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Alan Shepard
President & Vice-Chancellor
Western University

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To request the kind of contact you want to receive, please contact Advancement Operations by phone (519.661.4176 or 1.800.420.7519), by fax (519.661.4182) or by email (advser@uwo.ca).

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Anjali Singh couldn’t quite understand why she completed tasks, including studying for exams, so differently than her friends. “I felt insecure,” says the arts and humanities major. “I think I had a bit of imposter syndrome and I often compared myself to my peers. I thought because I was doing things differently, it meant I was doing them wrong.”

For Anjali to become successful at university her thinking needed to shift, and thankfully it did after attending a strengths-based program funded by the Parr Centre for Thriving.

“For a student to feel successful, they need to feel supported,” says Sara Wills, who has worked with the Parr Centre since it was founded in 2020. “The Parr Centre provides opportunities and access for students to focus on and learn about their whole self, including essential elements of well-being and resources that can support their success.”

One of the initiatives recently funded by the Parr Centre, and the program Anjali completed, uses the CliftonStrengths® tool to help students understand when they are at their best, and how to apply their natural talents in any situation.

“I would recommend this program to everyone,” Anjali raves. “After I did a session, it’s like a lightbulb went off. It was so affirming. I finally understood the way I am, and why it’s perfectly fine to be different since we all have our unique strengths.”

Now travelling across Europe, Anjali is working in a hostel in Spain. “I was nervous coming into university the first year, like most students. There is a lot of comparison and doubt that can come into play and the program helped me work past that. I was able to understand what I’m good at and focus on developing those skills instead of fixating on my weaknesses. I honestly feel it has made me stronger in the world.”

**Thriving through belonging**

The Parr Centre funds innovative projects across campus that help Western staff support student mental health and thriving.

The Cultivating Thriving Educators program encourages educators to discover their own strengths and apply them to improve their teaching methods and program design and make authentic connections with students.

After hearing about the program, Western staff member Dr. Sonya Malone, BSc’99, was quick to investigate it. “I thought, ‘I’m all about helping students thrive – why don’t I take this opportunity to learn more?’ At every turn, participants were encouraged to spend time brainstorming about ways to incorporate their learning into practice,” says the family physician. “The collaboration was wonderful!”

Crossing paths with colleagues who took the program along with her, Dr. Malone notes they all recognize the impact the program has had on their work. “If you want to better understand the needs of students, and how to evolve your work to meet these needs, this is the program for you!”

Excited to return to campus, Anjali plans to continue her involvement in the programming offered through the Parr Centre, including strengths-based learning experiences. “It made a world of difference for me. I would like to continue to help others to experience the same shift in thinking I did. Our differences are our strengths, not our weaknesses.”
Favour Okpali received the Teoh Family ’3259’ Award for Black engineering students and is now fulfilling her dream at Microsoft in downtown Toronto.

**Feeling the faith from donors, engineering student Favour Okpali was inspired to go after her dreams.**

Favour Okpali literally screamed and jumped for joy when she heard the news – she had received an award. “I was in shock! I called my mom and she started screaming too,” says the student-athlete.

Favour’s academic experience at Western has been far from typical due to the pandemic. “My family lives in Toronto, so when school switched to online learning, I moved back home for my second year.”

For her third year, she was able to attend university in London once again. “I was so happy to be back on campus, but now I had the additional expense of food and rent, which I didn’t have at my parents’ house.”

To her great surprise, Favour applied for and received the Teoh Family ’3259’ Award for Black engineering students. “I’m so grateful Western has awards like this. It’s so easy for minorities to feel like they don’t belong. Receiving an award like this reminds me that I do.”

**Taking a chance**

Prior to university, Favour was quite unsure where to go after high school so she “took a chance” on engineering and discovered her love of coding. “I was hooked. I loved programming and problem solving, I was going to be a software engineer!”

For the past two summers, Favour has interned at Microsoft in the heart of downtown Toronto, gaining incredible work-life experience.

Favour is still as grateful today as the day she received the award. “It gave me the faith in myself that I needed. Knowing that someone would donate to my success – there really are no words.”

As Favour expertly navigates Toronto, she reflects on the award and what it meant to her. “It kept me motivated throughout the year because I knew someone believed in me. I hope one day I will be able to give back and help other Western students – the way the Teoh family helped me.”
Enduring gratitude

Giving back to Western for more than half a century, Susan Finley is enjoying the fruits of her donations.

It was 1957 and Susan Finley, BScN’61, was glowing in a pale blue chiffon gown just before a formal dance at Spencer Hall. At the time, Spencer Hall was a residence for female students attending Western.

Now in her 80s, Susan remembers it clearly. “On Sundays we dressed up for the main meal and the housemother was in attendance. We had ‘high tea’ served in the formal living room. There we learned the skill of balancing a teacup and saucer while socializing,” muses the former nurse, reflecting on how far society has come.

For Susan, her time at Western was the start of a varied career in nursing, “I worked in an early intensive care unit in Ottawa; I was in hospital nursing management, taught nursing in Ontario and Arizona, and was an inspector of schools of nursing for a few years.”

Seeing the impact now
Susan has an enduring feeling of gratefulness for the strong professional foundation her education created, which inspired her 55 years of support to the university. Her first donation, seven years after graduation, was for $50—a substantial gift in the 1960s. Since then, Susan has been a regular Western donor through annual contributions. “My financial advisor recommended I continue to donate to causes that are important to me right now, so I can see and enjoy the impact of my giving.” She has also decided to leave a legacy gift to Western through her estate.

The advancement of research for older adults
Susan is interested in the advancement of health and nursing research, so it was a perfect fit when she was introduced to the work of Western professor Anna Garnett. “My area of focus is on the health of our aging population and their caregivers,” says Anna. “The pandemic highlighted the need to focus on senior care. It really shone a light on healthcare shortcomings for that age group.”

Wanting to ensure older adults have a voice and appropriate funding, Anna is helping to address equitable care through her research. “Often vulnerable populations are overlooked for access to health services and funding. The same is true for their caregivers who often leave work to care for their loved ones.”

Susan’s support has made a tremendous difference to Anna’s area of focus. One of Anna’s recent research studies hopes to understand the isolation older adults experienced throughout the pandemic. “I’m looking at how we can leverage technology to support the social and mental well-being of this age group, and Susan’s commitment allows me to really sink myself into it. It’s a real gift.”

Today’s devotion, changing tomorrow
Throughout the years Susan and her husband John, who was an aviator and engineer, have had a strong devotion to the advancement of education, so it’s no surprise Susan found Anna’s research at Western intriguing.

Amazed by how her contributions have been so positively received, Susan is happy to continue, “It’s rewarding to know my giving today has the potential to change the future.”
More loudly. More often.

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- **Helene Puskas Mayo Award in Education**
- **Reginald and Verena Mayo Nursing Award**, also for Dr. Mayo’s parents.
- **Ronald R. Mayo Award in Engineering**, for Dr. Mayo’s brother, an established engineer who passed away at an early age from cancer.
- **Sandor and Borballa Puskas Music Award**, for Helene’s parents and her passion for the violin.

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Meghan Taylor was relieved by the financial impact of receiving a donor-funded award.

Helene and Dr. Mayo are inspired by their families to give. The proud Western donors have made a difference in the lives of students for nearly 30 years. Inset: The happy couple on their wedding day, 1958.
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