



IMPACT *of* GIVING

SPRING 2026



LEARNING
AND GROWING
OFF CAMPUS

DEAR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS,

For the last three years, *The Wall Street Journal*/College Pulse has ranked University of Detroit Mercy among the top institutions of higher learning in the country. This year, they placed us at No. 36.

What makes these rankings so meaningful to the University is that they are based on student outcomes. Positive student feedback through a national survey puts us in the top 20% in terms of student experience, meaning our students find their time at UDM enjoyable, meaningful and rewarding in other ways.

One of the many ways we strive to make their years here memorable is experiences that happen outside the classroom and that enhance and expand their exposure to the Mercy and Jesuit values that shape Detroit Mercy.

It is those experiences we focus on in this issue of Impact of Giving, many of which are made possible by generous donors like you.

In October, at an international conference in Munich, Germany, three students presented research with metal alloys done in their undergraduate labs. Their audience was artists from across the world and they welcomed our students and their work. "I left feeling like I was floating," senior Hazel Song said. "Now I'm constantly thinking about what to create next."

That's just one example of many from across the University. Detroit Mercy offers study abroad in varying lengths from a few weeks to a full semester. We also offer immersion trips, which allow students to do a deep dive in specific places, some of them in our own back yard.

To many students, these encounters with other cultures and people are life-altering opportunities. While they learn, their hearts and understanding of others expands and informs what they do from that point forward.

Many generous donors pitch in to keep these experiences available to all our students, many of whom may not be able to afford it without this support. We hope, after reading this Impact of Giving, that you will find many reasons to support these programs that mean so much to our students.

Sincerely,



Dennis Carlesso '90, '97

Vice President for University Advancement
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IN THE COMMUNITY

After more than a half-century in the food distribution industry, Joseph Zalke '60 considers himself a foodie. So, when the University of Detroit graduate learned about the Titan Equity Nourish Network (TENN) a few years ago, he couldn't help but support the organization's cause.

"I'm a food guru," said Zalke, who was the founder and president of InnovAsian Cuisine, a company specializing in selling Asian frozen food products to supermarkets, food service and industrial accounts.

Since 2024, Zalke has financially supported and served on the advisory board of TENN, a University of Detroit Mercy organization that fosters student and community collaboration for a more food-sovereign Detroit. He was inspired to help by the work that Fr. Tim Hipkind, S.J., and Program Manager Chelsea Manning were doing with the organization.

"He's been really incredible," Manning said of Zalke. "He's facilitated and helped donate an immense amount of food from his business. And just being part of our advisory board, helping us with his expansive experience and knowledge and helping guide us forward as we continue to grow."

Zalke, who lives in Seattle but grew up on Detroit's east side, was struck by the lack of food access in the community when he returned to UDM a few years ago.

"Detroit is one of those communities in the United States that we refer to as food deserts," he said. "There are many residents who don't have access to fresh food, they don't have access to good quality food. The major retailers have essentially pulled out of those neighborhoods

— they close their stores and the local residents don't have access to good supermarkets. So that's a major problem."

According to data from the USDA, an estimated 53.6 million people in the U.S. live in areas that are low-income and low access to grocery stores.

That's where TENN comes in.

Throughout the year, student volunteers deliver fresh produce and food to families in the community surrounding UDM's McNichols Campus. TENN delivered more than 36,000 pounds of food in 2025, which helped feed 300 families.

Zalke's generosity has been felt in those food deliveries. Utilizing his food industry connections, he's purchased hundreds of pounds of frozen food and had it shipped to Detroit for TENN to use.

It led to a relationship with Gleaners, because TENN doesn't have the capacity to store frozen food. Gleaners stores the food in its warehouses, which not only helps TENN but other metro Detroit communities supported by Gleaners.

"That's a really direct impact on families," Manning said.

Zalke, who serves on UDM's Board of Trustees, has also helped with TENN's annual community meal as well as its community garden, located at Good Shepherd Lutheran Church. He gave a



\$1-million gift to UDM's Student Union renovations — the lounge area of the Lower Level was named in his honor.

As a student at U-D, Zalke was moved by the Jesuits and believes their influence was vital to his success in the food industry. He sees how TENN fits within the University's mission and values.

"That's what the Jesuits have been preaching for centuries: charitable giving and justice," he said. "TENN is a very integral part of what we're trying to do in the community. It's a natural vehicle to get ourselves more engaged with the entire community, not just Detroit, but all of southeastern Michigan."

Zalke has helped spread the word of TENN to others, including by having Hipskind and Manning speak to UDM's Board of Trustees last summer.

"Getting the confidence and the passion of such a reputable person like Joe has really helped other people who are at a very similar level see our value," Manning said. "Before

him and the advisory board, we really struggled to figure out how to reach those people, who we knew would love our work. We had to figure out how to tell them our story. Joe's been really instrumental in that change."

As he continues to support TENN's work, Zalke sees how volunteering with the organization impacts UDM students.

"I don't interact with these young people on a very frequent basis because I'm located a couple thousand miles away, but I have to believe that as I come back to the campus, I feel the spirit of these kids and what they want to do. They want to participate and bring people together. I definitely think it's impacting their lives."

To contribute to the work of TENN, visit udmercy.edu/tenn.



ACROSS THE NATION

Of the many virtues University of Detroit Mercy students are introduced to throughout their time on the McNichols Campus, service is usually one of the first.

It is an important part of the freshman class orientation known as PTV, or Prologues, Transitions and Viewpoints. During this week of getting to know the campus and the community, incoming students serve in various northwest Detroit neighborhoods, helping local schools, cleaning up distressed properties and assisting local nonprofits.

That focus on service is also available year-round through the work of University Ministry. It comes in the form of service immersion trips, which vary in length from a day to a week and in places right down the street or as distant as the U.S.-Mexico border in El Paso, Texas.

"The goal of these trips is, yes, making a difference, but it's also helping students become student leaders," said Sammy Eckrich, university minister for service & social justice who

organizes the trips. "It's a learning experience, not just giving back. But after students go on one, it often becomes an ongoing thing for them."

These service trips are among the many mission-centered offerings that Phyllis Peters Look '51 supports at UDM.

"It's hard to put into a few words how important this is to the way the Jesuits and Mercy sisters understand life," she said. "There is much more to education than passing classes, graduating and getting a job."

Peters came to that realization early in life. She grew up poor and attending college was out of the question until an aunt, noting the young Peters' good grades, offered to pay her tuition.

"I came here as a poor girl from a town of 3,000 when the University had 10,000 students," she said. "It was a different world."

On the Road

On University of Detroit's campus, she grew to love the Jesuit philosophy and its ethos of serving.

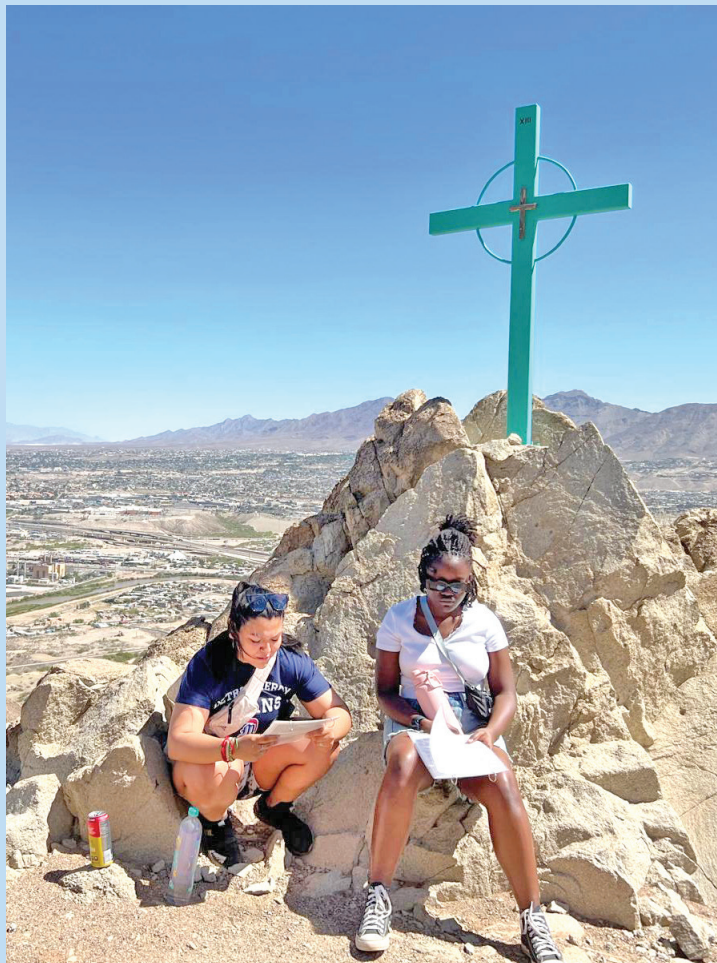
"The opportunity to spend time working with people is a gift," she said. "You learn that they have the same dreams you have, and you realize that there are things you can do to make their lives better and that is a grace."

After all, she concluded, Jesus said "love one another and take care of one another. If I am able to help that continue, that is a gift."

For Eckrich, making these trips available to all students is a goal, and scholarships help make that happen.

"These immersion trips are a learning experience," Eckrich said. "We're invested in the educational piece of these trips, where we encourage the students to ask the bigger questions about why these inequities exist."

To contribute to the service immersion trips, visit udmercy.edu/giving/fund/program/service-immersion.



Encuentro — El Paso, Texas on the Mexican border

The soul of the whole trip, Eckrich said, is to go beyond politics and the headlines to see the realities at the border. Students meet with Border Patrol officers and migrants and attend an immigration hearing. Depending on the situation, they might cross the border to get a more complete picture, and they create and deliver care packages.

"The goal is to humanize all sides — we hear their stories and are witnesses to the events," Eckrich said. "That's why we call this trip 'Encuentro;' it means 'encounter.'"

Civil Rights — Montgomery, Ala.

Students are hosted by members of a Black Catholic parish. They deliver food and assist with elderly care and yardwork for parishioners who need help. Also included in this immersion trip are visits to important historical sites that figured prominently in the fight for Civil Rights, memorials and museums.

"We show up with the spirit that wherever they need us to be, we will be there," Eckrich said.

Immersion days — Detroit

Local full-day service immersion opportunities are designed to increase understanding of Jesuit and Mercy values. These days include serving meals at a soup kitchen, tutoring children, working on urban farms, community beautification and assisting in many other ways. These trips are free and open to all current Detroit Mercy students.

AROUND THE WORLD

At University of Detroit Mercy, studying abroad is not just a change of scenery for students—it's a chance to see their field of study—and themselves—in a new way.

That's why there are so many of what UDM calls "internationally based educational experiences" available to students in nearly all schools and college.

The McAuley School of Nursing schedules regular trips to Ireland where students, alumni and faculty walk together in the steps of Catherine McAuley to see the lasting impact she has had on healthcare worldwide. The College of Humanities, Arts & Social Sciences organizes trips to Cuba and India, which are preceded by a semester of directed readings so students are able to put what they see in context historically and culturally.

The College of Business Administration takes students to Rio de Janeiro, Barcelona and Rome to experience the world of business and the College of Engineering & Science offers a three-week summer program on the Brittany campus of

the Jesuit engineering school ICAM that focuses on energy transition and technologies for a sustainable future.

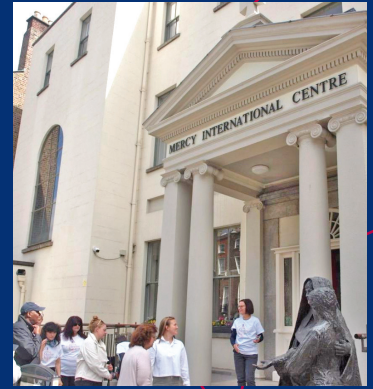
The School of Architecture & Community Development has two of UDM's oldest programs. For 40 years it has been participating in an exchange program with the Warsaw Institute of Technology and, since 1985 SACD students have studied architecture and culture in Volterra, Italy.

Students also have access to the study abroad programs offered by other Jesuit universities across the United States.

The value of these programs was not lost on Jamie Dylenski '90 and her late husband Bob. They created a fund that provides grants to ensure that study abroad opportunities are available to more students.

Dylenski, who for many years was an adjunct faculty member at Detroit Mercy, has traveled to all 50 states, five continents, most of Europe and the Mediterranean.





It was her grandmother who inspired her travel because she thought “travel was the only way to learn.” Dylenski sees the effects of travel in both professional and personal ways.

“When I was a hiring manager in IT, we were always looking for people who had experience abroad,” she said. “Students who study abroad develop life skills that transfer into other parts of their lives. It takes a lot of courage to go into the unknown, and they develop a confidence and are more compassionate.”

Lara Wasner is director of Language and Cultural Training, the Study Abroad coordinator, the Fulbright Scholar Liaison and an adjunct professor. She agrees with Dylenski. “When you ask about the long-lasting impact, it all boils down to life skills,” she said.

Study abroad students learn to navigate places and situations in a foreign culture, often without speaking the language. Listening and paying attention to local customs opens their minds to the realities of cultures and issues of other countries and using that experience and knowledge to grow empathy, said Diane Robinson-Dunn, a professor of History who has served as a faculty leader on several trips.

She curates the readings students are required to study the semester prior to the trip and, for the India trip, finds local guides who also share their lived experiences.

“It’s one thing to read about a place,” Robinson-Dunn said. “It’s a completely different thing once you’ve actually experienced it.”

She said an important aspect of these trips, one that adds meaning and depth is reflection through journaling. Shared reflection, she says, elevates individual insights and leads to deeper learning and understanding.

The very things Dylenski looked for when hiring.

“When you travel, you grow and that’s something you have with you forever,” she said. “It’s more than just an experience, it changes you.”

The Jamie & Bob Dylenski Fund provides grants to cover costs for students who attend study abroad experiences sponsored by the College of Humanities, Arts & Social Sciences. Jamie Dylenski has created a matching grant that will double any gifts to the fund. To contribute and receive the matching grant, visit udmercy.edu/giving/fund/scholarship/study-abroad.

What the students say

Soraya Puerto-Khalil

Nursing, Class of 2026

My experience in Cuba was like no other. I was fully immersed in a culture that puts an emphasis on personal expression, the arts and community and I thoroughly enjoyed every moment of it. I learned that happiness and fulfillment don't come from material objects and can be found in the most mundane experiences. My time in Ireland helped me realize the path I want to take in my nursing career. I grew a stronger connection and understanding about Catherine McAuley. My experience there also taught me that fulfillment can come from community engagement and active participation.

Jazmin Ortega-Lopez

Psychology, Class of 2026

I went to India with the University during summer 2025. It was very helpful to translate the historical context that I was learning during my Indian history class and how that related to present-day India. The melting of cultures that occurred with the British Empire and India shaped and changed the individuals living there. I can use that information and relate to it in my studies and understand how human interactions in the past that leads to how we act today.



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