

STUDENT SUPPORT SERVICES

TRIO Student-of-the Year: Jose Lemus-Juarez

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TRIO NEWS

As a TRIO alumnus of the Purdue University Fort Wayne Upward Bound program, it was clear from the state that Jose would be an excellent addition to our TRIO SSS family. From early on, Jose demonstrated a thoughtful balance of academic excellence, active involvement in TRIO, and intentional preparation for his future career.

Jose has consistently challenged himself with rigorous coursework and found meaningful ways to connect his academic experience to his career goals. Even a full plate, Jose remained a steady presence in our community. He became a regular at Rise & Grind, often working on assignments while contributing a well-timed, humorous one-liner that added to the welcoming atmosphere.

While Jose may be reserved, his presence is impactful – creating space for others and encouraging them to be themselves. Jose thoughtfully engaged with opportunities in his way, making it a memorable milestone when he joined us on our trip to Columbus, Ohio after previously declining similar opportunities. His steady involvement and unique personality have made him an integral part of our TRIO community.



*Image of TRIO Student-of-the-Year
Jose Lemus-Juarez*

Since graduation he has obtained his Registered Behavior Technician certificate and plans to take the exam soon to complete his certification. While he prepares for the exam, he is job shadowing at Partners in Autism. His desire is to work full time for this organization. He has established a relationship with Partners of Autism after completing his fieldwork experience there in Spring 2025.

We will surely miss hearing his signature send-off, “good luck, have fun,” as other left Rise & Grind for class or work. Jose, congratulations on receiving this award. We wish you all the best in your next adventure—good luck and have fun!

2025-2026 GRADUATES



Celebrating TRIO Students

Josselyn Amaya Hernandez – Bachelor of Science in Interior Design

Kayti Austin – Bachelor of Arts in Sociology
Associate of Science in Organizational Leadership

Dymond Barbre – Bachelor of Arts in Psychology

Ceonda Brown – Bachelor of General Studies

Isaac Clark – Bachelor of Science in Biochemistry

Faith Douglas – Bachelor of Science in Education

Andrea Eaton – Bachelor of Arts in Psychology

Ayden Esslinger – Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering Technology

Suhaid Haid – Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering Technology

Jaythen Haywood - Bachelor of Arts in Political Science
Bachelor of Arts in History

Mary Johnson – Bachelor of Science in Computer Science
Master of Science in Computer Science

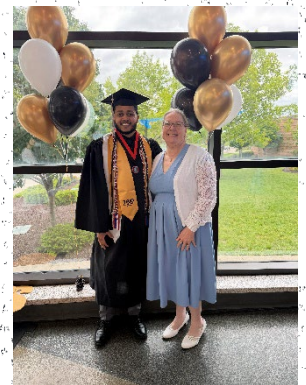
Collins Karanja – Bachelor of Science in Biology

Austin Kruckeberg – Bachelor of Science in Mechanical Engineering Technology

Christy Lay – Bachelor of Science in Psychology
Behavioral Analysis & Technique Certificate

Jose Lemus-Juarez – Bachelor of Arts in Psychology
Behavioral Analysis & Technique Certificate

O Ma Ma – Bachelor of Science in Management



2025-2026 GRADUATES



Celebrating TRIO Students

Alyse Mack - Bachelor of Science in Human Services

Saleh Mahamat - Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering Technology

Ariana Mustedanagic - Bachelor of Science in Organizational Leadership

Manuel Nieves Garcia - Bachelor of Science in Computer Science

Ian Ripple - Bachelor of Science in Accounting

Lauren Robison - Bachelor of Science in Computer Science

Master of Science in Computer Science

Samantha Romero - Bachelor of Science in Biology
Associate of Science in Science

Jessica Schiel - Bachelor of Science in Psychology

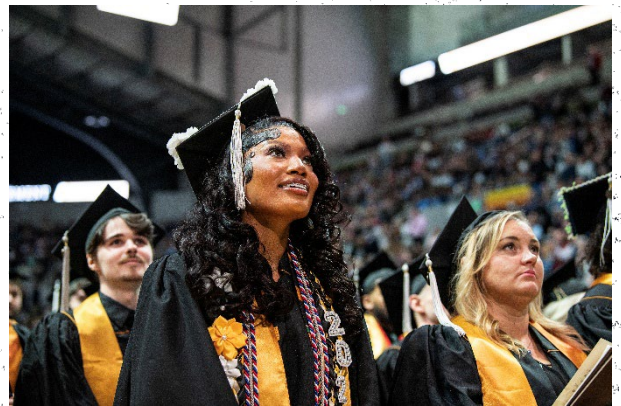
Donyell Smith II - Bachelor of General Studies

Saige Stiner - Bachelor of Science in Marketing

Macey Swearingen - Bachelor of Science in Education

Miranda Thomas - Bachelor of Arts in Art & Design

Skyler Zuber - Bachelor of Science in Human Services



From the Desk of the Director

Hi TRIO SSS:

Congratulations on completing another academic year! All of the time you invested into preparing for exams, scheduling meetings for group projects, and encouraging your fellow TRIO peers to finish strong paid off. Whether you are celebrating the conclusion of your freshmen year, approaching your final semesters with us, you have earned this period of rest and rejuvenation.

Summer break offers a unique opportunity: it's a time for celebration, reflection, and reconnection. Whether your plans involve working extra hours at your place of employment, taking summer classes, or dedicating your energy toward an internship, this is your time to reset. Or if your focus is on rest, relaxation, spending time with friends and family, or taking some time to reflect on what you've learned thus far in your academic journey and where you want to go next, this is the time to prioritize your goals.

As I reflect on this academic year, I am extremely proud of all of the milestones our participants have made including GPA improvements, recognized as student leaders on campus, or finishing degree requirements to become a first-generation college graduate! I have had the privilege of watching our participants tackle immense academic challenges and balance a jam-packed schedule of on and off campus responsibilities while being positive representations for first-generation college students who come after you.

It is an honor to serve as the Director of this TRIO program and I look forward to your return to campus for another academic year. We are busy this summer preparing for your return to campus; interviewing TRIO eligible students for acceptance into the program, and identifying what workshops and other programming ideas our participants want to see. I wish you a safe, productive, and restorative summer break, and I look forward to welcoming you back for another academic year.

Sincerely,
Demetria Pettie



A group of students posing for a photo in matching t-shirts

TRIO Award Winners

Each year, TRIO celebrates amazing students and highlights the work that they do during the TRIO Awards ceremony. This year, TRIO celebrated with students, family, faculty, staff, and friends to recognize the following individuals:

TRIO Student Workers: Abraham Garcia, Jubee Lipa, Snow Macy, Taiwo Oladapo, Riona Workman

TRIO Peer Mentors: Hunter Felton-Kaminskas, Jubee Lipa, Alyse Mack

TRIO Leaders: Ekambir Chauhan, Skreech Counterman, Henry Ford, Jaythen Haywood, Mary Johnson, Samantha Romero, Jessica Schiel, Allison Sittineri

TRIO Spirit Awards: Sophia Cheng, Henry Ford, Mary Johnson, Jubee Lipa, Donyell Smith II



A group of people posing for a photo

TRIO Persistence Awards: Collins Karanja and Zane Seigel

TRIO Excellence Award: Ian Ripple and Miranda Thomas

TRIO Students-of-the-Year: Ayden Esslinger and Jose Lemus-Juarez

TRIO Student-of-the-Year:

Ayden Esslinger

Ayden has been a joy to advise since he first applied to TRIO SSS during his freshmen year. From the beginning, he has been a high achieving student who consistently strives for excellence. Ayden has steadily demonstrated a strong commitment to TRIO by attending events and regularly connecting with staff to share updates on his progress toward degree completion. He has been a dedicated and present student, making TRIO a priority even while balancing the responsibilities of being a working college student.

Often, he could be found in Rise & Grind after getting off work at FedEx, seamlessly managing his job alongside his academic and extracurricular commitments. “Many of our students are juggling full time employment while being a full-time student, but Ayden stood out due to his schedule” says Director Demetria Pettie. “Working an overnight shift and still making it to a 8:30am study tables is impressive”.

During his senior year, Ayden faced significant adversity when he underwent surgery following a motorcycle accident. While such an incident could have disrupted his academic journey, Ayden showed remarkable resilience. He actively utilized campus resources – including the Disability Access Center, the CARE team, and faculty support – to maintain his academic excellence alongside physical therapy and recovery. Ayden was on the Dean’s and Semester’s Honors List every year of college graduating with a 3.63 cumulative GPA.



Image of TRIO Student-of-the-Year Ayden Esslinger

Now, as a college graduate, we are so proud of all he has accomplished. Since graduation Ayden has begun working at Incipio Devices as a Manufacturing Engineer in Huntington, IN. In this role he supports the production of medical devices and implants. He’s also purchased a new motorcycle and looks forward to getting it up and running.

Ayden, it has been a pleasure to have you be a member of the PFW TRIO SSS family. Congratulations Ayden! We wish you all the best with your future plans.

Giving Back: Building Leaders and Helping our Community

Indiana TRIO Student Leadership Conference 2025

One of the often-overlooked aspects of TRIO SSS is our commitment to developing leaders. This is an objective that transcends all levels of the program, from the national organization, the Council of Opportunity in Education, to regional associations, and state chapters. On November 1, 2025, Purdue University Fort Wayne in partnership with Indiana TRIO Inc., welcomed Pre-College and College students and TRIO staff from across the state for the annual 'The Future is TRIO' Student Leadership Conference. Participants came from local Fort Wayne area high schools, as well as the University of Southern Indiana, Ivy Tech Community College, Purdue University Northwest, and Indiana University-Indianapolis came together to participate in multiple sessions that focused on individual leadership development, collaboration and teamwork, and overcoming challenges. TRIO Alumni from our program (Manal Ali '25 & Taiwo Oladapo '24) served as panelists and discussed the benefits of TRIO programming, even after achieving their collegiate goals. After a long, productive day of learning, workshopping, and goal-setting, attendees wrapped up the event with a silent party, raffle, and a PFW Admissions presentation.



National TRIO Day 2026

During the fourth Saturday in February, TRIO programs across the nation celebrate National TRIO Day. Established by a congressional decree in 1986, this occasion recognizes the profound impact TRIO programs have on first-generation college students, low-income individuals, and students with disabilities. At its core, TRIO is dedicated to empowering those who face barriers in their pursuit of educational achievement.

To highlight the significance of TRIO's impact and demonstrate a shared commitment to service, Purdue Fort Wayne's TRIO SSS program and Ivy Tech's TRIO SSS program collaborated to support Community Harvest Food Bank. This nonprofit organization serves communities, families, and individuals throughout Allen County and the surrounding areas by addressing food insecurity through a variety of programs. Each year, Community Harvest Food Bank collects, organizes, and distributes millions of pounds of food to those in need. However, such as extraordinary effort is only possible with the help of dedicated volunteers. Food must be carefully inspected, sorted, organized, and distributed to ensure it reaches individuals and families efficiently and safely. Working with the employees and volunteers of Community Harvest Food Bank was an enriching opportunity for all involved and allowed TRIO SSS to do what it does best, continuing to help others in need.



Volunteers waving in front of pallet of food

Hai Nguyen

Hai Nguyen graduated from Purdue University Fort Wayne in May of 2024 with a Bachelor of Science in Business. He is currently employed as a staff accountant and audit associate at Forvis Mazars which is an accounting firm in downtown Fort Wayne, IN. Hai enjoys getting out of his comfort zone at work whether that's meeting with new clients, talking with colleagues, or learning how to navigate new situations. Hai was drawn to the field of accounting was conversations with his sister who was currently working in the tax industry. While in school, Hai made connections with friends and professors in the accounting major that encouraged him to delve more deeply into his interest in the field. Hai shares that without the help of his first accounting professor "hooking me in", he doesn't know if he would've kept going with the major at all. Hai encourages current students to put themselves out there in order to achieve goals such as making friends and experiencing new things. He has currently started rock climbing at a bouldering gym downtown and is also taking up sewing and altering garments. He shares that these new hobbies "keep [him] on his feet in terms of his physical and mental self" and sees it as a way to push himself while "enjoying the process and fruits of [his] labor". At work, Hai is working toward his CPA license. Once he has his license, he will be able to open more doors to opportunities at work and gain further knowledge. Hai thanks multiple professors at PFW and the PFW TRIO staff for their support and guidance throughout his college career. He wants to share the he encourages college students to use their resources to their advantage and to be open to making new friends along the way.

TRIO Alumni



Headshot Photo of Hai Nguyen

CAMP TRIO 2025

Over Labor Day weekend, TRIO students stayed at YMCA's Camp Potawatomi in Wolcottville, IN. Camp TRIO is a fun way for new students to meet other TRIO students and form new friendships. While at camp students participate in teambuilding activities, a scavenger hunt, boating, and volleyball. Alondra Shackelford shared that "Camp TRIO helped me break out of my shell and meet so many people from the program!" Mark your calendar for this year's revamped Camp TRIO held during Fall Break on October 16 – 18 taking place at our new camp location, Camp Lakewood in Wolcottville, IN. This event is open to all TRIO SSS students but space is limited. Fun camp gear and smore kits included!



TRIO SSS Academic Enrichment Trip



A group of people posing for a photo in matching t-shirts



TRIO Students Learn about Sustainability

Early Saturday morning on March 7, 2026, TRIO SSS students and staff set out to visit the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium. The weather was chilly, overcast, and gray, but our spirits were as bright as our orange t-shirts. Once we arrived at the zoo, we spent some time in group and individual exploration of the various themed areas, followed by a buffet lunch and a talk with Director of Sustainability at the zoo, Kristeena Baser. Her presentation focused on the many ways that the Zoo works to improve sustainability and increase conservation of critical habitats both at the zoo and in the surrounding region.

The presentation was particularly useful when Academic Coordinator Bryant Williams asked how Kristeena discovered her professional interests. Kristeena shared that she started off in a different undergraduate program and had a dint of circumstance became interested in conservation efforts. As a result, she ended up changing majors and discovered a new career path. This spontaneous discussion was very helpful for our TRIO SSS students to hear, as it showed them that the road to professional fulfillment is not always a direct one. Changing majors is often seen as a misstep that can waste time, money, and opportunity, but it can also be a chance to figure out where their actual passions and interests lie. For first-generation students, this information can help them feel far more comfortable if they find their own paths to graduation curving in unexpected ways.

Following the presentation, we were treated to a delightful opportunity to meet and greet some of the zoo's animal ambassadors! Zookeeper discussed the habitats and behaviors of three-toed sloths, armadillos, and penguins! TRIO SSS students and staff were charmed by the animals and impressed by the zookeepers' knowledge and ability to handle the animals carefully and respectfully.



TRIO Alumni: Stay in Touch

Calling all TRIO SSS Alumni: Your experience is powerful – share it, shape futures, stay involved.

We want to hear how TRIO helped you succeed – academically, personally, professionally, financially, or in any other way!

Scan the QR Code to submit your testimonial. Your experience can inspire current students, inform others of how #TRIOWorks, and demonstrate the life-changing impact of TRIO Student Support Services at Purdue University Fort Wayne.



QR Code for TRIO SSS Alumni Survey



TRIO STAFF GO TO D.C.

Over spring break, TRIO staff members Bryant Williams and Demetria Pettie traveled to Washington, D.C. to attend a leadership development conference called Policy Seminar. Over 700 TRIO professionals attended this four-day event just a few minutes away from Capitol Hill. During the event, Demetria presented a case study, *Engaging the Unengaged: A Strategic TRIO Approach*, to conference attendees on strengthening college access and success for first-generation, and low-income students as a part of the Council for Opportunity in Education's Executive Leadership Institute.



Group of people posing for photo on staircase in matching t-shirts

Bryant serves as the Secretary of the Indiana TRIO Board of Directors and attended the conference for the first time noting that “having the opportunity to participate in the seminar felt both professionally and personally significant”. During the event he met with congressional representatives and policymakers who champion TRIO programs. “The experience reaffirmed my belief in the importance of TRIO program and the positive impact they continue to have on students and communities nationwide”



Zane Siegel

Zane is a junior at PFW studying music performance with a focus on percussion. Zane shared that his father taught him how to play the drum set when he was four years old and he has had a passion for percussion ever since. After graduation, he would like to be a college professor and teach the drums. Zane is currently involved in the orchestra on campus, as well as the pep band and Symphonic Wind Ensemble. As a part of the Symphonic Wind Ensemble, Zane was able to participate in a world premiere performance of Two Sermons composed by Bruce Broughton. The Ensemble performed alongside the PFW choir and The Fort Wayne Children's Choir. Composer Bruce Broughton came to PFW's campus to instruct the performers on how he would like the pieces played and he conducted one of the pieces during the performance. The two pieces of music were a juxtaposition of each other. The first, "God's Creation of Life" was described by Zane as "very beautiful, relaxed, and peaceful" while the other, "The Judgement Day" sounded "evil, loud, and hellish". Zane shared that he was nervous for the performance and that he'd "never heard such a beautiful piece [of music] in my life". Zane felt very accomplished when they hit that final note and the crowd gave the performers a standing ovation.



Miranda Thomas

Miranda Thomas recently graduated from Purdue University Fort Wayne with a degree in Art & Design. Miranda has already achieved a lot of exciting accomplishments while attending college. She shared that she owns her own business selling art prints and other creations. She has customers all along the west coast and finds connections through her social media. Miranda decided to put this business on pause while in school and currently working two jobs; one as the Public Relations Manager at The Dream Center and the other as the Marketing Communications Director at Learn Resource Center. Both of these jobs allow Miranda creative freedoms to work on web design and marketing. While Miranda is working toward her college degree and future career field, she spent her free time pursuing another passion: creating murals. She set a goal for herself at 15 years old to complete a wall mural and accomplished that goal last year when she created a mural for the Boys and Girls Club. She has also created three murals at The Dream Center and another off Central Dr. in downtown Fort Wayne. Miranda says that each mural takes about six hours and she uses spray paint as her current medium. She stated that she finds work through connections as well as on LinkedIn and social media. Customers often allow Miranda full creative freedom and she will provide them with three designs before deciding on the final design for the space. Miranda just recently created a mural at the Johnnie Mae Farm thanks to a referral from The Dream Center. Keep an eye out for her work around town!

TRIO SSS Partnerships

CELT's Student Success Academy

TRIO Student Support Services was approached by the [Center for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching](#) (CELT) to partner in the creation of the Student Success Academy sponsored by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC). As part of their work, faculty members Andrew Kopec and Kevin Stoller conducted a group feedback session with TRIO students during Rise & Grind Study Sessions for a candid discussion about what resources are accessible and useful and where there is room for improvement on campus. "Student focus groups, including meetings with TRIO students, supported our efforts at that meeting to understand how students define success holistically – inclusive of academic success, social belonging, personal growth, relationship with faculty, staff, and fellow students, and career support" says Kopec. The next step is to take this valued feedback provided by students to build an institution and a culture that honors these holistic views on success. Our students thoroughly enjoyed participating in this experience and often reported that they felt affirmed while sharing feedback in the TRIO Resource Room to both Andrew and Kevin. We look forward to continuing to partner with CELT in the next academic year.



Persistence Pays Off Program

Did you know that TRIO SSS has a working partnership with Lutheran Social Services and United Way of Allen County? For first-generation, low-income students, the obstacles they face can come from a variety of sources and a 'one-size fits all' approach often leaves gaps in care that can make the difference between graduating and... not. During the most recent reporting year (2024-25), 73 students were served at either Ivy Tech Community College or Purdue University Fort Wayne with over 750 visits between participants and PPO case managers. During these visits are learning life skills, financial literacy lessons, being connected to community resources, etc. Over \$56,000 of funding was used to provide students with emergency and mental health assistance. These services allow for students to pay past due balances, provide food vouchers for those who suffer with food insecurity, and take summer classes when financial aid isn't available to the student. Because of this intensive support and connection to community resources and services, students who participate in this program persist from one academic year to the next at 98%. TRIO SSS graduate, Taiwo Oladapo, BS'24 & MS '26, an early PPO participant has often praised PPO for the impact it had on her journey toward completing her bachelor degree. "As a first-generation college student, we just want to graduate. We want to do better. But we don't really think about other factors like mental health. We are worried about tuition and working a job to pay for it. That can affect your college education. So the PPO program helps with that burden, but also helps you realize they are an arms-length away"

Learn more about the partnership and how it has helped students achieve their academic, personal, and professional goals in a recent InsidePFW article: [TRIO Student Support Services & Persistence Pays Off Program](#)

TRIO Staff Spotlights

**Not only are our students excelling,
so are our TRIO professionals!**

Demetria Pettie will be installed as the incoming President of Indiana TRIO in November 2026! Currently serving as President-Elect, Demetria will continue leading the organization in supporting first-generation, low-income, and students with disabilities as well as the TRIO professionals who serve them.



Project Director: Demetria Pettie

Bryant Williams recently completed his dissertation and graduated with a PhD in Clinical Psychology from Northwestern University in Chicago, Illinois. Congratulations Dr. Williams! The TRIO team is very proud of you for this considerable achievement.



Academic Coordinator: Bryant Williams

Cindy Firestine organized a highly successful silent auction at the Indiana TRIO Conference in Indianapolis, IN that raised over \$3000 for student scholarships. Her job title was also updated to reflect her contributions to the program.



Program Specialist: Cindy Firestine

Paula Ashe was recently accepted in the Indiana TRIO's MILE (Members Involved in Leadership and Engagement) program. The program is a professional development incubator meant to develop engaged TRIO professionals to strengthen state and federal advocacy and prepare them for leadership positions.



Academic Coordinator: Paula Ashe

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