



Innovation

IS OUR FAVORITE WORD AT ADRIAN COLLEGE

The President's 2026

STATE OF THE COLLEGE ADDRESS

Letter from the President

Dear Adrian College community,

Adrian College continues to prove what is possible when a community creates a bold vision for the future. The accomplishments highlighted throughout this 2026 State of the College publication reflect the dedication, resilience, and ambition that continue to move our institution forward. Together, we are building momentum for a future filled with opportunity, innovation, and continued success.

This past year has brought tremendous progress for Adrian College. The generosity of our supporters continues to make a meaningful impact on our mission and students. Our development efforts have reached historic levels, with thousands of alumni, friends, parents, and community members choosing to invest in the future of Adrian College. Their support strengthens every aspect of our institution and allows us to continue expanding opportunities for our students.

Across campus, we continue to see growth that is both measurable and transformational. From new academic initiatives and enhanced student experiences, to facility improvements and strategic partnerships, Adrian College is moving forward with purpose. These achievements are possible because of the dedication of our faculty, staff, students, alumni, trustees, and supporters, all of whom play a vital role in advancing our mission.

The strength of our student body remains one of the clearest indicators of Adrian College's continued momentum. What was once a small institution has evolved into a thriving campus community that now attracts students from across the country and around the world. Their energy, ambition, and involvement continue to shape the vibrant culture that makes Adrian College so special.

At a time when many colleges and universities across the nation are facing enrollment challenges, Adrian College continues to stand apart. Our admissions team has worked tirelessly to attract another outstanding incoming class, reinforcing the College's growing reputation and the value of the Adrian experience. Students and families continue to recognize the advantages of a personalized education grounded in academic excellence, meaningful mentorship, and hands-on opportunities.

Our continued success is rooted in intentional planning and an unwavering focus on students. We remain committed to developing innovative academic programs, strengthening career preparation, expanding campus opportunities, and ensuring students receive the individual attention that helps them thrive. Even as we grow, we remain dedicated to the close-knit learning environment that has always defined Adrian College.

What makes me most proud is not simply the milestones we have achieved, but the people behind them. Every day, I see students discovering their purpose, faculty investing in mentorship, staff members going above and beyond, and alumni continuing to champion this institution in remarkable ways. Their commitment is what makes Adrian College truly exceptional.

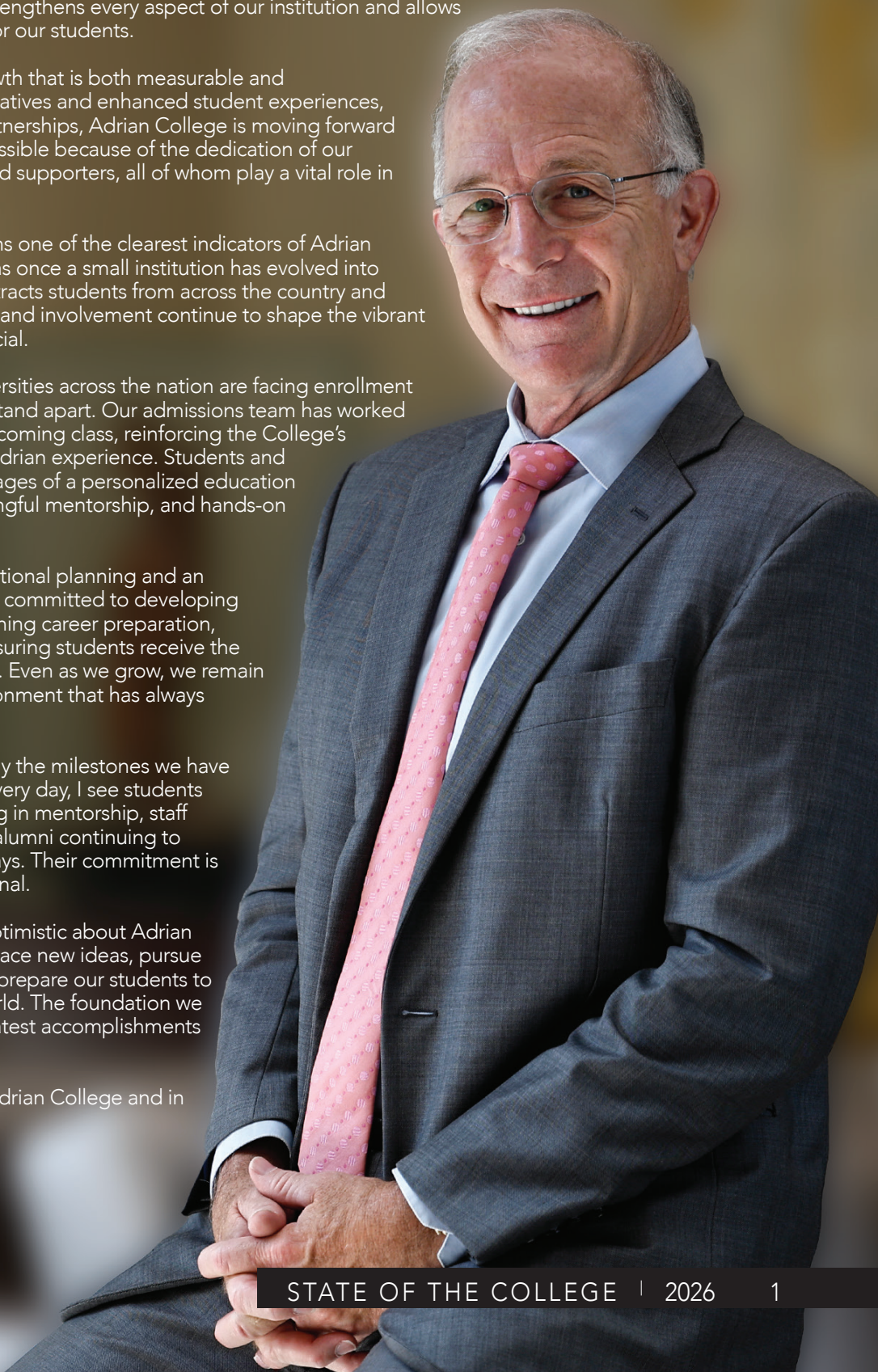
As we look ahead, I remain incredibly optimistic about Adrian College's future. We will continue to embrace new ideas, pursue bold goals, and create opportunities that prepare our students to lead and succeed in an ever-changing world. The foundation we have built together is strong, and our greatest accomplishments still lie ahead.

Thank you for your continued belief in Adrian College and in the mission we share.

Sincerely,



Jeffrey R. Docking, Ph.D.



STATE OF THE COLLEGE ADDRESS



CONTRIBUTORS



Michaela Sumner '22 & '25
Director of Marketing



Mickey Alvarado
Director of Communications



Jennifer Carlson '09
Director of Alumni Relations



Samuel Wyzlic '25
Marketing Coordinator



Innovation

IS OUR FAVORITE WORD AT ADRIAN COLLEGE

April 10, 2026 | 12:15 pm | Adrian Tobias Room

PRESENTERS

Another Natty, and Now It's Cornhole - pg.4

Max Benedict '24 — Coach

Alex Weaver '27 — Student

From Feedback to Foundation: Enhancing the Residential Experience at Adrian College - pg.6

Thomas Doney '18 & '21 — Dean of Students

Jill Ramirez — Three Squared

Balancing Academics, Arts, and Athletics: The Definition of a Liberal Arts Student - pg.8

Lily Utrup '29 — Student

Road to the Pros: From Bulldog to Detroit Tiger - pg.10

Dugan Darnell '19 — Alumnus, Pro Athlete

Free Speech as a Model: Leading the Way in Civil Discourse and Respectful Disagreement - pg.12

Nathan Goetting — Professor and Director, George Romney Institute for Law & Public Policy

Hye Jin Elliott '27 — Student

2026 Creativity Award - pg.16

Jeffrey Docking — President

Travis Erxleben — Professor and Director, Institute for Innovation & Creativity

My Journey from Burkina Faso to Adrian College - pg.18

Ariane Ouedraogo '26 — Student



Scan to
watch the
full video!

WATCH STATE OF THE
COLLEGE 2026 REVIEW

ANOTHER NATTY, AND NOW IT'S CORNHOLE

PRESENTED BY | MAX BENEDICT '24 — Coach
ALEX WEAVER '27 — Student

Adrian College added yet another national championship trophy to its collection to start the new year, this time in an unexpected arena, as junior Alex Weaver captured a Cornhole National Championship broadcast on ESPN.

While Weaver was competing in Wisconsin during the State of the College address, head coach Max Benedict took the stage to describe how the program had elevated itself onto the national scene.

Benedict explained that the program's success came not from gimmicks, but from relentless preparation.

"We don't have any magic beanbags," Benedict said. "But I can personally guarantee that we spend more time practicing than any other cornhole program in the country at the national championships this year. I said one thing to our team before we headed in: Every single one of you has what it takes to win, but the truth is only one of you can, so go be that one."

Weaver ultimately became "that one," delivering under pressure with a calmness that surprised even those closest to the program.

[Continued]



"This kid had ice in his veins and was so cool under pressure," President Jeffrey Docking said, noting he watched the event live on national television. "It was stunning."

As ESPN highlights rolled across the screen, Weaver reflected in a prerecorded video about the support system that carried him through the tournament's most intense moments.

"I had a huge support system there," Weaver said. "My whole team was in the crowd. I could definitely hear 'em the whole time, especially Max. My family was there, my mom, my stepdad, my grandpa, and my uncle all came to watch. Having everyone in attendance was super helpful. Hearing everyone cheer for me definitely helped me through the nervous moments of the game."

After securing the championship, many viewers noticed Weaver's surprisingly subdued reaction.

"Of course, I was excited," he said. "It was one of the happiest moments of my life. I was just so relieved to have

gotten past that point that I wasn't exactly sure how to react."

What many viewers did not realize was that Weaver nearly lost his season before it ever fully began.

"I was battling with some shoulder problems that I was pretty upset about because I thought it was going to stop me from playing the rest of the season," Weaver said. "But luckily, we have an athletic trainer for our team. We joke about the fact that I'm the first cornhole player to go visit her."

Even after winning a national championship, Weaver remained focused on the team that helped build the program alongside him.

"Everyone on our team deserves it just as much as anybody else," he said. "It's a singles tournament, so unfortunately only one person can win at a time, but I'm hoping that next year maybe I can do it again, or another Adrian College player can win it, and that would be super awesome."



FROM FEEDBACK TO FOUNDATION:

ENHANCING THE RESIDENTIAL EXPERIENCE AT ADRIAN COLLEGE

PRESENTED BY | THOMAS DONEY '18 & '21 — Dean of Students
JILL RAMIREZ — Three Squared

As part of the next series of projects in our College of the Future initiative, and in response to student feedback, Adrian College is raising support to fund a unique style of campus housing.

In recent years, Adrian College has upgraded restrooms in several residence halls, renovated common areas, built and purchased apartment buildings, and acquired several houses.

"This summer, we'll spend more than \$2 million to make additional improvements to housing," said Thomas Doney, Adrian College Dean of Students.

Doney and Jill Ramirez of the innovative architecture firm Three Squared Inc. shared Adrian College's plans to add a new style of modern mini housing that uses cargo shipping containers.

"We see those steel containers as the answer to our newest innovative housing option for students," Doney said. "They're eco-friendly and the possibilities for these units are endless. They can be stacked, expanded, and designed for one or multiple students."

[Continued]



ThreeSquared[™]
Architecture



Doney said the units have everything students need, as each is equipped with a bedroom, kitchen, washer and dryer, as well as heat and air conditioning. A rendering depicting the new housing on Charles Street was shown.

"These units are not just unique. They represent a new level of modern, flexible housing for our campus," Doney said. "The good news is that we hope to have these units available in the not-too-distant future, as we have already secured the first \$1.1 million in funding from our generous donors to kick off the project and get our first few units on campus."

Three Squared Inc. is a Detroit-based architecture firm specializing in efficient residential and commercial prefabricated design.

"After seeing your beautiful campus, we felt we could be a great partner here because we really emphasize the way we build and the College's need for more beautiful and innovative housing," Ramirez said. "We're so excited about our partnership with Adrian College and the future of student housing."

The company's CEO, Leslie Horn, said better housing isn't just possible, it's necessary.

"At Three Squared Inc., we're leading the shift toward smarter, faster and more sustainable buildings," Horn said. "With every modular steel project we deliver, we challenge outdated systems, cut timelines and design for what cities and communities truly need — today and tomorrow."



BALANCING ACADEMICS, ARTS, AND ATHLETICS:

THE DEFINITION OF A LIBERAL ARTS STUDENT

PRESENTED BY | LILY UTRUP '29 — Student

Lily Utrup had set her sights on playing college softball long before graduating from DeWitt High School. But by the time she reached her senior year, her love for music had become just as important. She spent three years in her high school's honors choir and found success both as a soloist and in ensemble performances, earning recognition for her vocal talent along the way.

Throughout her life, Utrup has been involved in a variety of sports, but softball quickly became her favorite. As a right-handed pitcher, she commands the circle with an arsenal that includes a fastball, changeup, curveball, and rise ball. She can also cover first base with ease, and her power at the plate makes her the kind of complete player any college program would want.

While she is fierce and competitive on the softball field, her voice carries a softness and control that captivates audiences when she sings.

When it came time to choose a college, Utrup assumed she would have to sacrifice one passion for the other. What she did not realize was that there was a place just down the road where she could pursue both at a high level.

"Finding a school that would allow me to pursue both performing arts and athletics at a high level seemed impossible until I discovered Adrian College," Utrup said. "Here, I can continue developing all of the things I love instead of feeling like I have to choose between them."

As a freshman at Adrian College, Utrup is pursuing a double major in business administration and vocal performance while also pitching for the Bulldogs' NCAA softball team. Many of her teammates were in the audience during the performance, supporting another side of who she is.

Adrian College President Jeffrey Docking introduced Utrup as an example of what a liberal arts education can make possible.

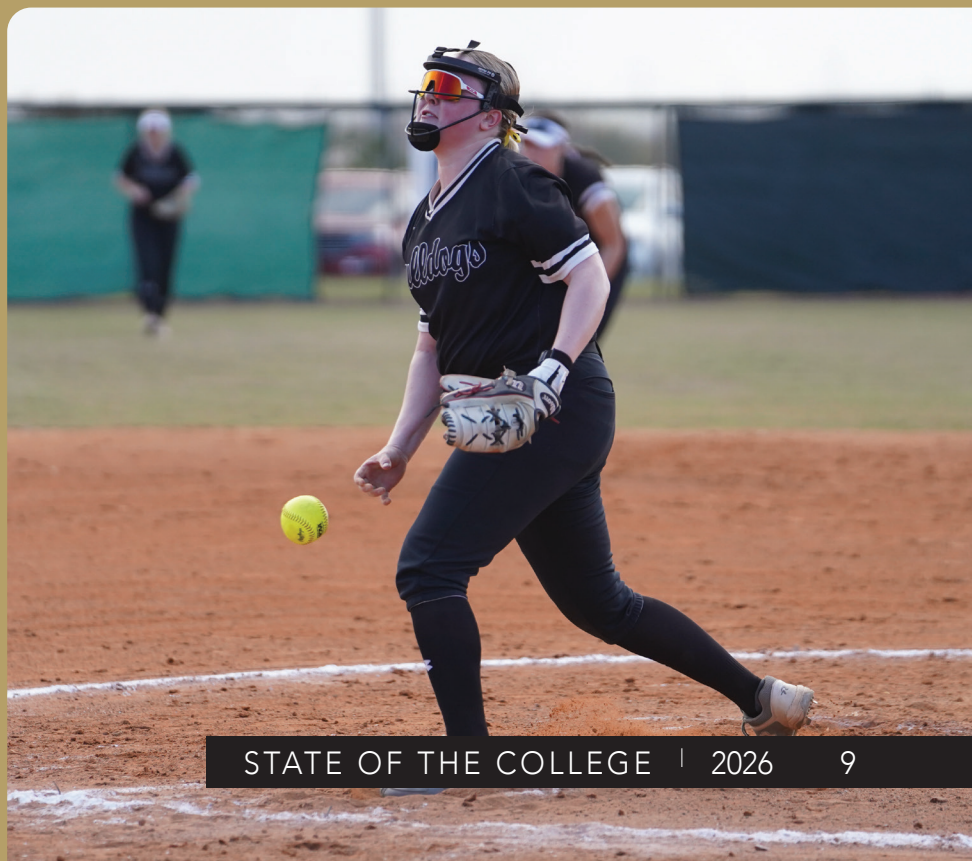
[Continued]





"She is an excellent student in the classroom, a talented softball player, and terrific behind a microphone," Docking said. "Her singing voice is absolutely beautiful."

During the State of the College event, Utrup shared the story of her journey to Adrian before captivating the audience with her performance of "O Mio Babbino Caro." The aria tells the story of a young woman pleading with her father to let her marry the man she loves — a fitting choice for someone who once believed she might have to give up one of the two passions that shaped her life.



ROAD TO THE PROS:

FROM BULLDOG TO DETROIT TIGER

PRESENTED BY | DUGAN DARNELL '19 - Alumnus

The road from NCAA Division III baseball to the professional ranks is one few athletes ever travel. With limited exposure and even fewer opportunities, earning a chance with the Detroit Tigers is an achievement that places one former Adrian College standout in rare company.

Dugan Darnell, a 2019 Adrian College graduate from Northville, spoke to the State of the College audience from Florida via video during spring training with the Detroit Tigers.

After graduating from college and leaving the Bulldogs baseball team, Darnell had committed to working as a recruitment consultant for financial advisers in Chicago. But after just three days on the job, he received a call from the Gary SouthShore RailCats of the American Association of Professional Baseball.

"I quit the job on the spot, went out, took a train, met the team in Gary, Indiana, and then drove 10 hours to Iowa, where I had my first professional outing," Darnell said.

In 2021, he signed a minor league deal with the Colorado Rockies organization and was named Reliever of the Year. In 2022, he pitched in Double-A, and the following year he appeared in both Double-A and Triple-A. In 2024, he pitched exclusively in Triple-A.

What began as a leap of faith after just three days in a corporate job eventually became a path to Major League Baseball.

"On August 1, 2025, I made my debut in Major League Baseball, a day that I worked many, many years for, and my family and I had prayed for, for a long time," Darnell said. "It was a dream come true to be out there. I'm still working, still looking for ways to get better and

get healthy and get back on the field and pitch for our hometown Detroit Tigers."

Darnell's journey reflects just how rare it is for a NCAA Division III athlete to reach baseball's highest level.

Jim Mahony '00, Adrian College Vice President of Development, introduced Darnell and noted that approximately 22,000 players have appeared in a Major League Baseball game since the National League began in 1876. NCAA Division III players represent only a small fraction of that number, with roughly 200 players reaching the major leagues. Over the years, the Bulldogs have had two alumni appear in Major League Baseball and 17 alumni play professional baseball.

"Claimed by his hometown Detroit Tigers this past offseason, Dugan is currently rehabbing from surgery," Mahony said. "He couldn't be with us in person today, but he did send us this video."

Darnell explained how he became a professional relief pitcher, giving credit to Bulldog baseball coach Craig Rainey '89.

"All through college, I played third base," Darnell said. "Right before my senior year, I had a conversation with Craig Rainey about possibly doing both, pitching and fielding, and I'm glad I listened to him."

For Adrian College, Darnell's journey stands as a reminder that talent, perseverance and opportunity can take Bulldogs all the way to the major leagues.

"From Nicolay Field to Major League Baseball. I mean, come on. How cool is that?" President Jeffrey Docking said, adding that Adrian College Night at Comerica Park is July 24.



P

POSITION

LEFT

BATS

RIGHT

THROWS

6'2"

HEIGHT

205

WEIGHT

FREE SPEECH AS A MODEL:

LEADING THE WAY IN CIVIL DISCOURSE AND RESPECTFUL DISAGREEMENT

PRESENTED BY | NATHAN GOETTING — Professor and Director, George Romney Institute for Law & Public Policy
HYE JIN ELLIOTT '27 — Student

Civil discourse has become increasingly difficult to find in modern political and social conversations, particularly on college campuses. At Adrian College, however, open dialogue and intellectual diversity have become central to the mission of the George W. Romney Institute for Law and Public Policy.

That commitment was highlighted as philosophy professor Nathan Goetting and junior Hye Jin Elliott discussed the institute's growing debate series.

"Professor Nathan Goetting, in my opinion, represents the best in higher education," Jeffrey Docking said as he introduced the next presentation. "Why? Because he believes in free speech, civil discourse, freedom of expression, intellectual diversity and the right of every person on this campus, conservative or liberal, to be heard. And he doesn't just talk a good game. He devotes many hours every week to organizing the best debates I've ever heard on a college campus."

Goetting said that in 2022, during a time when social media cancel campaigns made colleges and universities hesitant to host debates on important social and political issues, Adrian College leadership chose to move in the opposite direction.

"Our goal has been to teach students the importance of civil discourse by showing them examples of how serious thinkers can express disagreements thoughtfully, respectfully and with minds open to learning from political opponents," Goetting said. "To accomplish that, it was important for the institute to select topics for which friendly debate might seem difficult, so we ran toward, rather than away from, those topics."

Audience members listened attentively as the conversation turned to some of the most politically divisive issues facing the country today.

[Continued]



Debate topics included abortion, defunding the police, the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol riot and Israel's war against Hamas.

"I'm proud to say that no matter how polarizing the topic, our debates have been models of collegiality and mutual respect," Goetting said.

Elliott, from Saipan, said that during her Romney Institute internship, she learned how to host debates on socially and politically relevant topics and discovered that debating controversial issues can encourage honesty. That honesty, she said, encourages participants to move beyond surface-level understanding and reveal deeper, more essential values.

"This honesty increased mutual respect among the debaters. Even while disagreeing, both sides felt heard and understood," Elliott said. "That was especially true during the debate titled 'Is Donald Trump Governing like a Constitutional President or Political Strongman?' and the discussion that followed. I learned from this experience that intellectual diversity and tolerance of opposing views are important because they help broaden and deepen our understanding of the topics under consideration."

Through the Romney Institute's debate series, Adrian College continues to emphasize that meaningful conversation and respectful disagreement remain essential parts of higher education.





FRONT ROW (L-R) LILY UTRUP, HYE JIN ELLIOTT, ARIANE OUEDRAOGO, JILL RAMIREZ

BACK ROW (L-R) JEFFREY DOCKING, TRAVIS ERXLEBEN, MAX BENEDICT, NATHAN GOETTING, THOMAS

The President's
THE COLLEGE ADDRESS



novation

WORD AT ADRIAN COLLEGE

5pm | Adrian Tobias Room



THOMAS DONEY, JIM MAHONY



2026 CREATIVITY AWARD

PRESENTED BY | JEFFREY DOCKING — President
TRAVIS ERXLEBEN — Professor and Director, Institute for Innovation & Creativity





WINNER

KAILEY RODRIGUEZ '29 • FRESHMAN TEACHER EDUCATION MAJOR

'ADRIAN COLLEGE - THEMED SQUIRREL HOUSES'

From colorful campus murals to chapel storytelling displays, this year's Creativity Award finalists showcased the imagination and innovation that continue to shape the Adrian College community. But one idea stood out for its charm, originality, and unmistakable Bulldog spirit — Adrian College-themed squirrel houses.

Each year, Adrian College's Creativity Award competition invites students, faculty, and staff to submit ideas designed to enhance campus life in meaningful and memorable ways. The College sets aside up to \$10,000 to bring the winning concept to life, while the top winner receives a \$1,000 prize and finalists receive \$50 awards recognizing their contributions.

After reviewing numerous submissions, a committee of eight selected freshman Kailey Rodriguez's vision of decorative squirrel houses modeled after iconic campus buildings.

Rodriguez said the project would add a playful and welcoming element to campus while also supporting local wildlife. By recreating familiar Adrian College landmarks in miniature form, the squirrel houses would offer students and visitors something unexpected to discover throughout campus.

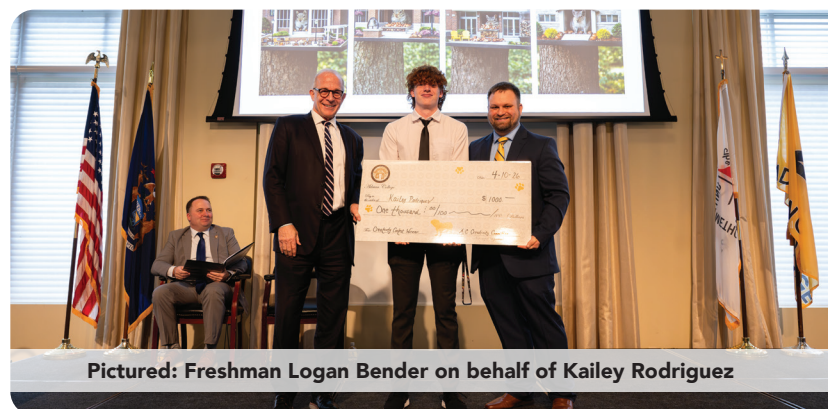
"The idea feels distinctly Adrian College and gives students and visitors something unique to notice, photograph, and talk about," President Jeffrey Docking said.

The winning concept captured the same creativity and community spirit reflected in this year's other finalists.

Director of Financial Strategy and Receivables Management Ryan Robinson proposed the Adrian College Spirit Wall, a vibrant mural on Dawson Auditorium designed to celebrate academic excellence and athletic pride. Freshman Silas Balkey suggested adding pool and ping pong tables to create more opportunities for students to relax and connect outside the classroom.

Vice President and Dean of Academic Affairs Andrea Milner introduced "Sermon in Silence," a proposal for descriptive plaques beneath the stained-glass windows in Herrick Chapel that would provide historical and symbolic context for visitors and worshipers. Assistant professor of business Jenna Cleary '11 envisioned colorful ribbon flags at the U.S. 223 entrance to highlight Adrian College's core values and Ribbons of Excellence.

Together, the ideas reflected the creativity, personality, and campus pride that continue to define the Adrian College community — proving that even the smallest ideas can leave a lasting impression.



Pictured: Freshman Logan Bender on behalf of Kailey Rodriguez

MY JOURNEY

FROM BURKINA FASO TO ADRIAN COLLEGE

PRESENTED BY | ARIANE OUEDRAOGO '26 — Student

Nongbzanga Ariane Fabiola Ouedraogo's story of coming to America and studying at Adrian College touched the audience deeply. Even President Docking wiped tears from his eyes.

When Ouedraogo was five years old, growing up in Burkina Faso in West Africa, she made a bold declaration to her mother: "One day I will go to the United States." Her mother smiled and said, "That will be very difficult," not knowing how many people would help that little girl accomplish her dream.

Raised in a large family with modest means but strong values, including faith, hard work, respect, and gratitude, Ariane carried those lessons with her on her travels. When she was 18, she traveled to the United States after being selected to represent her country in a U.S. leadership program, and returned home inspired. She launched a nonprofit to serve vulnerable communities, determined to make an impact.

From that point on, Ouedraogo dreamed of returning to the U.S. to study for a degree and applied to more than 40 colleges. Only one — Adrian College — offered what she truly needed to pursue higher education in America.

Ouedraogo was able to study in the U.S. for four years on a full scholarship.

"Please receive my profound gratitude, respect and appreciation," Ouedraogo said.

She talked openly about her time at Adrian College, including the ups and downs. She has not seen her family since arriving in America.

"Sometimes I cried in the bathrooms. Sometimes I had to read a page many times just to understand a few sentences," she said. "But in those moments, I remember my father telling me, 'You are strong. Stay focused on your goal.' And my mother saying, 'Nothing is eternal. It will pass. You are not alone.' And she was right. I was never alone. God showed up in my life through people here, through my professors, the Adrian College staff and my Adrian Catholic Church family. Because of this community, I grew."

[Continued]





She said her journey was not just about studying.

"My experience at Adrian College was also about relationships, friendships, community trips and celebrations," she said. "I experienced many things, like visiting the Toledo Zoo, going to a lake house, and fishing for the first time — I even caught my first fish. I even boated to the middle of a lake without knowing how to swim."

She also experienced great loss after one of her main supporters, Ken Staples, passed away. Ken was married to retired French professor Marianna Staples.

"I was the apple of his eye. He loved me like a granddaughter. I told him I wanted him to be with me at my graduation. I prayed that he would be there to see me walk across the stage. Unfortunately, life did not go the way I planned," Ouedraogo said.

It was another learning experience she will carry with her for the rest of her life. Instead of being sad, she chose to be grateful.

"I am not sad because he left. I am grateful because I had the opportunity to know him and to be loved by him," she said.

Ouedraogo graduated Adrian College in May with a Bachelor of Science in computer science. She is deciding where to continue her journey in America as she was accepted to two master's degree computer science programs at Michigan Technological University and Washington University in St. Louis, Missouri.

She plans to return to Adrian one day.

"Adrian College is where legends are made, and I hope one day I will come back and give back to this college and community that gave me everything," Ouedraogo said. "Thank you so much."

Ouedraogo was given a standing ovation as she walked off the stage, wiping tears of appreciation from her eyes.



**SCAN TO
GIVE TODAY!**

STATE OF THE COLLEGE ADDRESS

The President's 2026

IS OUR FAVORITE WORD AT ADRIAN COLLEGE

Innovation

