

From left: Julianne Liu, Zev Gorfinkle, Jimmy Chin, Espi Oyarzun, Chai Vasarhelyi, Ayana Amaechi, Annika Machado, and Pranav Rajan



ANNUAL REPORT: 2019-20

DIRECTOR: MARK MATHESON, D.PHIL.
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR: LIBBY HENRIKSEN
PROGRAM ASSOCIATE: ALISON FLANDERS
UNDERGRADUATE INTERN: ISABEL FULLER

2019-20 IN REVIEW



Our MUSE Theme this year was “Vision,” and we supported students as they conceived their own visions and pursued them for themselves and their communities. The University of Utah strategic goal that MUSE continues to support directly is “To Promote Student Success to Transform Lives,” and we do this through welcoming students to a lively on-campus learning community, by offering regular educational and intellectual events of compelling interest, and by providing opportunities for them to meet and converse with a variety of outstanding professors, leaders from the local community, and distinguished national guests.

In the 2019-20 academic year, students readily took up the opportunities that MUSE made available. In terms of providing them with a spirited community on campus, our MUSE Casual Friday program was once again a genuine success. We held 22 of these weekly events, often with more than fifty students in attendance. These students came from across campus and represented the rich diversity of our student body here at the U. Other guests included our UGS colleagues and MUSE Professors, and these friends of MUSE provided sustained support, guidance, and information for students in this casual setting. The free breakfast we offered was also a benefit that students very much appreciated, and many told us that the



MUSE Professors and students at our Fall Harvest Dinner, Nov. 2019

relaxed atmosphere of the gathering was especially welcome—a helpful opportunity for “decompressing” from the stresses of the week.

We also held more formal occasions for students to gather with peers, including our MUSE Fall Harvest Dinner. This annual tradition brings together a large number of MUSE students and MUSE Professors. It’s a celebration of our educational community and a chance to engage in lively conversations over a delicious dinner. Our special guest was Justice

Paige Petersen, justice on the Utah Supreme Court and University of Utah graduate, and she spoke with our students about career decisions and mentorship.

Our annual fall gathering is an example of MUSE events that offer U undergraduates the experience of small-college life in the context of our major research university. Students respond enthusiastically to such events, and they enjoy the spirit of solidarity they build with their peers and dedicated members of the U’s faculty.

At MUSE we deeply value our role as an office in Academic Affairs, and we provide students with regular opportunities for intellectual



Students, staff, and faculty at a Lunchtime Lecture, October 2019

growth and exploration. Our MUSE Lunchtime

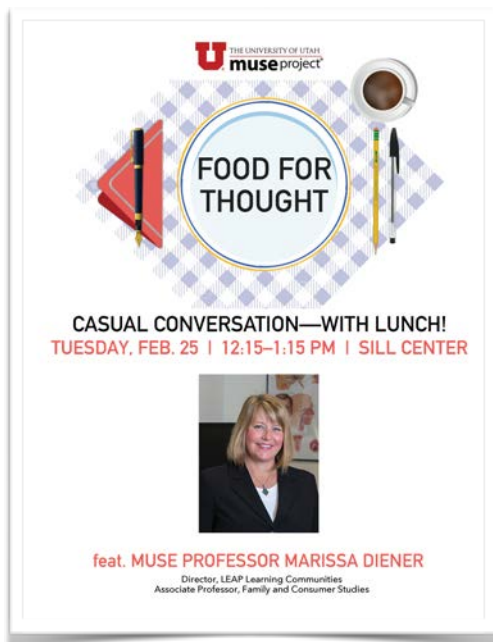
Lecture series this past year was once again an instance of this, and we were delighted to welcome outstanding U professors who gave presentations about their work and engaged in discussion with our students. They included Prof. Rob Mayer from Family and Consumer Studies; Prof. Karen Paisley from the College of Health; Prof. Edmund Fong from Political Science; and Prof. Natasha Seegert from the College of

Humanities. These well-attended lectures also attracted guests from the faculty and local community, and they represented a genuine opportunity for interdisciplinary learning.

MUSE also worked with Prof. Seetha Veeraghanta to host regular educational breakfasts for her LEAP engineering class, which is designed specifically for women and other underrepresented students in STEM. We were very pleased to bring this group together with some of the most accomplished professors at the University, including Dr. Cindy Furse from the College of Engineering and Dr. Nalini Nadkarni from the Department of Biology. These were extraordinary events in which first-year students engaged meaningfully with distinguished professors, and they received much wisdom about their developing careers in science and engineering.

Our work to advance the intellectual experience of students was set to continue through the spring semester, but the pandemic led to some disappointing postponements. Prof. Miriah Meyer of the School of Computing was scheduled to meet with Prof. Veeraghanta's class, and Dr. Elizabeth Joy of Intermountain Healthcare had agreed to deliver a MUSE Lunchtime Lecture. We very much hope to reschedule these outstanding guests when a full return to campus becomes possible.

One further educational opportunity we provided was our ongoing MUSE Internship program, in which students work with mentors around the University. This past year students studied and learned in a variety of different offices, and our lunch gatherings with interns and mentors were a dynamic time for discussing the remarkable educational work that goes on across our campus.



Many of these educational opportunities also served our purpose at MUSE of providing undergraduate students with regular access to inspiring professors and other leaders. We also achieved this through our “Food for Thought” events—a new program this year that brings students together with MUSE Professors for small-scale lunches and conversation. These gatherings turned out to be very successful. Our faculty guests included Dr. David Derezotes from the College of Social Work, Dr. John Ryan from the School of Medicine, Dr. Marissa Diener from CSBS and the LEAP Program, and Dr. Amy Barrios from the College of Pharmacy. One student leaving the lunch with Prof. Diener, in which the discussion was about the developmental challenges students face in their undergraduate years, said “This was an hour that changed my life.”

We also had a very productive keynote day for our MUSE Theme Year on Vision. Our guests were Jimmy Chin and Chai Vasarhelyi, the Academy-Award Winning directors of the film “Free Solo.” They had an engaging onstage conversation at Kingsbury Hall before a large crowd, including roughly 1,000 students, in

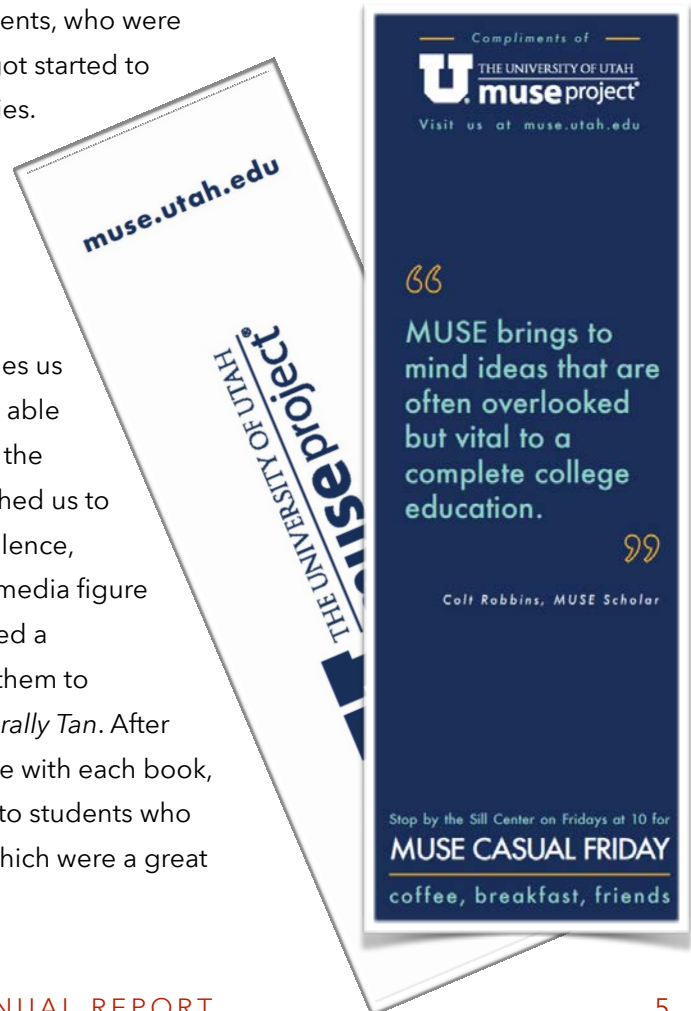


Chai Vasarhelyi and Jimmy Chin take student questions, January 2020

which they discussed their college experience, how they built their professional lives, and their dedication to their art. It was a winning and often humorous discussion, interspersed with clips from "Free Solo" on the big screen at Kingsbury, a climbing film that records Alex Honnold's rope-free ascent of El Capitan in Yosemite National Park.

After the presentation, MUSE hosted a lunch at the Alumni House for students to meet our national guests. About a hundred students attended, and the room was overflowing. Jimmy and Chai spoke and answered questions from MUSE students, who were interested in everything from how their relationship got started to their experience growing up in Asian-American families. It was a warm and wonderful occasion, and students spoke highly of their interactions with Chai and Jimmy, who posed for photographs with them at the end of the gathering.

Through our MUSE Microgrant program, which enables us to support the work of our campus partners, we were able to enrich student experiences with other guests from the national stage. MUSE student Abdul Osman approached us to support the student-led Conference on Diverse Excellence, which in the spring hosted Tan France, a well-known media figure and advocate for the LGBT community. MUSE provided a significant grant to Abdul and his team that enabled them to purchase 120 hardback copies of France's book *Naturally Tan*. After our intern Isabel created a MUSE bookmark to include with each book, Abdul and his student colleagues distributed copies to students who attended the Conference and France's talk, both of which were a great success.



Of course all of our MUSE efforts moved online in mid-March, and we worked to sustain our student community throughout the rest of the term. We published six digital MUSE Newsletters, with the goal of staying in touch with students and supporting them as they worked to complete the academic year. We also hosted online MUSE Casual Fridays, and students seemed genuinely appreciative of this opportunity to gather for therapeutic exchanges with their peers. The coffee and sprinkle donuts were certainly missed, but these online meetings clearly had real value for our quarantined students. During the shutdown we also kept in touch with MUSE students through dozens of individual emails. Our experience this spring provided valuable lessons for those of us fortunate enough to work with MUSE—and as we mention later in this report, we'll put this knowledge to work to continue delivering on our mission to students in the year ahead.



Jimmy Chin, Chai Vasarhelyi, and Prof. Mark Matheson at Kingsbury Hall, January 2020

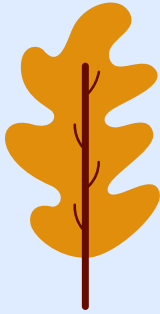


Keynote luncheon guests, January 2020



Prof. Mark Matheson with keynote luncheon guests, January 2020

MUSE, TOGETHER WITH MUSE PROFESSORS,
GENERATED **2,967** STUDENT ENGAGEMENTS IN 2019-20



FALL HARVEST DINNER
with
JUSTICE PAIGE PETERSEN

47 STUDENTS and
17 PROFESSORS

MUSE KEYNOTE EVENT
& lunch with
**JIMMY CHIN &
CHAI VASARHELYI**



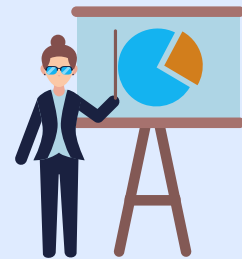
1,100 STUDENTS



**MUSE
INTERNSHIPS**

16 STUDENTS
over 3 SEMESTERS

**MUSE
LUNCHTIME
LECTURES**



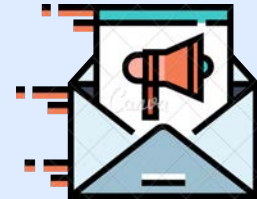
116 STUDENTS
over 4 EVENTS



**MUSE CASUAL
FRIDAYS**

1,100 STUDENTS
over 22 WEEKS

**MUSE SCHOLARS
NEWSLETTER**



1,855 SUBSCRIBERS
with a 22.2%
AVERAGE OPEN RATE over 6 EDITIONS



**FOOD FOR THOUGHT
LUNCHES**

60 STUDENTS
over 4 EVENTS

**MUSE
MICROGRANTS**



120 STUDENTS

LOOKING FORWARD TO OUR MUSE WORK IN 2020-21

As all of us know, there's uncertainty about what the coming educational year will bring. It's clear that we won't have a typical fall semester, and it's quite certain that students won't be able to enjoy the on-campus college experience in all its fullness.

But this doesn't mean that their experience can't be fulfilling. At MUSE we're intent on giving students this reassurance. The joyous work of education will continue this fall, and our MUSE programming will provide an abundance of opportunities for learning, mentorship, and community building. There's a bright prospect for U students in the fall semester, and we're determined to help them make the most of the promising educational experience that lies ahead.

We'll do this through offering many virtual opportunities for gathering, including MUSE Casual Fridays, which we'll host over Zoom every Friday morning from 10:00 to 11:00. This has become a great MUSE tradition—a chance for students and other members of the U community to get together for casual conversation, social bonding, and a good laugh. These are light-hearted and supportive gatherings that students typically find very sustaining. All of us celebrate getting through another week, and we make great plans for the weekend ahead--and sometimes for the larger future.

We'll also continue to offer dynamic educational experiences with some of the U's leading professors. MUSE Lunchtime Conversations, for instance, will take place on the first Thursday of every month. At these events we'll invite a professor to make a presentation and to engage in vibrant discussion with students. We'll also do this regularly with our "Food for Thought" program, which once again brings students together with distinguished faculty. In this case the participants will be our MUSE Professors, a remarkable group of teachers from across campus who are especially dedicated to undergraduate education.

Our MUSE theme this year will be "Resilience." We'll select a book on this theme and provide students with a free copy. We'll host virtual book discussion groups led by students as the year goes forward, and we hope to have a culminating keynote event with the author. We're confident that our ongoing collective discussion of Resilience will be helpful to all of us, and we look forward to engaging students with this theme throughout the year.

In addition, we'll keep offering the sustaining contacts with students that we developed last spring with the change to online learning. These include our weekly MUSE Newsletter, which has rich content contributed by both students and faculty, and we plan to continue our regular check-ins with students through individual emails.

All of us at MUSE are dedicated to helping U students have a year of genuine fulfillment. The structure of events and personal learning relationships we offer will enable students to benefit from experts as we face

the year's challenges, to create friendships and build community, and to grow intellectually through readily available conversations with some of the U's most engaged professors.

At MUSE we believe that each student comes to the U with a unique constellation of gifts, and our mission is to help students discover and develop these talents for the sake of both their own personal enrichment and the good of the human community. This process—which we understand to be the heart of education itself—will go forward no matter what the particular circumstances of the coming year turn out to be. MUSE is honored to continue to support students in this challenging and glorious work of personal growth—of bringing forth, as the great poet Walt Whitman writes, “what waits intrinsically” in themselves.

APPENDIX A: 2017-18 LUNCHTIME LECTURES

- ✦ September 5, 2019: Prof. Emeritus Rob Mayer (Family and Consumer Studies)
"Defending Cosmopolitanism"
 - ✦ October 3, 2019: Prof. Karen Paisley (Parks and Recreation)
"Play as a Social Justice Endeavor"
 - ✦ November 1, 2018: Prof. Edmund Fong (Ethnic Studies, Political Science)
"Race and the Political Imaginary"
 - ✦ March 5, 2020: Prof. Natasha Seegert (Communication)
"Images, Media, and Everyday Life"
 - ✦ Cancelled: April 2, 2020: Dr. Elizabeth Joy (Medical Director for Community Health at IHC, Adjunct Professor in the Dept. of Family and Preventative Medicine)
"Living a Purpose-Driven Life in the Community"
-

APPENDIX B: MUSE PROFESSORS

- ✦ Prof. Amy Barrios, Pharmacy
- ✦ Prof. Carolyn Bliss, LEAP Learning Communities
- ✦ Prof. Mary Burbank, Education
- ✦ Prof. Erin Castro, Education
- ✦ Prof. David Derezotes, Social Work
- ✦ Prof. Marissa Diener, Social & Behavioral Science
- ✦ Prof. Linda Edelman, Nursing
- ✦ Prof. Ann Engar, LEAP Learning Communities
- ✦ Prof. Cynthia Furse, Engineering
- ✦ Prof. Pamela Geber, Fine Arts
- ✦ Prof. Jordan Gerton, Science
- ✦ Prof. Holley Godsey, Mines and Earth Sciences
- ✦ Prof. Matt Haber, Humanities
- ✦ Prof. Kim Hackford-Peer, Cultural and Social Transformation
- ✦ Prof. Sara Hart, Nursing
- ✦ Prof. Rachel Hayes-Harb, Humanities
- ✦ Prof. Andy Hoffmann, Honors
- ✦ Prof. William Johnson, Mines and Earth Sciences
- ✦ Prof. Xan Johnson, Fine Arts
- ✦ Prof. Mimi Locher, Architecture + Planning
- ✦ Prof. Robert Mayer, Social & Behavioral Science
- ✦ Prof. Dean McGovern, Family and Consumer Studies
- ✦ Prof. Carolan Ownby, LEAP Learning Communities
- ✦ Prof. Karen Paisley, Health
- ✦ Prof. Patricia Rohrer, Honors
- ✦ Prof. Hugo Rossi, Science (Emeritus)
- ✦ Dr. John Ryan, Cardiovascular Medicine
- ✦ Prof. Ryan Smith, Architecture + Planning
- ✦ Prof. Elizabeth Tashjian, Business
- ✦ Prof. Margaret Toscano, Humanities
- ✦ Prof. Elpitha Tsoutsounakis, Architecture + Planning
- ✦ Prof. Seetha Veeraghanta, LEAP Learning Communities
- ✦ Prof. Paul White, Social & Behavioral Science

APPENDIX C: FOOD FOR THOUGHT LUNCHES

- ✦ September 24, 2019: Prof. David Derezotes
 - ✦ November 2, 2019: Dr. John Ryan
 - ✦ February 20, 2020: Prof. Amy Barrios
 - ✦ February 25, 2020: Prof. Marissa Diener
 - ✦ Cancelled: 2-3 lunches throughout March and April 2020
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APPENDIX D: E-LEAP + MUSE BREAKFAST EVENTS

- ✦ September 13, 2019: Prof. Mark Matheson
 - ✦ October 16, 2019: Prof. Nalini Nadkarni
 - ✦ November 6, 2019: Prof. Cindy Furse
 - ✦ February 12, 2020: Prof. Mark Matheson
 - ✦ Cancelled: March 25, 2020: Prof. Miriah Meyer (Associate Professor, School of Computing)
 - ✦ Cancelled: April 8: Guest speaker TBD
-

APPENDIX E: MUSE MICROGRANTS

- ✦ February 2020: Purchase of 120 copies of Tan France's book "Naturally Tan" in support of this year's C.O.D.E. Conference
- ✦ Cancelled: March 18, 2020: Lunch workshop featuring Vivette Garcia Deister for MUSE students, Latin America Studies students, and Ethnic Studies students; co-hosted with Prof. Matt Haber in conjunction with the Philosophy of Science speaker series
- ✦ Cancelled: April 16: Career and Professional Development Center's 2020 Recognition Awards ceremony for University of Utah student interns

APPENDIX F: MUSE INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

Summer 2019: 6 MUSE Internships

Internship Title (Student Name)	Department (Mentor Name)
Clinical Research Education TA (Kristen Cline)	Pediatric Research Education (Dr. Maija Holsti)
Hinckley Institute TA (Gabby Villalobos)	Hinckley Institute (Gina Shipley)
Virtual Reality Student Developer (Dana Hansen)	Eccles Health Sciences Library (Brandon Patterson)
Software Development (Amir Ansari)	Marriott Library (Dhanushka Samarakoon)
CECE Intern (Anna Jarman)	CECE (Katie Bevan)
MUSE Intern (Isabel Fuller)	MUSE (Libby Henriksen)

Fall 2019: 8 MUSE Internships

Internship Title (Student Name)	Department (Mentor Name)
Clinical Research Education TA	Pediatric Research Education (Dr. Maija Holsti)
Hinckley Institute TA (Abigail Barney)	Hinckley Institute (Gina Shipley)
Hinckley Institute TA (Nick Cockrell)	Hinckley Institute (Gina Shipley)
CECE Intern (Anna Jarman)	CECE, Katie Bevan
Software Development (Amir Ansari)	Marriott Library, Dhanushka Samarakoon
Special Collections (Sophia Filip)	Marriott Library, Alison Elbrader
Virtual Reality Student Developer (Dana Hansen)	Eccles Health Sciences Library (Brandon Patterson)
MUSE Intern (Isabel Fuller)	MUSE, Libby Henriksen

Spring 2020: 8 MUSE Internships

Internship Title (Student Name)	Department (Mentor Name)
Clinical Research Education TA (Spencer Cook)	Pediatrics Research Education (Heather Cook)
Hinckley Institute TA (Pedro Martinez)	Hinckley Institute (Gina Shipley)
Hinckley Institute TA (Sheely Edwards)	Hinckley Institute (Gina Shipley)
Software Development (Amir Ansari)	Marriott Library (Brian McBride)
Book Arts Graphic Design (Sophia Filip)	Marriott Library (Amy Thompson)
Virtual Reality Student Developer (Dana Hansen)	Eccles HS Library (Brandon Patterson)
CECE Intern (Jessica Huynh)	CECE (Katie Bevan)
MUSE Intern (Isabel Fuller)	MUSE, Libby Henriksen

APPENDIX G: MUSE SCHOLARS NEWSLETTERS

- ✦ March 30, 2020
- ✦ April 7, 2020
- ✦ April 13, 2020
- ✦ April 21, 2020
- ✦ April 27, 2020
- ✦ May 4, 2020

Visit <https://muse.utah.edu/muse-newsletter/index.php> to view the newsletters.

APPENDIX H: MUSE SCHOLARS SPOTLIGHTS

Brooklyn Weight



Brooklyn is a third year student at the University of Utah studying biomedical engineering. When her niece was born with Turner Syndrome and was required to have open heart surgery at nine days old, Brooklyn refined her broad interest in science and engineering into a desire to do genetic research to detect similar problems in the womb and prevent them from happening to other kids. This translates into her long term goal of participating in a genetic research lab to see if genetic mutations and abnormalities can be prevented to increase quality of life for the general population. Brooklyn lives with the mindset that she can “always be kind, always give people the benefit of the doubt, and give second chances and be there to help people... regardless of your level of intelligence, what you look like, how you act.”

Brooklyn has made quite a few friends through attending MUSE events, and she appreciates having Casual Fridays as a way to see her friends and catch up. She enjoys the safe space and community aspect of MUSE, especially the community it fosters within the greater community of campus. Simply put, “MUSE is a good time every Friday, and it’s one of the best places on campus to make friends.” (2019)

Josh Hardy



Josh is a first year student at the U studying computer science with a games emphasis. He likes the broad opportunities and how “computer science can be applied to everything.” He is interested in many disciplines and appreciates that CS with games allows him to utilize both scientific and artistic skills. He remains grounded in his desire to create something useful, and he explains, “I want to be able to contribute as much to as many different ideas and things as possible. I want to always have a wealth of information that applies to any situation.”

Josh has met a few friends at MUSE events, particularly Casual Friday. In fact, he met friends who introduced him to the Animation Club as well as friends with the same degree emphasis as his. Although he has yet to be able to attend many events other than Casual Friday, he says that weekly gathering has “connected me to more people and networking [opportunities], and of course all the faculty and professors.” (2020)

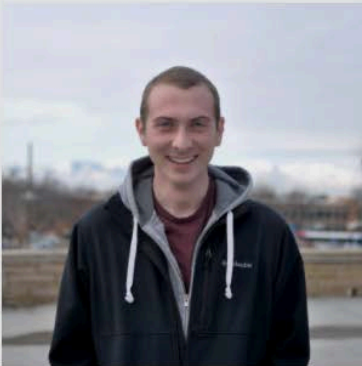
Sudha Reynolds



Sudha is a first year student at the U but a third year overall after two years studying at other schools. She has recently decided to pursue a degree in journalism, as she particularly enjoys the social aspect of it. She is already gaining valuable experience as an intern for the K-UTE radio station. For this position, she takes on the role of DJ, blog writer, and concert-goer. While she is unsure of her exact future plans, she is interested in broadcast journalism. She is enjoying her experience with radio so far, so she is interested in radio or possibly video production.

Despite just starting at the U, Sudha is one of our most consistent MUSE event attendees. She loves Casual Fridays and explains: "I really enjoy coming into MUSE on Casual Fridays and how friendly Mark is when he greets everyone. When he greets me, it really makes me feel welcome." When asked how MUSE has influenced her college experience, she says, "I like the social scene and the food of MUSE," although she goes on to admit that the social aspect has been much more influential than the food. (2019)

Kaylon Draney



Kaylon is in his third year at the U, and he is studying Materials Science and Engineering—a major that allows him to utilize his passion for sustainability and the environment through the development of sustainable products. Outside his major, he keeps busy as a facility manager at the Student Life Center and as a senior peer advisor for the LEAP Program. He also works in a materials science research lab looking at the optimal polymers for contact lenses, he has an internship with the Materials Characterization Lab, and he helped start the pop tab collection project through the Bennion Center. In the future, he wants to develop sustainable products through polymer work, hopefully developing biodegradable and eco-friendly plastic alternatives. Kaylon wants to make an impact: "What pushes me through college is trying to make a difference in my community and the lives of those around me and hopefully, eventually, the world."

When asked to describe MUSE, Kaylon said, "In one word, I would say 'amazing.'" He explained that he has met a lot of really cool people through the program and the reserved time it creates to hang out with others and get to know them better. "It provided me a network and a community where I know I can go every week." (2020)

Melina Lewis



Melina is a junior at the U studying nursing, a path that she chose as it maximizes her positive impact while utilizing her specific skill set. As a participatory member of the Honors College and the Nursing Early Assurance Program, she has had access to many events and opportunities that have helped her to connect with her peers. She is also involved with the Bennion Center, through which she volunteers for Saturday Service Projects, Bags to Beds, and knitting baby hats. Her affinity for service translates into her current job in medical oncology and her plans to attend graduate school to become a nurse practitioner, as well as her hopes to spend time working in disaster relief and humanitarian aid.

Melina has been involved with the MUSE Project ever since her freshman year. She particularly loves the Lunchtime Lectures for the opportunity they provide to gain perspective and hear from professors in other fields. Melina appreciates the fact that "MUSE has not only created events to help students become involved, but also connects them to other opportunities for campus involvement and networking." (2019)

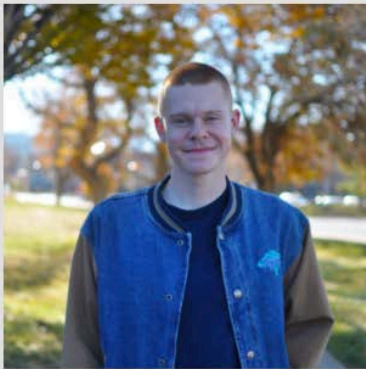
Moani Tuitupou



Moani is studying applied mathematics, a choice that stems from their “give me an equation and I’ll solve the problem” mindset. However, their interests vary greatly, and this shows in their involvement on campus and around the community. Moani is a student staff worker at the LGBT Resource Center and they also volunteer in a local research lab which tracks wildlife in Salt Lake City and the surrounding canyons using camera traps. This work complements their applied math major in preparation for their future aspirations, which include attending grad school for biology with the end goal of working with wildlife and utilizing their skills in math and data analysis to model natural processes. Ideally, this would allow them to work in a variety of environments including labs, the outdoors, and with computers.

Moani attends every MUSE event they have the chance to. They fondly reflect on last year’s spring gala and the opportunity it provided to interact with professors and other students, share a good laugh, and take lots of pictures. Reflecting on their experiences with MUSE so far, Moani asked, “You know how people say college is the best four years of your life? All of that is encapsulated in MUSE.” Just as MUSE has done for them, Moani hopes to “be known for making a positive impact and just having that ability to make people smile and make people feel better.” (2019)

Colt Robbins



Colt is a second year student at the University of Utah majoring in Peace and Conflict Studies, as he desires to gain “a greater understanding of international development techniques and to learn about the strategies of approaching conflict resolution.” In addition, Colt is studying Arabic with the hope of integrating it into his career. He has a particular interest in current issues affecting countries like Sudan and Yemen. He would eventually like to work with organizations that stimulate involvement of Western governments in such crises. Currently, Colt is a University Ambassador, providing prospective students tours of campus, and he is a site leader for the Queering Justice experience, an Alternative Break through the Bennion Center.

Colt sees that MUSE has created a safe space for all on campus, and he personally experiences it as a place where he doesn’t have to feel uneasy about how people will react to his identity. His favorite MUSE memory was Professor William Smith’s Lunchtime Lecture on racial battle fatigue, which he was able to connect to similar concepts he had learned in his classes. Such MUSE events are what helped Colt to make some of his closest friends through the in-depth discussions they prompt. “MUSE brings into mind conversations that are usually pushed aside but vital to a complete college education.” (2019)

Anna Mancera



Anna is in her third year at the University of Utah. She is double majoring in Health Society & Policy and Sociology, choices she made after realizing that “our society isn’t as equitable as we think it is, especially for people of color and low income individuals. The oppression and discrimination that these groups face greatly impact their physical and mental health in ways that one wouldn’t think of. And I want to get to the root cause of it all to improve overall health.” She ultimately wants to become a research analyst for policy makers so that they can effectively create a health care system that doesn’t leave people out.

From the very beginning of her experience with MUSE, Anna has felt a part of an inclusive community. She remembers one of the first Casual Fridays she attended where Mark introduced her to so many different people, making her feel like she belonged. Anna now looks forward to attending MUSE events as stress relief, a break from class and homework, and a chance to relax and socialize. She recognizes MUSE’s incredibly welcoming community that “connects students of all different backgrounds with conversation and food. Free food!” (2019)

Erick Lawrence



Erick is a second year student at the U studying Material Science Engineering. He had originally known that he wanted to do something related to chemistry, and chose MSE after realizing that it is actually what he had thought chemical engineering would be. Erick is currently being funded through the Office of Undergraduate Research by an Undergraduate Research Opportunities Program (UROP) grant. He is working in a research lab under Dr. Minter in biochemistry and electrochemistry. He is relatively undecided on most fronts regarding future plans, but he is leaning toward research, as he admits that “being involved in the process of literally creating new knowledge is pretty damn cool.”

Erick makes frequent appearances at MUSE Casual Fridays and other events. With how busy he is as an engineering student, Erick appreciates the regularity of MUSE events. He likes the welcoming atmosphere and having a little bit of social contact and free food between classes. His favorite MUSE memory is a MUSE Night Out last year. He and other students attended dinner with the curators of the Utah Museum of Fine Arts before going through the exhibit *Race to Promontory* at the museum. He reflects that “it was really, really cool to have dinner with those people, have them tell us about the exhibition, and then go through it with them.” (2019)

Zahra Saifee



Zahra Saifee, a sophomore at the University of Utah, is “currently in a ‘major’ crisis,” although she will likely study Communications and Environmental & Sustainability Studies. She is highly involved on campus, working as a volunteer with the Bennion Center, an active board member in ASUU, an Air Quality Scholar through the Global Change and Sustainability Center, and a Campus Life Mentor. She is actively and visibly passionate about the environment; as she finished sharing her thoughts for this MUSE Scholar interview, she was finding space in her backpack to bring home her paper plate and cup to add to her waste tracker for the year. As she explains, it’s “more than just the environment; I really care about making other people care about the environment... communicating why people should be concerned and why they should want to take action against climate change.”

Zahra likes seeing the repeating familiar faces nearly every Friday at MUSE Casual Friday. She actually started her MUSE experience the summer before her freshman year with a *Hidden Figures* book club. As Zahara sees it, “Here at MUSE we try to invite different conversations and invite people of different backgrounds and people of different beliefs and seeing that community is really cool.” Zahara believes that MUSE works to be inclusive, and that it is a program where “you can discuss really important topics but in a discussion setting or a casual setting where you don’t feel like you have to know everything, and you can come here to learn and know more and you don’t have to come here knowing all the answers.” (2020)