We learn a lot. Sometimes we don’t realize everything that is going on in the college.”

The College of Science event is one of many on campus that highlights the benefits to both students and faculty members of working together on research, scholarship and creative activity, a high-impact practice that is highlighted in SJSU’s Four Pillars of Student Success student engagement pillar.

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Social Science Students Address Critical Issues
Clockwise from top: College of Social Sciences graduate students John Linford, Joseph Holman, Ana Lucrecia Rivera, Ida Wilson, Christal West and Matthew Gloria-Dalton presented their research at the Graduate Student Colloquia in April; Guests listen to the first student presenter, Gloria-Dalton; Linford and Holman

Photos by Bob Bain
share analysis of auto collisions; Rivera discusses urban heat islands; and College of Social Sciences Dean Walt Jacobs talks with West at the event.

This year, the College of Social Sciences established a Graduate Student Colloquia to share research, scholarship and creative activity (RSCA) accomplishments. The April event focused on “Environmental Factors and their Impact on American Communities.”

“In the College of Social Sciences, we value research that addresses critical issues facing 21st century society and beyond,” Dean Walt Jacobs said. “Our graduate students are the next generation to lead this effort, so we wanted to highlight their initial investigations. After our first graduate student research colloquium, a student approached CoSS Research, Scholarship and Creative Activity Director Ruma Chopra to express her enjoyment of the event and to volunteer for next year’s colloquium, so we will definitely continue.”

The research projects undertaken by students and their faculty mentors investigated vulnerable populations in the community. Matthew Gloria-Dalton, a communications studies student, reviewed portrayals of mental illness in mass media. Christal West, a Mexican American studies student, explored the role of ethnic studies in informing trauma intervention for youth of color. Ida Wilson, an anthropology student, examined the underground economy in Oakland. Other presenters included John Linford and Joseph Holman, economics students who studied automobile collisions in California, and Ana Lucrecia Rivera, a geography and global studies student, who identified urban heat islands that can impact vulnerable residents in Santa Clara County.

The colloquia was supported by the Academic Affairs RSCA and Professional Development priority group work from 2014-16. Research opportunities are an integral high-impact practice in SJSU’s Four Pillars of Student Success student engagement pillar.
College student success centers provide general education advisement and other resources for students. Here, Career Center Advisor Lynn Chang discusses potential career paths with Raghev Srivastava, ’15 Philosophy.

Gisela Gray-Peoples joined the College of Humanities and the Arts Student Success Center as interim director a year ago, but she has been involved in student advising for years, first as an advisor in Academic Advising and Retention Services and later while teaching what she refers to as “academic bootcamps,” Science 2 and 90T.

She said she likes the college-based success center approach. The success centers were supported by the Academic Affairs Educational Excellence and Student Experience priority group work from 2014-16 and will be integral to supporting SJSU’s Four Pillars of Student Success advising pillar.

“It is good because it allows us to form closer bonds with both faculty and students,” she said. “It allows us to work with the students, first by giving information on their general education, answering any questions about university policy and helping them to follow roadmaps. We then send them off to see their major advisor to learn specific information about their major.”

In the fall 2015 semester, H&A's Student Success Center had 2,131 visits with students and Gray-Peoples said the word is still getting out about the one-year old center.
“We can help them to get their questions answered and connect to resources,” she said.

The staff comprises two full-time advisors, a part-time advisor and three student peer advisors who provide general education advising with referrals to other places on campus for questions outside their expertise.

The space also provides support for faculty members, Gray-Peoples said, noting that she recently hosted a “Graduation 101” session for faculty advisors. H&A faculty members heard from representatives in the registrar’s office about the steps students need to take to apply for graduation, and how to submit major and substitution forms.

“It helps faculty and students alike,” she said. “We can make sure we know what all the common problems are so we can be more proactive as opposed to reactive.”

Gray-Peoples said the center staff members are working on marketing their services to all H&A students and plan to have more workshops on different subjects in the fall semester.

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Grant Fosters STEM Course Redesign
SJSU professors are redesigning lower division math and physics classes that are requirements for science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) majors.

For the next four years, several faculty members in the Charles W. Davidson College of Engineering and the College of Science will be working to transform gateway science, technology, engineering and math (STEM) courses with a $3 million grant from the U.S. Department of Education. San Jose State University is one of 18 colleges and universities in the nation to receive a 2015 First in the World grant.

SJSU faculty members will work with CSU Los Angeles and Cal Poly Pomona representatives on creating flipped classroom materials that will be piloted at all three campuses. At San Jose State, Provost Andy Feinstein and Associate Professor Laura Sullivan-Green, from civil and environmental engineering, are co-directors on the grant. The first courses that will be updated are Math 30 (calculus I) and Phys 50 (physics I). The classes are a requirement for many STEM majors and a prerequisite for upper division work. The SJSU team plans to implement the flipped classroom model in fall 2016. Flipped courses often include richer and more readily accessible online supplemental study materials; more elaborate and interactive homework and self-check instructional materials; and more engaging in-class teaching strategies.

“We all know that innovation can take many forms and as a key part of the Administration’s goal to promote college access and affordability, the First in the
World program aims to support a wide range of innovation to improve student success,” said U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, in a press release. “We are pleased to support these educational leaders who are driving exciting innovations to achieve those goals.”

As part of SJSU’s Four Pillars of Student Success, university leaders are focused on clearing course bottlenecks. Surveys of students revealed that a major challenge to success is course bottlenecks – impasses where they cannot enroll in a course they need to make progress toward their degrees, or when they cannot successfully complete a course and move forward. The university will offer up to 500 additional course sections in 2016-17 to clear bottlenecks. The CSU Chancellor’s Office Proven Course Redesign and Promising Practices grants along with the First in the World grant are targeted at improving successful completion of general education courses that are needed for students to move on to upper division work.

“We are hosting faculty and campus coordinators from our two partner campuses the first weekend in June to facilitate community-building and course material development,” said Sullivan-Green, noting that 30 faculty members and administrators are involved between the three campuses in the First in the World Grant.

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