

# Unique Perspectives

Celebrating Diversity, Inclusion and Equity in the University of Missouri's School of Medicine | Volume 4, Issue 1

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## **Contributor's Notes:**

Brought to you by the School of Medicine Faculty and Staff Diversity and Inclusion Committees. To be disseminated 5 times per year.

To nominate someone for the Spotlight or Give Me 5, or to submit D&I news and events, please e-mail [Amy Folkerts](#) and [Kelly Reeves](#).



The School of Medicine Office of Diversity and Inclusion is now the Office of Diversity, Inclusion, Culture and Equity (DICE). To learn more about MU's SOM diversity and inclusion efforts, click [here](#).

## ***In the Spotlight: Denicia Dwarica, MD***



*Dr. Denicia Dwarica, MD is a faculty member specializing in female pelvic medicine and reconstructive surgery in the Department of Obstetrics and Gynecology.*

### ***W*hat is your definition of diversity?**

Diversity equates to variety. Life is so much more enjoyable when you include different perspectives from different groups. When I visualize a diverse room, I see different races, genders, cultural attire, eye shapes and colors, hairstyles and body language. When I listen to a diverse room, I hear different accents, languages and reactions.

### ***From your perspective, how do diversity and inclusion relate to one another?***

Inclusion is a demonstration of accepting diversity. Both terms go hand-in-hand. We cannot try to diversify our classrooms, clinics or workspaces without finding ways to accept and welcome students, patients and co-workers from different backgrounds or with different points of view. If people feel excluded, they would not be open, honest or willing to stay.

### ***How do you think your intersecting identities affect your career as a physician and educator?***

My identity allows me to approach my work from a different point of view. If I were to describe myself in a few words I would say I am a Trinidadian, immigrant, woman of color with views that swing from conservative to liberal depending on the topic. I often try to connect with people by first trying to get to know a little bit about their background and then trying to find things we share in common. Students who rotate in my operating room are kept on their toes when I ask surgical and anatomical questions. However, many remember my room for the music I like to play. We listen to calypso, Afrobeats, hip-hop, rap, pop, K-pop, and those timeless holiday classics come November and December. My goal is to create an environment of learning where everyone feels welcomed and excited to learn.

### ***How do you foster an environment that is inclusive and honors the uniqueness of each individual in your department and the School of Medicine?***

Taking the time to connect with each individual I work with allows me to foster an inclusive environment. I approach my work with a sense of purpose and understanding the importance of my role as a faculty member and physician. As one of the few women of color on faculty, I try to always say yes to those who ask for help. I would not have accomplished as much in life without mentors and supporters who gave up some of their time to help me. I also understand that I have a unique perspective and can serve my department and medical school to help recruit and retain trainees and faculty who better represent the patient population in mid-Missouri. One of my favorite questions to ask interview candidates works two-fold – one, to gain their perspective on health disparities, and two, to encourage them to envision their role in solving these issues. Many of these candidates offer thoughtful and realistic solutions, and end up giving me more insight.

*(Spotlight continued on page 2)*

*(Spotlight continued from page 1)*

In my role as diversity ambassador, I represent my department and the SOM in as many ways as possible. I serve on the medical school admissions committee, Circle (mistreatment) committee, and mentor students in our pre-admissions programs, as well as during first and second years of medical school through the ACE programs. I also work with third- and fourth-year students on their residency applications and building their rank lists. Seeing my learners succeed brings me so much happiness. But my greatest joy is working to change the lives of students who have overcome every obstacle possible to achieve success.

As the chair of our department diversity committee, I have worked to find ways for our team to increase access to our department as well as to bring different perspectives to our faculty and residents. Our committee serves on residency recruitment fairs with the School of Medicine and participates in regional and national conferences such as the Student National Medical Association meetings. We have brought in speakers to share their insights from Native American, African American, and LGBTQ+ points of views. We are currently finalizing our plan for a 4<sup>th</sup> year clerkship for medical students from underrepresented groups in medicine to experience OBGYN at Mizzou. Our department has embraced our role in fostering this necessary change and continues to find ways to improve.

I wholeheartedly believe that to whom much is given, much more is expected. My path to this career was not easy but was necessary for me to do this work I enjoy. I hope that through my encounters with learners, patients, and coworkers, I can make Mizzou a better, more vibrant place, with a little more pizzazz.



*Pictured above is Dr. Denicia Dwarica, MD.*

## Activity Highlights

**Diversity Dialogue**~ On Wednesday, Feb. 15, the School of Medicine's Diversity Dialogue: Humanizing Medicine series presented, "Beyond the Bullets: The Intersection of Gun Violence and Medicine." The Zoom event was organized by the SOM Student Diversity Ambassadors which included a 60-minute informative presentation followed by 30 minutes of small group discussion. Dr. Peter Masiakos, a pediatric trauma surgeon at Massachusetts General Hospital, and Dr. LJ Punch, trauma surgeon and advocate at Washington University, led the talk from a physician's point of view, while Chaplain Clementina Chéry, founder and president of the [Louis D. Brown Peace Institute](#), shared the tragic story of her son, Louis. On his way to a Teens Against Gang Violence meeting, Louis was killed in broad daylight, caught in the crossfire of two rival gangs. Since 1994, she has worked diligently to bring awareness to the unresolved trauma that generations of gun violence victims and their families have experienced. Curricula are being developed at institutes of higher learning across the country to transform the gun violence narrative.

**Diversifying the Physician Workforce**~ On Feb. 9, the School of Medicine Alumni Association and the Office of Diversity, Inclusion, Culture and Equity (DICE) held an event in acknowledgement of Black History Month, "Diversifying the Physician Workforce: An Open Discussion." The first part of the event allowed participants to view the documentary film, "Black Men in White Coats," by Dr. Dale Okorodudu, a Mizzou alumnus. The film was followed by an engaging discussion led by four physician panelists, exploring the barriers and challenges to diversifying the physician workforce, the effects of the lack of diversity on health care in the U.S. and interventions and resources that can be used to address the issues.

**Bridging the Gaps**~ On Feb. 25, Columbia-area middle and high school students spent the day at the Missouri Orthopaedic Institute for "Bridging the Gaps" Outreach Day. Faculty, staff and medical students spent the day introducing students to the field of orthopaedic surgery, a field traditionally known for a lack of women and underrepresented minorities. The event was led by Abdoulie Njai, a current M-4 in the School of Medicine. Click [here](#) to read more about this successful event.

## Give Me 5!



*Maya Ramachandran is a third-year medical student and Student Diversity Ambassador. To get to know Maya better, we asked her these 5 questions:*

### 1. If you could live anywhere or do anything, where or what would that be?

I would live in a French-speaking country and research the effects of spaceflight and microgravity on the eyes while also providing comprehensive, free eye care.

### 2. What is your favorite food or restaurant?

My favorite restaurants in Columbia are Flyover and Barred Owl Butcher & Table. Who knew a restaurant with butcher in its name could offer such amazing vegetarian food.

### 3. What is your favorite cultural/family tradition you celebrate every year?

Our family is Tamilian and we celebrate Krishna Janmashtami (the birth of Krishna) by drawing decorative kolams with rice batter and eating sweets.

### 4. Tell us an interesting or fun fact about yourself.

I have two zebra finches, which my sister named Chico and Rito because she thought these Australian birds could speak Spanish.

### 5. If you could make one change in the world what would it be?

I would encourage the practice of ahimsa, which extends the principle of "do no harm" to all living beings.

## A Look Back...

To honor Women's History Month, we acknowledge and highlight MU Women's

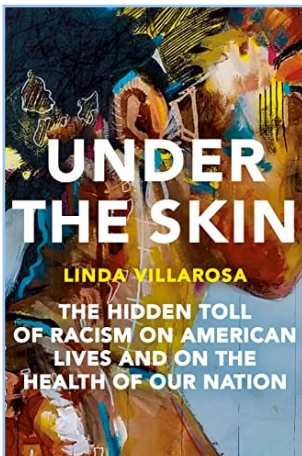
Hospital. In 1974, Columbia Regional Hospital opened as a collaborative effort between local area physicians. University of Missouri Health Care purchased the facility in 1999 and 11 years later, the hospital was renamed the University of Missouri Women's and Children's Hospital. It is the only hospital in Missouri specifically dedicated to the health of women. The hospital houses the Women's Health Center and the Family Birth Center providing care for women throughout all phases of life. From routine gynecological services and specialty care to prenatal and high-risk birthing care, the hospital provides comprehensive, personalized services for the women of mid-Missouri. The hospital has also earned recognition from the [Baby-Friendly Hospital Initiative](#) (BFHI), a global program created by the World Health Organization (WHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) that provides breastfeeding and lactation support to educate new mothers.

In 2020, the MU Board of Curators approved to move the hospital on Keene Street back to the University's main campus to continue providing specialty services to mid-Missouri women and children from a centralized location. In a state where the percentage of women who report fair or poor health is higher than the national average, access to high-quality, focused care is of utmost importance. The new 323,000 square foot facility is scheduled to open in the summer of 2024. We acknowledge and appreciate the leadership, faculty and staff dedicated to providing quality care to the women and children of mid-Missouri.



Pictured above is the original Columbia Regional Hospital.

## Brain Food



Award-winning investigative journalist and contributor to The 1619 Project, Linda Villarosa, has been studying and reporting on the health of Black Americans and racial health disparities for over 30 years. In 2022, her book, "Under the Skin: The Hidden Toll of Racism on American Lives and on the Health of Our Nation," debuted as a crucial and timely read that should be on every American's bookshelf- especially those of healthcare professionals. She

discusses numerous research studies over the past century, both valid and detrimentally misleading, that have shaped several theories on why Black and brown bodies suffer the most in one of the wealthiest and most advanced countries in the world. The term "weathering," frequently used throughout as a theory for these disparities, refers to the consistent and high effort coping by generations of Black Americans caused from fighting off microaggressions, discrimination, and chronic stress that can prematurely age and deteriorate the body causing poor health outcomes. Villarosa shares heartbreaking stories from Americans across several demographics while also discussing her own personal experiences. She closes the book with optimism, noting that the topic is no longer being ignored and praises the inspiring actions of our younger generations to create a more equitable future. "Under the Skin" can be found at Columbia's library.

## Calendar of Events

Upcoming events on campus and in the Columbia community



\***Culture Couture**, an event to celebrate and experience diverse cultures through food, music, fashion and conversation, will be held at Stotler Lounge in Memorial Union on **April 4, 5:30-7:30pm**

\*The [Student National Medical Association \(SNMA\) annual conference](#) will be **April 5-9** in Hartford, CT

\*The **Inclusive Impact Institute** of Columbia presents [Equity Lab](#) at the Ragtag Cinema on **April 12 from 9:30-11am**. Click the link to learn more

\*The [Rural Health Workforce Development Conference](#) will be **April 20-21** in Columbia, MO at the Courtyard Marriott. Click the link above for more information and to register

\*The [Black Men in White Coats Youth Summit](#) will be on **April 29 from 8am-2:30pm** held in the Patient-Centered Care Learning Center (PCCLC). This event is free! Click the link above to reserve your spot

\*The [Heart of Missouri Girls on the Run](#) 5K Celebration is **May 6 at 9am** at Albert Oakland Park. Click [here](#) to volunteer, register or for more info

*Event dates and times are subject to change. Thank you!*

**TIGER  
PANTRY**



A BIG THANK YOU to the School of Medicine Diversity and Inclusion Staff Committee for organizing to collect food for the MU Tiger Pantry during their first annual Spring Food Drive held March 20-23. The group collected 248 pounds of food for students, faculty and staff in need. Click [here](#) to learn about the Tiger Pantry.