

# The Patriot

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Francis Marion University's award-winning student newspaper

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## AAFSC celebrates 25 years Presents professor with Diversity Award

Chanelle Hanberry  
Staff Writer

At the African American Faculty and Staff Coalition's (AAFSC) 25th Annual Gala, FMU President Fred Carter established a new \$20,000 scholarship in honor of AAFSC President Linda Sullen.

The AAFSC hosted their 25th Annual Gala Platinum Vision: A Coalition for the Future at 6:30 p.m. on Feb. 18 in the Chapman Auditorium. In connection with announcing the new scholarship, the AAFSC also recognized efforts to promote diversity at FMU.

Sullen said the recognition reinforces the important messages of diversity at FMU and in the Coalition.

"The people make our motto true: together we can," Sullen said.

Rebecca Lawson, former director of the Office of Counseling and Testing and the first FMU staff member to receive the Diversity Award, presented the Diversity Award to Daniel Brauss, assistant professor of mathematics. Lawson said she believed Brauss deserved to receive this award because he is committed to quality



PHOTO BY KEI'YONA JORDON

President Carter holds up a plaque with a list of the founding members of the African American Faculty and Staff Coalition.

teaching, being available to his students and an underlying belief in inversion and conclusion.

Tevin Leary, an FMU alumni, said his time with the AAFSC showed him the power of members of the FMU community promoting

inclusivity and diversity.

"With some hard work and perseverance, you can be the right person at the right place, at the right time, and be someone to everyone," Leary said.

After Leary gave his speech, Arthenius Jackson,

an FMU alumna and former member of the AAFSC, gave a musical performance.

Kayla Duncan, assistant director of the Office of Counseling and Testing, said in the AAFSC's 25-year history, it has continued to provide numerous enrich-

ment opportunities for the FMU community. In light of this, the AAFSC has created new partnerships with the psychology and sociology departments and provides Black history programs every year. Duncan also said FMU should continue to of-

fer the community pertinent cultural trainers to promote a positive narrative in the aftermath of recent racial issues in the U.S.

The AAFSC provides many scholarships to students to help them pursue their education. The Coalition spotlights the work of those who are dedicated to celebrating diversity and inclusiveness in the FMU community. The AAFSC has established six named scholarships that have supported 202 recipients at FMU, according to Carter.

For some of the scholarship recipients, the AAFSC's work has helped bring them closer to their educational goals and their dreams. Astou Aw, a senior supply-chain management major, said receiving the scholarship allowed her to further pursue her education and honor her mother, who recently passed away.

The Coalition started with 32 men and women who came together to create the AAFSC. According to Carter, they perceived an acute need at FMU to change and make things better. Currently, seven of the 32 founding members still work at FMU.

## NPHC discusses Greek life with FMU students

Julia Fulmer  
Copy Editor

The FMU chapter of the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) hosted a sorority open house at 6 p.m. on Feb. 4 in the Lowrimore Auditorium.

The event followed a sit-down style lecture with socially-distanced seating and pre-recorded PowerPoint presentations from members of the Alpha Kappa Alpha and Sigma Gamma Rho sororities, which introduced the core values of their groups and discussed the detailed requirements to be considered for membership in NPHC organizations.

The NPHC, also referred to as "The Divine Nine," originated as a primarily African-American group, consisting of nine collective sororities and fraternities, four of which are active on the FMU campus. Due to COVID-19 precautions, what would usually be one large open house event was split into two meetings, with one focusing on the sororities and the other on the fraternities.

Since 2014, the FMU chapter of NPHC continues to host open house events every spring and fall, requiring all students

interested in joining their organizations to attend at least one open house before they may be considered for recruitment.

The event was led by LaTasha Brand, the FMU dean of students, who emphasized the importance of students' involvement in campus organizations. In addition to personal connections and family-like relationships, Brand said Greek life allows students to serve while also building their leadership skills.

"I've seen students, in the many years that I've been here, join a club, and it helps break them out of their shell," Brand said. "It gives them a way to network with other people. Greek life just adds to the campus community and allows students another opportunity or venue to

become a part of, to make not only FMU their school, but make FMU their home."

In addition to discussing information on the NPHC sororities, Brand also warned students against the dangers of hazing in Greek life and encouraged students to notify someone immediately if they suspect any hazing acts have been committed. Brand emphasized hazing does not always involve physical harm and advised students to ask questions if an organization tells them to do anything that does not make sense.

"As a university, we do take the practice of hazing seriously," Brand said. "It's not something that we tolerate in our campus community, and I'd rather be proactive than reactive."

Aaliyah Wilson, a sophomore psychology major,

*Continued on page 2*



PHOTO BY ELODI BREG

Students listen to representatives from different sororities.

## FMU prepares for 4th President's Bowl

Julia Fulmer  
Copy Editor

Starting at 6 p.m., Feb. 22, at the Smith University Center (UC), FMU will host the bracket selection event for the fourth annual "President's Bowl," in which teams will be chosen to compete head-to-head in a battle of the brains for the hope of bringing home the FMU President's Bowl trophy and a \$1,500 check for their group.

The bracket selection is one of seven events in the President's Bowl series, with the rest of the competition scheduled throughout March in the same area of the UC. The tournament runs similarly to a conventional quiz bowl, in which three players from a variety of teams will compete against each other to answer questions from an assortment of subjects as quickly and as accurately as possible.

Teams will be given free T-shirts to wear at the event and are allowed a team size of up to six players with the ability to make substitutions at halftime. Though groups are usually formed through campus organizations and classes, applications are open to anyone who wants to enter as long as they have a faculty adviser.

Apart from bragging rights, free T-shirts and a custom-engraved trophy,

many students are drawn to the bowl by the possibility of winning the monetary reward. The first-place prize for the bowl is \$1,500, followed by the second-place prize at \$1,000, with third and fourth places receiving \$250 per team.

Christopher Kennedy, vice president for student life and professor of history, said the event has become a popular tradition, usually hosting around 16 teams per tournament.

"When we have it all set up, it looks kind of like a game show," Kennedy said. "There's an MC in the middle, and he keeps things going and keeps it kind of light, and the teams just go back and forth."

The event will follow traditional COVID-19 precautions to ensure the safety of participants and everyone else involved. In addition to mask requirements and capacity limitations, officials will take the teams' temperatures on the nights of the events.

"Come on out and just have some fun," Kennedy said. "That's the whole goal of student life, to get students engaged and have some fun during your college times. I think we're coming out on the other side [of COVID-19] and making some memorable events. This will be our fourth year in a row, and I think

we're going to be keeping the President's Bowl for the unforeseen future."

Questions for the event are broadly based and follow many topics involving history, science, geography, pop culture, art and literature. Though teams receive more points for answering a question quickly, the prompts were designed to be easier to understand the longer they are read, requiring players to consider their course of action for responses.

"We have some old [questions] from last year, and we can just give out the whole set to read through and practice," Kennedy said. "That's the strategy—to actually get your ear tuned to hear how it goes."

This year's President's Bowl is hosted by the McNair Institute for Research and Service. Though sign-ups are nearly closed, Ann Stoeckmann, director of the McNair Institute, encouraged students to attend the event regardless of whether they are on a team.

"Come by and see us," Stoeckmann said. "Watch the matches, see how it goes, and then next year, enter a team yourself."

For sample questions, team applications and further event information, visit the official President's Bowl page at <https://www.fmarion.edu/presidentsbowl/>.



# The Patriot

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# Hamilton's variegated colors of 2020

Joshua Hardee

Co-Editor

In assembling her exhibit, titled "[SUB] LIMINAL SPACE," Ashley Hamilton has been making sense of the turbulent year of 2020. Through more than 100 pieces, Hamilton has put together the rather colorful work she made about her emotional experiences last year in response to the pandemic and the loss of her mother.

According to Hamilton, all the pieces in the exhibit are one body of work, although the large-scale paintings are also a project on their own. On the surface, intensely vibrant colors stand out alongside an abundance of rainbow iconography. Hamilton said she loves how the simplicity of a colorful arch can signify so much all at once, and the rainbow has appeared in her work for many years.

"I've always been fascinated with semiology and signs and all the different connotations that one symbol can hold," Hamilton said. "I think I was first interested in the history of the rainbow as a queer person, and I used to make rainbow paintings around Pride Month every year."

Hamilton said the rainbow motif made its way back into her work in 2020 after she read an article in the beginning of the pandemic about children all over the world making



PHOTO BY ELODI BREG

In Ashley Hamilton's exhibit, she boldly expresses the humbling year of 2020.

rainbow paintings and putting it in their windows to signify "hope."

"I felt incredibly connected to that idea of 'holding onto hope' during a time of panic, anxiety, fear and grief," Hamilton said. "After seeing my 2020 work, a friend texted me, 'The rainbow is everything: a bridge, a portal, a spectrum, a symbol of dissent, a promise, an act of unapologetic defiance against the status quo.'"

Under the surface, however, this body of work all started when Hamilton abruptly lost her mother in January of 2020.

"She was my favorite person in the world, my best friend and my family's matriarch," Hamilton

said. "My whole world felt uprooted and there is a void in my heart that will never go away. The only way I know how to deal with such a profound loss is to paint my way through it."

Knowing that her mom loved her extremely vibrant paintings, Hamilton said she focused on those as a way to make her proud in her honor.

"By using such a vibrant palette last year, it made me feel some moments of joy through the pain," Hamilton said. "In a time of emotional darkness, using bright colors almost tricked my brain into feeling some happiness, and it was very healing for me through this time of grief."

Once the pandemic hit, she said her own emotional turmoil quickly became a

time of collective grief and anxiety for the world, and so she continued on this path of creating and sharing moments of joy through vibrant color.

Just as her painting practice helped her work through 2020, Hamilton said she thinks people realized the importance of art in society to comfort and heal during the isolation of quarantine.

When it comes to people viewing her work, Hamilton said the personal nature of her work can make her feel vulnerable, yet this vulnerability has led others to identify with it.

"I've found that others who have experienced major loss this year have connected to my work

differently than the average person," Hamilton said. "Perhaps, it's some sort of collective consciousness between those of us who are grieving."

According to Hamilton, she's had this desire to artistically express herself since her earliest childhood memories. She went to an art-centric high school in Nashville and continued her art education through college. She received her bachelor's in drawing and painting from the University of Tennessee in Chattanooga and she spent a year studying abroad at Queensland College of Art in Brisbane, Australia, where she focused mainly on printmaking and installation.

Hamilton said she has been showing and selling her work for around 12 years. In the years she couldn't manage to do it full time, she took jobs that were related to the arts in one way or another, such as artist assistant, gallery curator and artist in residence.

Since she was a teenager, Hamilton said she has had a rigorous studio practice, and she is always working on 20-40 paintings in all sizes and multiple projects at a time. At the moment, she is working on a series of almost-sculptural "grungy" pieces, hundreds of the "rainbow/portal" paintings similar to the work in the show and a dozen large-scale paintings.

*Continued from page 1*

# NPHC

said she was excited to learn about Greek life on campus after her recent transfer from Florence Darlington Technical College.

"I'm interested in maybe joining a Divine Nine sorority one day, so I just wanted to get out and see what it's about," Wilson said. "I'm just trying to get into more stuff on

campus since this is only my second semester being here. I think [Greek life] is important to the campus because it gives everybody opportunities to find where they fit in and

gives you the opportunity to have a long-term brotherhood and sisterhood."

For more information on NPHC organizations and other Greek life on campus,

visit the official FMU webpage at <https://www.fmarion.edu/gogreek/>.

# FMU raises minimum wage

Kei'Yona Jordon

Copy Editor

The Student Government Association (SGA) achieved one of its goals after FMU's decision to raise the minimum wage to \$8 per hour.

On Nov. 12, 2020, the SGA senate passed Resolution 107 to raise the student worker minimum wage by 75 cents.

After proposing the bill, and taking it through the proper channels of confirming the resolution, Tymoshio Robinson, SGA president and a senior political science major, took the results to FMU President Carter.

"That's the way it works," Carter said. "It's supposed to go that way.

You come up with an initiative, you pass it and you recommend it to the administration. If it's a good initiative, we act on it and we put it into place."

Shortly after Robinson's meeting with Carter, all the faculty and staff on campus received an email about the new changes.

Robinson proposed Resolution 107 in a package of legislation he created entitled "Omnibus 2020: To Advocate. To Govern. To Represent. Your SGA."

The Robinson administration's one and only goal was to meet the members of FMU's entire student body where they were.

Robinson said the passing of this resolution was special to him because it was one of the main reasons he decided to begin his journey

in SGA.

"When I joined SGA three years ago, tackling the campus minimum wage was one of my main reasons for running for my seat," Robinson wrote in a Facebook post.

According to Robinson, he figured that it would take a while to make this goal a reality.

"When I presented this resolution, I did so under the impression that it would take an entire semester to advocate and eventually get the increased proposal accomplished," Robinson said.

Carter approved the increase after hearing the reasons behind it and that it went through the proper channels.

"Hearing him say, 'Oh, we can do that,' was an

amazing feeling," Robinson said.

Carter said his motivation behind increasing the minimum wage was wanting to make sure students had enough resources to get what they needed.

"There are many of our students on campus that are involved in working on campus and work-study activities because they want to get the experience," Carter said. "But almost all of our students are engaged in working on campus because they need the money."

Robinson said the resolution will help all students, specifically first generation and financially independent college students.

"I was one of those students," Robinson said. "It took me two years of

working at my on-campus job to break the \$8 an hour threshold."

Carter said he is hopeful this resolution will have a positive impact on the FMU community.

"It's not a big increase, but it is the beginning of what may be some continual increases down the road," Carter said.

Robinson said his administration is working toward letting the students know they are here to help them.

"I want students to know that there is a governing entity on campus that truly cares for them and works extremely hard to advocate on behalf of their best interests," Robinson said.

# Sargent gains ground with volunteers

Cierra Graham

Staff Writer

Jesse Sargent, associate professor of psychology, has been at FMU for nine years. Before obtaining his doctoral degree in psychology, Sargent went through a phase in which he wanted to be a rock star. However, after gaining experience as a psychology research assistant, curiosity struck and he hung up his guitar.

Following Sargent's first-hand research experience, he began to think more frequently about the underlying processes of consciousness and cognition. Having already received his bachelor's in psychology, he decided to move forward in his career by pursuing a Ph.D. in cognitive neuroscience.

As an experimental cognitive psychologist,

Sargent is currently researching spatial cognition and memory. His interest in this research includes human organization, storage and manipulation of mental representations of spatial locations on both larger, environmental scales and smaller, figural scales.

Sargent collects behavioral and electrophysiological data from younger and older adults in the hope to better understand how the human brain segments time and the grouping of visuospatial information. The data should reveal how these processes could affect our memory capacity as we age.

This semester, Sargent had plans to visit older adults within the community residing in residential assisted-living facilities to expand his research data. However, given the COVID-19 pandemic, access to a broader range of volunteers at the moment is

not possible. Nonetheless, each semester, a small group of students with interests in psychology participate in Sargent's lab. The research lab consists of articles discussed in weekly lab meetings, as well as the training of research assistants to manage participants in ongoing behavioral and electroencephalography (EEG) studies.

By using EEG, Sargent can collect and review electrical signals transmitted from the brain while volunteers participate in memory tasks. In turn, this allows him to identify brain waves that correspond to certain behavioral tasks and functions.

"It's a combination of looking at behavior and physiology, and it's putting these things together that make what I do cognitive neuroscience," Sargent said. "So, it's not just looking at physiology and brain

waves, and looking at behavior, it is looking at them in conjunction with each other, creating a much more powerful method for understanding how brains work."

Conclusively, data is examined and interpreted with an eye toward designing subsequent experiments and shaping the future of the research program.

Current volunteers are students in introductory psychology courses who have signed up as participants in exchange for extra credit toward their final grade in a course. Participating in psychology research allows students to learn about the processes of conducting real research, as well as making a meaningful contribution to what we know about cognition.

"Without volunteers, there's no research," Sargent said. "They are more than just guinea

pigs. Our volunteers are critical, important and valued collaborators in my research enterprise. I am very appreciative of anyone who participates in our research."

Throughout the remainder of the semester, FMU students are encouraged to volunteer. Anyone interested in learning more about spatial cognition and memory can contact Sargent at [jsargent@fmarion.edu](mailto:jsargent@fmarion.edu) and should include their name and school email address in the message.

Also, it is necessary to mention that Sargent found a way to continue his rock star ambitions and is in a band called Yelodrama with a few other professors. Be on the lookout, Yelodrama could be world-famous within a few years.

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We encourage letters to the editor but do not guarantee publication.

*The Patriot* reserves the right to edit or reject any material submitted.

## NOTICE TO FMU OFFICES AND STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS:

*The Patriot* is interested in what you are doing on campus. To increase the likelihood that your events are covered, please submit news releases and schedules to us. We look forward to hearing from you.

# The Patriot

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# PROFESSOR SPOTLIGHT | Daniel Brauss

**Kei'yona Jordan**  
Copy Editor

A native of St. Louis, Missouri, Daniel Brauss, professor of mathematics, was honored with the African American Faculty and Staff Coalition 2021 Diversity Award at its 25th anniversary celebration.

“Receiving the Diversity Award was one of the best moments I have had here so far,” Brauss said.

Brauss is not only dedicated to teaching students about math, but he wants to foster opportunities for STEM students to experience diversity firsthand.

Since 2018, Brauss has been helping to organize STEM-related math trips geared toward diversifying the STEM field.

One of the first trips he organized was to the Society for Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science (SACNAS) conference in San Antonio, Texas.

From the time he became an FMU professor, Brauss has been working to give students new and different perspectives.

“Getting to take students to the conference in San Antonio was the first time being able to leave South Carolina and catch a flight, and they were so happy,” Brauss said.



PHOTO BY KEI'YONA JORDON

Professor Daniel Brauss holds the Diversity Award for his dedication to inclusivity through mathematics.

Not only is diversity important to him on the collegiate level, but also among younger students.

Brauss initiated a science fun day for primary school students at the Compassion Elementary School located in Belize.

He said the math department does some international traveling with students to Belize, where they conduct research and community outreach.

“We can’t really beat the opportunities we’ve had to take students abroad and to other places in the U.S.,” Brauss said. “These were great opportunities and we’ve had lots of fun doing them with the students.”

One of the most recent accomplishments was his involvement in a group of math professors who were able to create a supplemental instruction program that gives students

the opportunity to gain experience in introductory math courses.

This year will be the second year they have been able to keep operating the program.

Brauss’s love for mathematics began a long time ago, but it really surfaced after his senior year at Clemson University.

Brauss said the course he took that year really dove into the deep end of what he

began to love about math.

Upon graduating with his bachelor’s and master’s degrees from Clemson University, Brauss got a job in the chemical engineering field.

After working in the chemical engineering industry for more than a year, he decided to return to school and pursue a master’s in mathematical sciences.

Before becoming a teacher at FMU, Brauss was a math

teacher in Belize, where he and his wife, Minerva Brauss, a fellow FMU math professor, lived for some time.

Brauss and his wife began working in the math department at the same time, and he said they enjoyed the welcoming atmosphere.

“Since our first days at Francis Marion, my wife and I both remarked upon the exceptional level of light and compassion extended by the faculty and staff,” Brauss said.

Brauss said the acceptance that he and his wife received from the faculty and staff showed them how important diversity was to the school.

“It was this inclusion that we observed from our first day – understanding, accepting and valuing the differences between people – that continues to attract us at Francis Marion,” Brauss said.

Brauss has worked tirelessly to enrich students’ knowledge of math and diversity at FMU as well as in the world.

“My wife and I like to share our time with the students through research and immersion experiences,” Brauss said.

Brauss and the math department have many more plans to immerse students in diversity and STEM in the future.

# STUDENT SPOTLIGHT | Merissa Taylor

**Melanie Dozier**  
Staff Writer

Rather than allowing stress to keep her down, Merissa Taylor said she uses it to encourage herself to travel and better herself every day.

Growing up with three sisters, Taylor graduated from West Florence High School in 2019. She did cheerleading when she was younger and continued cheer all the way through school. She also participated in choir the last three years of high school. From constantly being around people and performing, Taylor developed impressive people skills and a love for children.

Beginning her FMU journey as a transfer student from the College of Charleston last year, Taylor is now a sophomore. She decided to major in elementary education and minor in history so she can teach in elementary school as well as in a middle school history department.

Nannying two children inspired her career path. Her experiences in childcare have enabled her to appreciate the meaningful connections that can be created with others.

“I do not even look at them as kids; I look at them as my very best friends,”



PHOTO BY MELANIE DOZIER

Merissa Taylor uses traveling as a way to relax and take a break from school and work.

Taylor said.

Taylor also said she enjoys working and traveling. Sometimes, it can be overwhelming, since she is a full-time student, works as a nanny after school and as a hostess at a local

restaurant in the evenings. However, she manages her time well and always keeps her grades up.

To relieve her stress, Taylor travels around different areas in North and South Carolina on the

weekends when she can. She also enjoys venturing outside of the Carolinas as much as possible.

“I’ve been to Asheville, Greenville and Charleston most recently,” Taylor said.

Taylor said her most

impactful trip was an impromptu one to New York after a breakup.

“I’d have to say the most important and biggest trip would have to be when I went to New York after getting my heart broken last

summer,” Taylor said

Taylor said she had a friend who had gone to New York for fashion school, but when COVID-19 hit, her friend had to come home. She ended up having to go back to get the rest of her things, so, one day, she suggested to Taylor that they take a trip to New York. So they packed the car and drove to New York City, stopping in Virginia and New Jersey along the way. Taylor and her friend also went to Washington, D.C., during the trip.

“Everyone says not to travel right now because of COVID, but it was the best time to go because no one was there,” Taylor said. “We drove scooters around D.C. and saw people at the Lincoln Memorial drinking wine and staring up at the monument because this was when the Black Lives Matter protests were going on. It felt like we were in a movie.”

The trip was beneficial for Taylor, even though the world is in a pandemic and she had to return to school after the trip. Going back to reality was difficult, but she is hoping to return to New York in the summer for another get-away from the stress and anxiety of school.

# Fraternities host open house, talk about hazing

**Ansley Lesley**  
Copy Editor

FMU hosted the National Pan-Hellenic Council (NPHC) Fraternity Open House from 6 p.m to 7:15 p.m. on Feb. 5 in Lowrimore Auditorium.

NPHC is comprised of African-American fraternities and sororities. Two NPHC fraternities are currently active on campus, Alpha Phi Alpha and Kappa Phi Kappa, while two NPHC sororities are active on campus.

The fraternity and sorority open houses used

to be combined, but due to safety concerns with the COVID-19 pandemic, they were separated into two different meetings. The open house also used to include breakout sessions, where students could go and learn more about a specific fraternity or sorority.

Several of the members of the fraternities or sororities would attend in order to answer any questions other students might have. This year, the breakout sessions could not be held due to COVID-19. To join a NPHC fraternity or sorority, a student must attend an NPHC Open House.

The number of students in attendance was also reduced. Some of the speakers filmed short videos instead of attending. Instead of several of the fraternity members attending, only members in leadership roles attended.

Alpha Phi Alpha has been on campus nearly since the founding of FMU. They were established in 1975. Alpha Phi Alpha runs several events throughout the year, such as Show Time McNair and the Black and Gold Pageant. They also do service projects in the community.

The Chapter President of Alpha Phi Alpha, Adrien McClintock, spoke briefly to

the attendees about why he joined Alpha Phi Alpha.

“I was actually interested back at Morris College, and I saw a stroll from some fraternities and sororities,” McClintock said. “And that got me interested in fraternities.”

Kappa Alpha Sci is the other active NPHC fraternity on campus. Junior Math major and fraternity brother Malachi Dawson spoke briefly about Kappa Alpha Sci.

“I was always interested in fraternity life,” Dawson said. “I really wanted to do it because I knew what I wanted to accomplish.”

Both fraternities try to help develop the leadership skills of the young men that join.

“I have seen myself grow,” Dawson said.

Dean of Students Latasha Brand gave a briefing on FMU’s hazing policy and South Carolina’s hazing law. South Carolina law forbids hazing of any kind, and FMU likewise forbids hazing. Even those present who do not actively participate in hazing can be held legally responsible.

According to SC Code 16-3-510, hazing includes any “acts which have a foreseeable potential for

causing physical harm to a person for the purpose of initiation.” Hazing can also include acts such as going for extended periods of time without sleep.

“[Hazing education] is a lot like car insurance,” Brand said. “You get it just in case you have an accident. You don’t expect or intend to get into an accident, but in case you do, you know you’re covered. And that’s basically what this is about.”

Any hazing activity should be reported to Brand as soon as possible.



# COACH SPOTLIGHT | Garth Thomson

Finn Millians  
Copy Editor

As a former FMU men’s tennis player in 1990, Garth Thomson, head coach of both the men’s and women’s tennis teams, never imagined he would become the head tennis coach for his alma mater.

“You know, I always thought I would be working on Wall Street or somewhere in the finance world, but I feel like if I lived behind a desk my whole life it wouldn’t have been a positive lifestyle for me,” Thomson said.

After receiving his bachelor’s in business administration, Thomson planned on playing tennis as long as he could. Many tennis players play tournaments around the country to accumulate points that lead to invitations to bigger tournaments and a more established career. Unfortunately, extenuating circumstances involving weak Zimbabwean currency slowed the process for Thomson considerably.

“My goal was to play tennis after I graduated, but I didn’t have any resources,” Thomson said. “In Zimbabwe, foreign currency is terrible, so I would teach for a month and then go play tennis for a month.”

His steady determination allowed him to follow his dream for a while, but he was eventually brought back to FMU when the tennis teams needed a coach. The athletic director of FMU had known Thomson as a player



PHOTO BY FINN MILLIANS

FMU’s longest serving alumni coach, Garth Thomson has built a family both on and off campus.

and reached out to him to offer him a job.

“I did that for a year, and then there was an interim coach after Dave Cordrey who was here for about a year and then resigned in October,” Thomson said. “Coach Griffin, who was the baseball coach and athletic director then, called me and said, ‘Garth, would you like to be the tennis coach?’”

It was an unexpected offer, but not one Thomson would reject. Though he loved traveling and playing tennis, he knew that it was

not a sustainable lifestyle without a steady source of income.

“I knew I could not afford tennis and stay out there; I needed to make a living, and this opened up,” Thomson said. “Initially, I thought this would be something I would do for a year or two. A lot of players I actually had played with [were] on the team, so it was a very strange situation, but after a couple of years they said they would pay for my MBA.”

Twenty-nine years later, Thomson remains and is

the only alumni coach on staff. With a legacy of many tournament appearances, academic all-Americans and undefeated seasons, Thomson turned his temporary position into a lifestyle and lifetime career.

“I really enjoyed it,” Thomson said. “You know, I’m outside. It’s a great life. Six months I’m working hard and then six months I spend a lot more time with the family, and to me, it was a wonderful way to make a living.”

Presently, Thomson has

simple yet ambitious goals for his program and players. He always plans to appear in the NCAA tournament, but he also does not want to limit himself and his teams.

“Let’s see how far we can go,” Thomson said.

Ultimately, though his career turned about a bit different than his original plan, he did succeed with one goal: to live in America.

Originally from Harare, Zimbabwe, Thomson dreamed of leaving and moving to America—a beacon of abundance and

opportunity.

“Coming from a third world country, I felt like the U.S. had a lot to offer,” Thomson said. “When we are struggling with basic necessities, and you come to a country where there is an abundance of everything—I saw a lot of opportunities here. I did not want to go back, so I made sure I did well on the tennis court and in the classroom so that I could keep my scholarship and stay here.”

Staying in the U.S. is exactly what he did. At 52, Thomson has established deep roots in Florence, South Carolina, at school with his legacy and in the community with his wife and three children.

Thomson continues his legacy now in mentoring and coaching his players in both life and tennis.

“The transition between 18 to 21 to graduation, you see a dramatic change in the players and people,” Thomson said. “We’re trying to win the conference, trying to get to the NCAA’s, but we’re getting a degree first. I just enjoy the journey with them.”

With the large number of international students making up the rosters, Thomson wants to help shape them into great people with high ambitions. He uses his own journey to help guide them on theirs.

“Life is one big adventure; you better go and make the most of it,” Thomson said.

# ATHLETE SPOTLIGHT | Leonel Gonzalez

Finn Millians  
Copy Editor

After facing enormous adversity with COVID-19 at the start of his first college season, Leonel Gonzalez, a native of Morelia, Mexico, and a freshman business major on the FMU men’s tennis team, is finally at FMU and ready to make an impact on the team.

“Last year, I didn’t play many tournaments because of COVID-19,” Gonzalez said. “I also had to stop training for about five months.”

Despite having to stay home last semester, Gonzalez is now in Florence and happy to be here.

While in Mexico, Gonzalez worked with an agency to find a school in the U.S. where he could pursue a degree while continuing to play the sport he loves. He communicated with many schools through the agency, but his decision became clear when he met Garth Thomson, head coach of the tennis at FMU.

“I was talking with many coaches, and one of them was Garth,” Gonzalez said. “I liked him very much. Also, in the beginning of the process, I chose eight states and one of them was South Carolina.”

One of his teammates, senior Mauricio Guerrero, is also from Mexico and reached out to Gonzalez to



PHOTO BY KEI'YONA JORDAN

Leonel Gonzalez looks forward to the tennis season after COVID-19 made travel from Mexico to the U.S. difficult.

make him feel more at ease.

Gonzalez has high hopes for this season and ambitious goals for himself and the program.

“I know that this team has qualified for the semifinals in the tournament, so I want to work with all of my teammates and help get that again,” Gonzalez said.

Gonzalez had a great start in their opening weekend, where he went 1:1 in his solo matches, losing to Blue-

field State College (a historically strong tennis program) and winning against Coker University.

Tennis has been an important part of Gonzalez’s life since he was 11. Several members of his family were tennis players, so it is only fitting that he adopted the racquet himself.

“I was in a [soccer] club in Mexico, but I was playing soccer,” Gonzalez said. “My dad used to play tennis, so

once I went to play with him, I kept playing.”

Years of hard work went into his game, eventually leading him to huge success in the “under 18” category in his country. In tennis, players participate in tournaments and accumulate points, which determine ranking and status. Gonzalez managed to earn enough points to rank in the top 16 of the country.

“I played many tourna-

ments and was one of the top 16 players in Mexico,” Gonzalez said. “I played so many tournaments that year and I got really good results, so I was named in the top three.”

His abilities created many opportunities for him, even before his appearance at FMU. Gonzalez was able to travel to play internationally. At 17, Gonzalez lived in Germany for three months and played tournaments with a team there.

“My best friend, her mom is German,” Gonzalez said. “They moved from Mexico to Germany and played for one club there, so she contacted me with the coach there. They asked me if I could go to play with them and they offered me housing and food. I could even travel a little bit during the day there. I also had teammates from Italy and France.”

This experience prepared him for college, as he once again moved to another country to play tennis with a team of strangers—this time with COVID-19 as a factor.

“Two years ago, I was playing in Germany,” Gonzalez said. “It was the same. It was a tennis team, about six players. I had an idea of how it was going to be.”

Currently, Gonzalez participates in team practices and weights, utilizing his free time to talk to family and friends back home. It has been difficult to keep active, but Gonzalez’s love for the game trumps all else.

“I have a lot of fun when I’m playing,” Gonzalez said.

You can find Gonzalez and the FMU men’s tennis on the courts at FMU, the Dr. Eddie Floyd Florence Tennis Center or at an away game, playing to win for the Patriots.

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Lady Patriots fall to Bluefield State College  
Mens tennis suffers close loss to Cobras

Finn Millians  
Staff Writer

In the season opener for both Patriot tennis teams, the women’s tennis team lost a tough match against Bluefield State College 4-2 at 12 p.m. on Feb. 6 at the Dr. Eddie Floyd Tennis Center.

The first event of the tournament was doubles. The matchups were as follows: Hermon Mikael (sophomore) and Viktoria Leth (freshman); Eva Zannier (junior) and Nargiza Yakhyayeva (freshman); and Camryn Cassetori (freshman) and Kailey Eggert (senior).

Although the Mikael-Leth pair won their match (by default since the last set was unfinished), the other two pairs dropped their matches to Bluefield State, causing the Patriots to lose the doubles event.

The singles event went better for the Lady Patriots, with half of the team defeating their respective opponents. Mikael defeated her Bluefield State opponent 6-1 and 6-3 in two sets. Leth played a close match, but won by default, playing her first set 6-1 and ending the second set with a 6-6 tie. Cassetori won her match in two sets, 6-3 and 6-1.

Mikael, a sophomore business marketing and human resources double major, though disappointed in the loss, was happy that the season was able to happen. With COVID-19 becoming a factor last year, the previous tennis season was unfortunately cut short.

“It felt really good [to be back],” Mikael said. “We were just happy we could have a game.”

Mikael was also very optimistic about the rest of the season, saying the losses are just an opportunity for growth and future success.

“As long as we practice and support each other, we can be a really good team,” Mikael said. “I am really excited.”

Cassetori, a freshman English major, was ecstatic to play and win her first singles college match.

“It was such a surreal experience,” Cassetori said. “I was definitely a little nervous, but I was also filled with excitement and the drive to win.”

She was able to defeat her opponent in singles and is only looking at the positives as the tennis season starts.

“If I am being honest, I

definitely believe our team could have won that match,” Cassetori said. “I’m happy with everyone’s performance, but I think it’s always better to strive for more and to try to be better. I’m hoping as the season goes on, we see more success.”

Cassetori and the rest of the Lady Patriots are ready to get back on the court and prepare for the rest of the season.

“I think everyone is really motivated and wants to win,” Cassetori said. “I think that will be a key factor in matches to come.”

Finn Millians  
Staff Writer

In the season opener for both Patriots’ tennis teams, the men’s tennis team yielded tough losses to Bluefield State College and Coker University 0-4 and 3-4 at 10 a.m. and 2 p.m. on Feb. 6 at the Dr. Eddie Floyd Tennis Center.

The first event of the tournament included doubles matches against Bluefield State College. The matchups were as follows: Mauricio Guerrero (senior) and Leonel Gonzalez (freshman); William Anth-Forsberg (senior) and Adam Ernberg (freshman); and David Bodson (freshman) and Joshua Schaefer (freshman).

After going 0-3 in the doubles event, the men slightly bounced back in the singles with two wins by default from Guerrero and Ernberg with victorious first sets and unfinished remaining sets.

After the unfortunate results from the morning, the Patriots brought more competition to Coker University in their second match of the day.

The doubles event had the same matchups, but Guerrero and Gonzalez emerged victorious, finishing 6-1 against their opponents.

The singles event resulted in a nail-biting tiebreaker between Bodson and Coker’s Thibaut Decaluwe. Three victors from FMU caused this tiebreaker match: Guerrero, Anth-Forsberg and Gonzalez. Anth-Forsberg won his match 6-4 and 6-1, Guerrero won his match 7-6 (7-4) and 6-2 and Gonzalez won his match 3-6, 6-4 and 6-2.

Bodson was defeated by Decaluwe 6-3, 6-7 (5-7) and 6-4, allowing the Coker Cobras to steal the win.

Guerrero, one of two seniors in a team largely

comprised of freshman, was disappointed in the day’s results, but acknowledged the opportunity for growth.

“The first match was a tough loss,” Guerrero said. “I think we had big expectations because of how we practiced. We had a bad start in doubles, and I think it was hard for the freshmen. It was their first matches.”

Even with the performances and results of the team, Guerrero is looking forward to the rest of the season and has high expectations for the future.

“At the same time, we got a lot of feedback from the players,” Guerrero said. “One thing is practice, and one thing is playing. The second match was better. I have good hopes for the guys.

I’m looking forward to the rest of the season.”

Gonzalez, one of five freshmen, played his first collegiate tennis matches at the tournament. Though he was nervous and upset about the results of the weekend, he is excited about the future season.

“The day before, I was really excited, but I was so nervous,” Gonzalez said. “Hopefully, the next tournament is better. We are so new, and everyone was so nervous, but I think the next tournament will be better and the whole season.”

The Patriots’ men’s tennis teams next home game will be against Chowan University at 12 p.m. on Feb. 27.



PHOTO BY ELODI BREG  
Kailey Eggert prepares to receive a serve from Bluefield State College.



PHOTO BY ELODI BREG  
Mauricio Guerrero gets ready to return the ball to his opponent.

