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COLLEGE OF  
EDUCATION

# IMPACT REPORT

## SPRING 2022

FEATURED IN THIS ISSUE

- **Kelcy Rolak: Appreciating People & Helping Patients**
- **Dr. Sandra Harris: An Alum Dedicated to Education**
- **David Smith: Stepping Up for Students Who Need It**
- **How to Give Back**

### SCHOLARLY HIGHLIGHT

## Appreciating People & Helping Patients

Kelcy Rolak is a graduate student of the Communications Sciences and Disorders (CSD) program within the College of Education at Eastern Michigan University. As of the Spring 2022 commencement, she will have graduated with her master's degree and be ready to pursue a career in the field she describes as her "dream job."

The CSD program prepares individuals for the field of speech and language pathology, and it focuses on the biological, physiological, linguistic and neurological bases of communication disorders. She fell in love with this field after graduating from Michigan State University with an undergraduate degree in English. Finding a job at a center-based school near Lansing that worked with cognitively and multiply impaired students, she was introduced to speech-language pathology and immediately knew it was what she wanted to do for a career.

Since Kelcy pursued a master's degree outside of her undergraduate field, many universities would have required her to apply and complete a preparation curriculum, or "leveling" courses, as well as her desired graduate program. However, the College of Education's program simplifies it for students by combining the leveling courses and prerequisites within the graduate program's curriculum, which made EMU an easy choice for Kelcy.

Even though it is a field she finds herself loving more each day, it is a rigorous program. As a graduate student, Kelcy is required to balance her coursework with the daily responsibilities of a young working adult. While she was hopeful that she could put enough time towards her studies and work at the start of the program, it quickly became apparent that doing both and getting the most out of her education would not be possible. As such, she relied on financial support such as the Delores S. Brehm Endowed Scholarship to be able to devote 100% of her efforts to the program. →



**KELCY ROLAK**

Students of this scholarship are called Brehm Scholars, and only a handful of students from the Special Education and Communications Sciences and Disorders programs are chosen each year to receive it. As a Brehm Scholar, Kelcy conducted a research project that she would also go on to utilize for her master's thesis.

The Brehm Scholarship had a significant impact on Kelcy as it allowed her to enjoy and experience her education more completely, and it also introduced her to an aspect of the field that she would come to really enjoy—research. Introduced to the processes and methods of research by EMU faculty member Dr. Sarah Ginsberg, Kelcy has loved the intense, detail-oriented work that goes into creating and understanding results of a research project. She credits Dr. Ginsberg, who was also her Brehm faculty mentor and thesis chair, as a major contributor to her success within the program.

Reflecting on her experience within the CSD graduate program, as a Brehm Scholar and even her goals and ambitions before finding this field, Kelcy attributes it all to an appreciation of people. As she describes it,



**“I’ve always appreciated people and the daily interactions you can have with another person, so when I found CSD it felt like everything was coming together.”**

**- Kelcy Rolak**

“I’ve always appreciated people and the daily interactions you can have with another person, so when I found CSD it felt like everything was coming together.” By helping others unlock their ways of communication, she can give patients and clients the opportunity to enjoy those interactions and human experiences as well.

After graduation, Kelcy hopes to work with adults in neurorehabilitation, an area she has had the opportunity to experience while working through her current internship. Kelcy notes, the idea of her graduating has not sunk in yet, but she’s ready and excited to take the next step in her career. Visit [emich.edu/foundation/give/index.php?fund=01567](https://emich.edu/foundation/give/index.php?fund=01567) to support the Brehm scholars and their research initiatives. ■



**In loving memory of Delores “Dee” Soderquist Brehm, who passed away on April 3, 2022. She and her husband, William K. Brehm, established the Brehm Center for Special Education Scholarship and Research to give special education students an award and opportunity that would make as much of an impact as Dee’s scholarship did when she was an Eastern Michigan University student.**

# Stepping Up for Students Who Need It

Soon to be graduating with his bachelor's degree at 35, David Smith is older than your typical undergraduate student. While his path toward becoming an educator has not been a straightforward one, he is determined to see it through and leave a positive impact on under-represented students.

David first attended Eastern Michigan University at 18, intending to become a math teacher, but he left because he was not quite ready for the freedom that being a young college student brings. After leaving school, he found success in Los Angeles, California working in marketing for a skateboarding company. As a member of their marketing team, he would frequently interact with young kids and teenagers in the skateboarding community. He was shocked at how much they did not know and at their general outlook on school and their future. These interactions and a sense of unfulfillment in his current career ultimately brought him back to EMU.

Aside from teaching algebra and the Pythagorean theorem, David's goal as an educator is to be an example for under-represented students in the classroom. Throughout his entire school experience, he never had a male African American teacher. That fact has stuck with him and is a major contributor to his desire to work with young students. He believes that it can be extremely impactful for kids to be exposed to people from multiple backgrounds and experiences—especially ones that mirror the students'. As someone who wants to see and drive impactful change in the educational system, David credits the NEXT Scholars program for being his support group and collaborators in this venture.

The NEXT Scholars is a program that focuses on ensuring that under-represented future teachers are supported and given opportunities to thrive. David was first introduced to the program by Dr. Imandeep Grewal,



DAVID SMITH

an assistant professor and the director of the NEXT Scholars program. Students within the program receive training and a special certification in Place-Based Education, which emphasizes being an active citizen and problem solver within communities.

David believes that without this group, he may not have made it through school this time around. The group has provided a community that has not only supported and believed in him but also pushed him to achieve the goals he set for himself: "They've helped me get something out of myself that I didn't know was there."

He most recently participated in the NEXT Scholars' EdTalks event. This event is designed to create an open dialog between students and faculty members, and encourage communication about how students are taught and how the students receive instruction. During the event, David spoke about generating curricula that will include more complete views of American and world history through additional perspectives of other cultures, sexualities and gender identities.

David plans to help bring about this change in education for all students. For now, he will focus the majority of his efforts on students at the middle school level. As children who are beginning to →

**"They've helped me get something out of myself that I didn't know was there."**

**- David Smith**



transition into teenagers and the next stage of their lives, middle school students are curious, and David believes educators can have a profound impact on them. It is at this critical point in students' lives that he wants to be a positive influence on their mindset and intrinsic motivation.

As for why he is so determined to be this force for change for marginalized and under-represented groups in education, David feels it is his responsibility to do what those before have allowed him to do. He states, "None of us would be here without others stepping up. I think it's important to give back because we wouldn't be here without others doing the same for us."

David Smith will be graduating in the Fall of 2022 after completing his student teaching. His students will be lucky to have a passionate, energetic educator like him.

The NEXT Scholars program impacts not only the students who participate but also those that the students will go on to teach. Visit [emich.edu/foundation/give/index.php?fund=02506](https://emich.edu/foundation/give/index.php?fund=02506) to donate or make a gift to the program. ■

# GIVE RISE

CAMPAIGN GOAL

# \$100 MILLION

**\$93 Million**  
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## Donate to Give Rise: The Campaign

Give Rise: The Campaign for Eastern Michigan University is pushing toward a goal of \$100 million—our largest goal to date. The bold vision we have for our university demands that we give our students everything they need to succeed, and requires that we continue building our programs of distinction.

We must rise to every occasion for students from abroad, for students in need and for students who will lead the way to our future. Give Rise asks that we open doors to success, well beyond the boundaries of campus.

Any gift to the College of Education will contribute to the Give Rise campaign. Donate by visiting [www.emich.edu/foundation/give/index.php?fund=02236](https://www.emich.edu/foundation/give/index.php?fund=02236)

SCAN TO GIVE



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## SCHOLARLY HIGHLIGHT

# An Alum Dedicated to Education

To all who know her, it is hardly a surprise why Dr. Sandra Harris is one of this year's Eastern Michigan University Alumni Award recipients. She holds several degrees from EMU and has dedicated her entire career to the education and support of students at multiple levels of the educational system. Even now as the Director of Graduate Education for the School of Education at Concordia University Ann Arbor, she is constantly moving forward with new projects and opportunities to impact younger generations and her community.

Some discover their calling later on in life, but Dr. Harris was pulled toward the field of education as a child. While others played games of pretend, like 'Cops & Robbers' or 'House,' she would play 'School.' And yes, she was always the teacher. Despite her innate love for teaching, she did not see it as a possibility until the fifth grade. Her teacher at the time, Mr. Trost, had kept her after school for being a bit unruly in class. Also staying after school was another student, who was there to complete extra credit. This individual was recognized by all as someone who would go on to do something great. Mr. Trost encouraged Dr. Harris, reminding her that she was just as capable as the other student; as long as she set her mind to it, she could do anything. This moment inspired her to fulfill her potential. As Dr. Harris stated, "From that point forward, it was my mission to be all that I could be."

Mr. Trost's words of encouragement inspired Dr. Harris to pursue her dream of working in education, although the path has not always been straightforward. Dr. Harris has gone through, around and over many obstacles to reach her many accolades and achievements. At the time of her schooling in junior high and high school, students would be put on strict curriculums of general, vocational, or college education. As an African American student, these options were often limited to the first two. Always the supporter, her mother fought for her to be on the college path, and Dr. Harris would go on to prove that she had not let the encouragement and opportunity go to waste.

Even upon finally entering EMU, she continued to push through adversity to reach her dream. While pursuing her original degree in elementary education, a shortage of teachers in the workforce quickly shifted to a surplus before she graduated. Concerned that being specialized in elementary education might limit her ability to find work, she pivoted to business education. This change paid off, as she went on to work in the business sector for two years before finding her first job in education as a junior high business teacher. →

**"A teacher can either make or break a child."**

**- Dr. Sandra Harris, Ed.D.**

Dr. Harris would work in this position for six years before venturing into administration and leadership positions within education. Though she loved working with students in the classroom, she realized she could have a wide-reaching effect on students by influencing the teachers they came in contact with. As Dr. Harris says, "A teacher can either make or break a child," and this pushed her towards the personnel side of administration to ensure that only educators who wanted to encourage and work with students would get the opportunity to do so. She would continue to move up the leadership ladder and go on to become the superintendent of the Oak Park School District before her "first retirement" in 2010.

Throughout her career and brief retirement, she has been extremely active in her community as a part of several public service organizations, including Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Inc., The Links, Inc., the National Association of Negro Business and Professional Women's Clubs, and the Human Relations Commission in Ann Arbor. She says that she would like to get more involved with EMU's boards but that she has enough on her plate to keep her busy. As for why she has dedicated so much of her life to giving back to her community and those she has impacted in education, Dr. Harris believes that it is only right given that she would not be where she is today without those who had helped and supported her along her own journey.



**DR. SANDRA HARRIS, ED.D.**

Now the Director of Graduate Education for the School of Education at Concordia University Ann Arbor, Dr. Harris teaches and works alongside students who also have dreams of leaving a positive impact in the field of education. Outside of the classroom, she will still get stopped at the grocery store, doctor's office, or on the street by former students, coworkers and employees who describe just how much it affected their life. She says that continuing to work with students keeps her young, and that she doesn't have plans for her second retirement anytime soon. ■

# JUST THE FACTS

**COLLEGE OF EDUCATION**

Few colleges in the United States have more experience or success in preparing teachers than EMU's College of Education. For over 150 years our graduates are some of the most highly sought after educational personnel in Michigan, across the country, and around the world.

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