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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## **PRESS RELEASE**

### **Outstanding SIU Students Awarded and Recognized by SIU Board of Trustees**

**SPRINGFIELD, Ill.**— The Southern Illinois University System Board of Trustees and the Student Advisory Committee for the SIU System (SACSS) are honoring some outstanding students with the 2024 SIU System Distinguished Student Service Award. Eight students from our SIU campuses in Carbondale, Edwardsville and Springfield were recently honored at the SIU board meeting that was held in Carbondale on April 11, 2024.

“SIU is proud to have so many wonderfully accomplished students who are not only making a major impact on campus but also in the greater communities,” said SIU System President Dan Mahony.

The SACSS advises SIU administrators on student-related issues that are pertinent at the system level. It also serves as a vehicle to discuss matters impacting the campuses, share ideas and projects, find solutions to problems, and work together on vital student concerns.

“This committee works very hard to be a voice for their fellow students and to recognize the outstanding work their peers are doing at SIU,” said Dr. Gireesh Gupchup, SIU VP of Academic Innovation, Planning and Partnerships.

With the 2024 SIU System Distinguished Student Service Award, the SACSS received applications from across the system and selected one undergraduate student and one graduate student each from SIU Edwardsville and SIU Carbondale, as well as one student from the SIU schools of medicine, law, pharmacy and dental medicine.

We are honored to share more about the 2024 SIU System Distinguished Student Service Award recipients.

**SIU Carbondale Undergraduate Student, Sarah Lukavsky (hometown: O’Fallon, Ill.):** As a senior at SIU Carbondale, Sarah Lukavsky is majoring in zoology, specializing in wildlife conservation and minoring in environmental studies. She is a first-generation college student, a McNair scholar, a [University Honors Program](#) student and president of the SIU Honors Assembly Student Organization, Diversify STEM and Zeta Theta Omega. The hundreds of volunteer hours Sarah has given far exceed the standard, and her leadership will certainly leave a positive and lasting impact at SIU.

**SIU Carbondale Graduate Student, Saidat Rasaq-Balogun (hometown: Ife-Ife, Nigeria):** Saidat is working towards her Ph.D. in environmental resource and policy at SIU and previously studied in Nigeria. She has made a tremendous mark at SIU as a teacher, researcher and volunteer. Serving international students is a key part of Saidat's life at SIU. On campus, she works with numerous organizations that are focused on helping international and African students. She is currently the VP of the SIU International Student Council. Saidat's service even extends to her home, where she often provides temporary housing to international students as they arrive or if they face challenges. She makes inclusivity a top priority as she takes the initiative to ensure that international students can find communities where they belong at SIU.

**SIU School of Law Student, Shailey Park (hometown: Carlinville, Ill.):** Shailey is a first-year law student at SIU Carbondale who brings a well-rounded set of accomplishments to the SIU community. Prior to law school, she spent time working in local, state, and national government as well as political campaigns. Additionally, Shailey has spent time innovating programs to increase the representation of neurodivergent people in spaces where they were not rightly represented. She has also worked with Royal Family Kids Camp to help heal trauma associated with child abuse and foster care. Her goal is to become a public policy lawyer in hopes of one day advocating for children and families who face trauma.

**SIU School of Medicine Student, Ashley-Ann Walker (hometown: Aurora, Ill.):** Ashley-Ann is a third-year medical student who is pursuing a career as a surgeon. The daughter of two immigrants from Jamaica has a special interest in global healthcare. She has organized and participated in various medical missions abroad. Ashley-Ann started the SIU School of Medicine's Global Brigades chapter. Global Brigades is an international nonprofit organization that collaborates with communities to help them overcome global poverty. Ashley-Ann served as chapter president for the 2023 brigade to Panama where they set up free clinics and delivered medical supplies to underserved communities.

**SIU Edwardsville Undergraduate Student, Isabella Pruitt (hometown: Springfield, Ill.):** Isabella is a senior majoring in public health with minors in biological and forensic sciences. She is a member of the Alpha Phi sorority who has served as SIUE student body vice president, panhellenic president, and student government's marketing and communications officer. As panhellenic president, she helped create and appoint the first ever panhellenic VP of antiracism, diversity, and inclusion. Isabella has achieved high academic success and has served her fellow students through several initiatives, including advocating for student mental health days with the SIUE administration and legislators at the Illinois Capitol with Senate Bill 2606.

**SIU Edwardsville Graduate Student, Amber Powell (hometown: Pearland, Texas):** Amber is pursuing a master's degree in sport and exercise psychology. She has deep passion for recreation and student development. Amber serves as the member services and operations graduate assistant with SIUE campus recreation. She is also a group fitness instructor within the fitness center. One of Amber's supervisors says that the students Amber mentors are becoming some of SIU's brightest stars. Amber's service does not stop at SIUE. She has been a conference presenter within the leading collegiate recreation organization, the National Intramural

Recreation Sports Association (NIRSA). Amber has served on NIRSA committees that contribute broadly to the recreation profession and reflect positively on SIUE.

**SIU School of Dental Medicine, Julissa Quinonez (hometown: Rochelle, Ill.):** Julissa is pursuing a doctoral degree in dental medicine at the SIUE campus in Alton. She is a highly involved student who serves as a member of the American Dental Education Association, American Student Dental Association (ASDA), American Association for Women Dentists, and Xi Psi Phi Dental Fraternity. She has been able to use these leadership positions to advocate for women in dentistry and promote overall social justice initiatives in oral health. Julissa received the 2024 National ASDA Legislative Liaison of the Year Award, the 2023 Illinois State Dental Society Foundation Scholarship Award and the SIU School of Dental Medicine Dean's Scholarship Award. She has also volunteered in many community service events including Give Kids a Smile and Veterans' Care Day.

**SIU School of Pharmacy, Jessie Icenogle (hometown: Aledo, Ill.):** Jessie is pursuing a doctoral degree in pharmacy with an acute care specialization and a master's degree in healthcare informatics. Beyond her academic pursuits, she is a passionate advocate for her school, profession, and patients as a regular presence at state and national legislative days. Outside of student leadership positions within numerous campus pharmacy organizations, Jessie's dedication to community volunteerism is admirable, whether she's providing blood pressure checks at the Goshen Market, educating about HIV PrEP and PEP therapies at pride festivals, or cleaning yards for local senior citizens. Jessie's work on the Jamaica Dental and Pharmacy Mission Trip has been especially notable as she acts for the chief of student involvement for the program.

"On behalf of the SIU Board of Trustees, I want to congratulate and thank these students for their outstanding achievements and for being such wonderful examples of what SIU stands for," said SIU Board of Trustees Vice Chair Dr. Ed Hightower. "We know these students will be great assets to the professional workforce, and SIU is proud to provide educational opportunities to help them develop and grow."

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*SIU employs more than 7,000 faculty, staff and administrators who serve 23,500 students through our campuses in Carbondale, Edwardsville and Springfield. The SIU System Office and SIU Medical School are located in Springfield as well as SIU Medicine clinics that serve thousands of patients.*