

BREAKING BLUES

BLUEFIELD STATE UNIVERSITY

FALL 2025



Terry Thompson

Living a Life of Convictions and
Self-Determination

From Quiet Beginnings to Cybersecurity Trailblazer

Kellie William's Journey Through
Bluefield State and Beyond

Breaking Boundaries

Bluefield State's Global Influence
On One Student's Journey From

Timid to Tenacious, Arthur Krenkel of
Germany

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BREAKING BOUNDARIES:

BLUEFIELD STATE'S GLOBAL INFLUENCE ON ONE STUDENT'S JOURNEY FROM

TIMID TO TENACIOUS — ARTHUR KRENKEL OF GERMANY

By Samuel Olokeogun, Feature Writer



Arthur is in the middle in a black shirt and sunglasses

Bluefield, WV – When Arthur Krenkel first arrived at Bluefield State University from Germany, he never imagined how profoundly the experience would reshape his identity. Shy, reserved, and unfamiliar with American culture, Arthur describes himself as someone who “stayed in his own shell.” But as the months turned into a year, Arthur’s story became one of confidence, courage, and transformation – a powerful example of how Bluefield State helps students become citizens of the world.

“At first, I didn’t talk to many people,” Arthur admitted. “But Bluefield State changed that. The people, the professors, the environment – I was pushed out of my comfort zone.”

Coming from Germany to study in West Virginia wasn’t easy, stated Arthur. Everything – the language, the customs, even the food – was new. But Bluefield State’s diverse, inclusive environment and its support for international students gave Arthur the tools to grow. He credits the university’s Office of International Initiatives, Honors College, and Service-Learning for opening his eyes to the importance of human connections and global thinking.

“Being in different international activities helped me a lot. I had to interact with people from all over the world. It really helped me come out of my shell and learn to connect with others.”

Learning to Lead

Arthur didn’t just adapt – he flourished. Through his involvement in the International Student Organization, he began attending trips, cultural events, and group outings that broadened his perspective and honed his leadership skills.

“We traveled a lot – to cities, to events – and every experience taught me something new,” he said. “It made me think bigger, more globally. I learned that leadership isn’t about being the loudest voice, but about understanding others.”

He became active in numerous student activities on campus, meeting people from many walks of life, and developing the communication and collaboration skills necessary in today’s professional world. As he puts it, “We all got along really well. That experience of learning to work with people from different cultures taught me how to listen, adapt, and lead.”

The Classroom as a Launchpad

Arthur’s academic journey also played a pivotal role in his transformation. As a Business Management major,

he was exposed to courses that pushed his thinking and refined his professional edge.

“Business classes helped me develop strong social skills, not just academic ones,” he explained. “They trained me to be efficient, to communicate clearly, and to think critically in real-world situations.”

The curriculum didn’t just teach theory – it challenged him to apply concepts in group projects, presentations, and real business scenarios. These experiences laid the groundwork for his post-college career, preparing him to navigate high-level professional environments with ease. “I believe I am now ready to engage in graduate level work. I have applied to an Austrian university to pursue a master’s degree in wood engineering,” said Arthur.

Discipline Born from Challenge

Beyond academics, Arthur’s time at Bluefield State was defined by hard work and determination. Balancing a full course load with a job, he often found himself stretched thin – but the pressure forged resilience.



Arthur is a master carpenter who specializes in roofing



Along with international students from a variety of countries, Arthur (in black shirt, leaning forward with hand on knees) shared German foods during the 2024 UN Day celebrations in downtown Bluefield

“Working while going to school built a different mindset in me. I had to be disciplined, focused, and persistent,” he shared. “That balance taught me to never give up, even when things are hard.”

This drive has carried over into his internship, where he thrived in a professional environment requiring strong time management, problem-solving, and interpersonal skills. “I am a carpenter by training,” said Arthur. “I was lucky to be hired by Appalachian Log Homes located outside Princeton where I put to good use skills developed during my apprenticeship in Germany.”

A Second Home in a Small Town

While some might see Bluefield’s small-town atmosphere as limiting, Arthur sees it differently.

“Because it’s small, it forces you to talk to people, to engage,” he said. “You can’t just disappear into the crowd here. You’re seen, and you are part of a community.”

Living with a host family also deeply influenced

Arthur. He learned firsthand how to adapt to new social dynamics and cultures, an experience that boosted his confidence and taught him the importance of mutual respect and understanding.

“John Feuchtenberger, and his sister, Betse, showed me how to interact with people in ways I hadn’t before,” he said. “That taught me not only how to communicate but how to be open-minded and welcoming.” Living with the Feuchtenbergers also taught Arthur about the importance of people-to-people diplomacy and how homestays can contribute to understanding between ordinary people of different countries. “Now more than ever,” stated Arthur, “now more than ever do we need to connect with others in different parts of the world to show we are one people occupying one planet and that getting along is the first priority of humankind.”

Advice to Future Bluefield State Students

Now a graduate and working professional, Arthur reflects with gratitude on his journey – and offers a heartfelt message to students who are just starting theirs.

“Try everything,” he urged. “Don’t be afraid to be uncomfortable. That’s where growth happens. Do things you’ve never done before. Take risks. Overcome those hard steps and boundaries.”

He especially encourages students to travel and explore, whether through university sponsored student programs or personal ambition. “The more you see, the more you grow. Traveling changes your mindset. It did for me.”

Giving Back and Paying It Forward

Arthur’s experience at Bluefield State was so impactful that he now considers it a duty to share his story.

“I’ll always give positive feedback about Bluefield State,” he said. “It really changed my life. If I can help other international students feel welcome and grow the way I did, that’s the best way I can give back.”

Arthur’s story is not just about academic success or professional development. It’s about transformation – a journey from isolation to empowerment, from fear to boldness. And it all started at Bluefield State University, where students like Arthur are not only educated

but inspired to lead, connect, and change the world.

Before Arthur ever set foot on Bluefield State’s campus, his story began with a dream of international exploration and personal growth – a dream made possible through the Congress-Bundestag Youth Exchange Program (CBYX).

Established in 1983, CBYX is a prestigious, government-sponsored program jointly funded by the U.S. Congress and the German Bundestag and administered by Cultural Vistas (<https://culturalvistas.org>) Designed to strengthen ties between young Americans and Germans, the program offers German and American students and young professionals the opportunity to live, study, and work in each other’s countries for one academic year.

Arthur applied to the program in his home country of Germany, hoping to gain insight into American education and culture while also challenging himself in a completely new environment. The selection process was competitive and rigorous, requiring a demonstration of leadership, language skills, adaptability, and a genuine desire to build cultural bridges.



Arthur with friend, dressed in traditional German garb



Arthur put his love of skiing to good use at Winterplace as a ski instructor



Just explore and you will learn, says Arthur, and it's cheaper when you walk!

“When I got accepted, I was excited but also nervous,” Arthur recalled. “It was a huge opportunity, but I knew I was stepping into a whole new world.”

After a detailed orientation and visa process, Arthur was placed in Bluefield, West Virginia, a quiet and scenic town he had never heard of before. But it was here, far from the bustling cities of Europe, that his transformation truly began.

“Most people think of big American cities when they picture studying abroad. But being in a smaller town like Bluefield actually made my experience more personal,” he said. “It wasn’t overwhelming. It gave me the space to connect deeply with people and really understand the culture.”

Through CBYX, Arthur was matched with a host family – John Feuchtenberger and his sister Betse -- who helped him settle in and introduced him to American customs, traditions, and everyday life. They are now his second family – who provided a vital support system during his transition.

“Living with a host family was a turning point. It showed me how to communicate more effectively and respectfully with people different from myself. It helped me adjust quickly and feel truly at home.”

His enrollment at Bluefield State University was a core part of the program, and it provided Arthur with both academic challenges and new cultural experiences. The CBYX program’s emphasis on cross-cultural learning and professional development aligned perfectly with the university’s mission to prepare students for global citizenship.

“I didn’t just study business. I lived it. I experienced firsthand what it means to operate in different environments, with people from all over the world.”

Arthur’s journey through CBYX wasn’t just about going abroad – it was about growing into a more confident, culturally aware version of himself. For him, Bluefield State wasn’t just a destination – it has been the launchpad of a much bigger life journey. It has just begun. ■

Note: Bluefield State has been privileged to host students from Germany since 2007, thanks to home stay hosts such as John and Betse Feuchtenberger, the late Jack and Jennifer McGhee, Janet Williamson, Rodger Woodrum, Mandy Fink, and Darlene Gilley.

SAMAHER OMRANI

From Tunisia to Bluefield, West Virginia, and Back

By Gyasi Wallace, Feature Writer



Samaher attended the WV Legislative Interims on December 7, 2025, a hands-on learning experience enjoyed by her and other BSU students

Samaher Omrani, Fulbright Arabic Language Teaching Assistant from Tunisia, arrived at Bluefield State University on August 18 to teach Arabic and Arabic Cultures. She will return home to Tunisia in May 2026 to continue her teaching responsibilities.

“The Fulbright Language Teaching Assistant program has been a life-changing experience for me, both professionally and personally, says Samaher. “It has given me the opportunity not only to teach Arabic and share my culture with American students, but also to grow as a cultural ambassador. The program has allowed me to refine my teaching skills, discover new pedagogical methods, and engage with students in a dynamic, multicultural classroom. Beyond teaching, it has given me a platform to build bridges between Tunisia and the United States and to highlight the richness of the Arab world.”

Samaher’s time at BSU has been incredibly rewarding. She has felt welcomed into a supportive academic community where both faculty and students are open, curious, and encouraging. She believes BSU has provided her with the resources she needs to succeed as an instructor and to thrive as an international scholar. “I particularly appreciate how BSU values global engagement and encourages cross-cultural dialogue,” says Samaher.

The students Samaher has in her classes are diverse in terms of backgrounds, interests, and motivations for learning Arabic. “Some,” says Samaher, “are deeply interested in Middle Eastern culture and politics, others are fascinated by the beauty of the Arabic language, while still others are simply curious to explore a less commonly taught language. Regardless of their reasons, they all bring enthusiasm, creativity, and a willingness to learn. Their openness to my culture and eagerness to share their own perspectives create a truly collaborative environment.”

Being at Bluefield State has had a profound impact on Samaher. She has grown more confident as a teacher, more adaptable in new situations, and more empathetic toward people from different cultures. At the same time, she knows she is having an impact on her students and colleagues—helping them gain a deeper understanding of Arab traditions, values, and daily life, beyond stereotypes. “Many of my students expressed how learning Arabic opened new doors for them and challenged their perceptions of the Arab world,” says Samaher.



Samaher, along with BSU international students from Argentina and Spain, enjoyed a trip to Pigeon Forge following the UN Day celebrations

BREAKING BLUES



Samaher Omrani served Tunisian foods during UN Day on October 26 as German Exchange Student Sophie Toegel looks on



Along with other BSU students, Samaher enjoyed making Christmas ornaments during the inaugural *A Bluefield State Christmas* on November 19



Samaher with Sir Blue

Before coming to the U.S., Samaher had certain assumptions shaped by media and distance. Living here, however, has reshaped her perspective. “I discovered that Americans are generally warm, welcoming, and eager to learn about other cultures,” states Samaher. “I also see the diversity within the U.S.—not just ethnic and cultural diversity, but also diversity of thought, lifestyle, and opportunity. This has broadened my understanding of American society and has made me appreciate its complexity.”

Says Samaher: “BSU is an excellent host institution. From day one, I have felt included and valued. The faculty supported me academically and personally, while the students welcomed me with genuine curiosity. The university’s commitment to international exchange is clear, and I am grateful to be part of that mission.”

During her time at Bluefield State University, Samaher plays an important role in helping students grow in confidence, learn new skills, and understand the world around them. Through her teaching, mentorship, and involvement on campus, she is making a positive and lasting impact on many students.

In her Arabic classes, Samaher helps students build confidence by giving them many chances to practice. They often give short presentations, take part in cultural activities, and share what they have learned with others. These low-pressure activities help students feel more comfortable speaking in front of others and trying new things. Her approach fits well with Bluefield State’s focus on hands-on learning. The school encourages internships, projects, and real-world assignments, all of which teach students responsibility, communication, and professional behavior.

Samaher also appreciates the close, supportive academic environment at Bluefield State. Smaller class sizes allow her to work more closely with students, guide them through challenging topics, and help them reach higher standards. At the same time, she supports students who take on leadership roles in campus organizations. These roles teach important skills such as time management, teamwork, and decision-making that they will need in future careers.

Samaher participates actively in BSU’s International Student Organization. She helped members plan the UN Day celebration which involved preparing foods from their countries, sharing traditions, and organizing a community event. Watching students take

charge of such an event showed her how much they grew in confidence and organization. “They learn that they can plan, communicate, and work together successfully,” says Samaher.

Samaher also sees student success in smaller, personal moments. One student in her Arabic culture class created a digital portfolio about several Arab countries. His hard work, focus, and dedication helped him produce a high-quality project that he can use in the future. Moments like this show her how much students can accomplish when they stay committed.

Most importantly, Samaher helps students learn how to move comfortably between different settings—academic, professional, and cultural. By bringing global ideas into her lessons and sharing her own experiences, she gives students a chance to see the world from a wider point of view. Combined with Bluefield State’s lessons on ethics, communication, and professionalism, students gain the skills they need to succeed anywhere.

Upon returning home to Tunisia, Samaher hopes to sustain ties with Bluefield State. She wants to build long-lasting partnerships for virtual cultural exchanges so students can keep learning about the world. ■

TERRY THOMPSON

Living a Life of Convictions and
Self-Determination —————

Jacob Lawless, Feature Writer



Terry Thompson



BSU's 1975-76 women's basketball team featuring Terry Thompson, second from left, back row

“From the moment I stepped foot on the campus of Bluefield State College in 1974, I knew I was embarking on a journey that would shape my life in extraordinary ways.” says Terry Thompson, who in May 2025 was elected President of BSU Alumni Association.

Born and raised in Landgraff, West Virginia (a small, rural town in McDowell County whose remoteness would prompt Terry to later say that Bluefield State, for her, seemed like the “big city, brimming with opportunity”), Terry Thompson embodied the spirit of Bluefield State long before she arrived on campus.

Her father, a coal miner, and her mother, a homemaker, instilled in their children the values of hard work and self-determination -- principles that left a lasting impression on Terry. One may think that working hard and making the most of life are obvious, even clichéd, principles, but in practice, they prove to be invaluable. Properly taught, these ideas equip one with the power to succeed in a multitude of ways -- as Terry Thompson has. When asked

about her early life, she had the following to say of her mother’s frequent advice:

“[My mother always said] life was what you made it, and I was determined to make mine exceptional.”

And Terry Thompson is, indeed, exceptional, having worked in a wide array of positions within Bluefield State, both as a student and as a full-time employee. From doing maintenance as a student worker to working as a library clerk, to serving in the financial aid office and as the Registrar, Bluefield State has been an active and constant part of Terry Thompson’s life, and it has not ceased to be so since her retirement in October 2020. About retirement, Terry remarks:

“Retirement has been a joyful new chapter, filled with adventures alongside my grandchildren, who range from five to thirty years old. Whether we are attending concerts, playing at the park, or simply enjoying a sunny day together, I cherish every moment. Family is everything to me, and I strive to be present in their lives whenever they need me.”

When she is not enjoying time with her grandchildren, Terry serves as National President of the Bluefield State University Alumni Association, where she is “committed to strengthening our relationship with the university, giving back through scholarships, and building a stronger connection with the community.” Terry Thompson exemplifies the enduring impact Bluefield State can have on students eager to engage with what it offers. Citing the influence that her time at Bluefield State had on her life, Terry Thompson had the following to say:

“Bluefield State was more than just an institution; it became my home away from home. The instructors were my mentors, always making time to help me grasp the complexities of my studies. Their dedication inspired me to pursue not just an associate degree, but a Bachelor of Arts and, eventually, a Master’s in Strategic Leadership from another institution.”

Terry Thompson describes herself as a firm believer in the powers of community and education; she does not merely claim this but has lived out that conviction in her own life.

What she learned at Bluefield State is merely an echo of what her mother and father taught her as a young girl: pursue greatness in whatever ways you can, be determined, work hard, help others when the opportunity arises, and never limit yourself. She is evidence of how Bluefield State prepares students to excel in the world, and how readily they can thrive after graduation.

Moving forward, Terry looks to enjoy more time with her grandchildren and maintains a sense of openness to life and the adventures ahead. ■



Second from right, front row, Terry Thompson poses with members of BSU's Alumni Association

FROM QUIET BEGINNINGS TO CYBERSECURITY TRAILBLAZER

By Samuel Olokeogun, Feature Writer

Kellie Williams' Journey Through Bluefield State and Beyond



Kellie listens to the WV Legislative Finance Committee session on December 7, 2025

When Kellie Williams first arrived at Bluefield State University, she barely spoke above a whisper in public. She was quiet, observant, and unsure of how she'd fit into a world so different from what she had known.

Fast forward a few years, and that same young woman is leading student groups, speaking in meetings, managing campus roles, writing and sharing her poems during Agora, A Celebration of Creative Expression (Kellie has won first place two years in a row, in 2024 and 2025!), and interning as a Security Engineer with the Walt Disney Company – one of the world's most iconic brands.

How did that transformation happen?

"It's crazy to think about how far I've come," Williams said, smiling. "Bluefield State really gave me the space to grow, and the push I needed to rise."

A Place Where Growth Feels Natural

For Williams, Bluefield State wasn't just a college. It was a turning point – the setting where she learned not only who she was, but who she wanted to become.

"I was extremely shy when I got here," she admitted. "But the moment I started joining clubs, stepping into leadership, and really talking to people, something changed. I began to feel confident in my voice."

That voice would go on to lead in many settings. As a member of Fellowship of Christian Athletes (FCA), Student Government Association (SGA), Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC), and the Computer Society, Williams made her presence known in every corner of campus life. On top of that, she competed with BSU's Cross Country and Track & Field teams and served as a Resident Assistant – a job that tested and strengthened her communication skills.

“I had to learn how to deal with people from all walks of life,” she said. “Different cultures, different communication styles – all of that made me more adaptable.”

Learning to Lead in the Real World

One of the things Williams values most about Bluefield State is how it has prepared her for the real world – not just with theory, but through real-life exposure.

“In some of my campus roles, I’d have to sit in on professional meetings – with faculty, staff, even outside organizations,” she said. “Those experiences taught me how to carry myself in a professional setting: how to dress, how to prepare, how to communicate ideas with clarity.”

She said her professors also played a big role in preparing her for life after graduation.

“They didn’t just throw information at us,” Williams said. “They showed us how those skills translate in the workplace – how to manage projects, work in teams, present ideas, and solve real problems.”

It was that level of preparation that gave her the confidence to pursue one of her biggest dreams – working at Disney.

Magic Meets Cybersecurity: A Dream Realized at Disney

This past summer, Kellie Williams earned a coveted spot as a Security Engineer Intern with the Walt Disney Company, joining their Red Team under the cybersecurity division.

“I still can’t believe it sometimes,” she laughed. “Disney has always been a dream company for me, and now I’ve seen the inside of it – the tech, the culture, the people.”

Her internship took her deep into the world of digital security – working on perimeter scanning, red team operations, corrective actions, and even network testing at one of Disney’s resorts.

“I learned from some of the most talented engineers I’ve ever met,” she said. “I shadowed teams in threat intelligence, blue team defense, project management – it was non-stop learning.”



Kellie mastered unlocking the lock at a regional cybersecurity conference—without the use of a key



Gaining even more leadership skills and confidence, Kellie at the UNCF Student Leadership Conference

But Williams emphasizes that none of it would've happened without one key factor: discipline.

"I had to stay focused in school," she explained. "I treated every class like it was building me toward something bigger. I spent time researching, networking, and applying for opportunities until I landed that internship."

Learning to Balance It All

With such a packed college schedule — sports, leadership, academics, jobs — Williams became a master of time management. But it wasn't easy.

"There were moments when I felt overwhelmed," she said. "But Bluefield State helped me learn how to balance my time, how to prioritize, and how to take care of myself while still performing."

She learned that the key to balance wasn't about doing everything — it was about doing the right things at the right time, and leaning on your support system when needed.

A Message to Current Students: Get Uncomfortable

When asked what advice she would give to current BSU students, Williams didn't hesitate.

"Step outside of your comfort zone," she said. "I know it's scary, especially if you're shy like I was. But that's where growth happens. The more uncomfortable I got, the more opportunities I found."

She says if she had stayed quiet and hesitant, she might've missed out on everything she now considers the foundation of her career.

"Every big moment for me — leadership roles, the internship, even friendships — came from just saying 'yes' to something new."

[Though Kellie will not brag about herself, this author has learned that Kellie often provided rides to international students who do not have vehicles. This act of generosity was shared by those who received such kindnesses from Kellie.]



Kellie participated in several community service events over the years. Here she is engaged in a food drive



Kellie enjoyed hanging around international students and students from Appalachia

Paying It Forward

Now, with graduation in sight and big dreams still ahead, Williams is already thinking about how to give back to the school that gave her her start.

“I want to keep supporting the programs I was involved in,” she said. “I want to mentor students, share my story, and let them know that it’s possible to go from unsure to unstoppable — just like I did.”

Bluefield State, she says, isn’t just where she went to college. It’s where she *became herself*.

Looking Ahead: What’s Next for Kellie Williams?

With a Disney internship behind her and a cybersecurity degree in hand, Kellie Williams is preparing for a future full of possibilities. She’s eyeing roles in threat intelligence, ethical hacking, and digital security for major tech companies — all while continuing to advocate for women in STEM and under-represented voices in tech.

“I know I’m just at the beginning,” Kellie said. “But I’m ready. And I have Bluefield State to thank for that.” ■

JAILYN CREEK

TRANSFERRING LEADERSHIP LEARNED ON THE SOCCER FIELD TO LIFE

By Gyasi Wallace, Feature Writer

As Jailyn Creek is getting ready to graduate from Bluefield State University, she is thinking about the important effect that her time here has had on her life and career.

According to Jailyn, a senior and captain of the women's soccer team, her life experiences both on and off the field have prepared her well for the future. After having taken difficult courses, especially in psychology and speech, Jailyn improved her communication abilities, which she thinks would be useful in any workplace. "The mock interviews and class presentations really pushed me out of my comfort zone," she explained. "They helped me find my voice and learn how to present myself with confidence, whether in a meeting, an interview, or a public speaking setting."

She developed further in her role as the women's soccer team captain. As the leader of a team of student-athletes from different schools, she got experience in encouraging others, handling all kinds of personalities, and setting an excellent example.

"Being a captain isn't just about calling plays or leading warmups," she said. "It taught me how to manage relationships, listen actively, and be someone my teammates could rely on. At the same time, I had to keep up with my academic responsibilities, which wasn't always easy but it made me more organized and driven."

Jailyn learned the importance of responsibility and time management while juggling the stresses of college sports and schoolwork. She had the ability to plan ahead and organize her days. She realized that success requires organization, sacrifice, and balance in between practices, games, classes, and studying.

Her ability to keep that balance has allowed her to form routines that she is confident will help her in



Jailyn was recognized during the Athletic banquet [Image contributed by Paige Whittington]

all of her future endeavors. She feels she grew most during difficulties she faced which pushed her to take chances, get involved, and push herself in unexpected ways.

Jailyn wishes to motivate other students to make the most of their time at Bluefield as she prepares to graduate. She advises students to try out options rather than waiting for them to come up. This can be done by attending events, talking to instructors, joining campus organizations, or just being open to new experiences.

One of the most helpful parts of her journey was forming relationships, both within and outside of the classroom, which she feels guided her growth on both a personal and professional level. "Take advantage of every opportunity, build relationships, and don't be afraid to lead," she said.

"College is what you make of it and for me, it's been truly transformative. I'm walking away with lifelong lessons, lifelong friendships, and a clearer sense of who I am and where I'm going," says Jailyn. ■



Jailyn is passionate about soccer
[Image contributed by Paige Whittington]



Keith was inducted into BSU's Mining and Engineering Hall of Fame in 2024

KEITH SIGMON

How BSU Prepared Him for Leadership and Career Opportunities

By Honors Scholar Gabrielle Justice, Feature Writer

Keith Sigmon is the General Manager of Coronado Global Resources, Inc. - Buchanan Mine No. 1, one of the world's largest and most productive metallurgical coal mines, located in Grundy, Virginia. In December of 2024, Keith was appointed by Governor Glenn Youngkin to a four-year term on the Virginia Board of Coal Mine Safety, which oversees certification of workers, operations at domestic coal plants, and mine rescue operations.

Keith Sigmon, a Bluefield State Alumnus, is an exceptional example of local dedication and scholarship, one whose formative years at Bluefield State University prepared him for a career full of opportunities he never envisioned but pursued with dedication and focus.

At Bluefield State

Ambitious by nature, Keith saw every quiz, exam, and assignment as a challenge to do his best. Bluefield State was a good fit for his hardworking attitude and gave Keith confidence by focusing on skills that prepared him for his career goals. As a Mining Engineering major, Keith was able to hone technical and critical thinking skills in his classes. He had internships with Consolidation Coal Company during his four years at Bluefield State, which he viewed as greatly impactful experiences. Being able to use the practical and technical skills obtained during his education at Bluefield State has been very meaningful to Keith during his career.

While at Bluefield State, he appreciated how much care the knowledgeable faculty took in giving hands-on experiences to students. "You never forget the impact they have on you." He notes that because of the smaller class sizes, the faculty were able to get to know each student, which made a huge difference in communication and instruction.

Local Legacy

With the financial assistance of Coronado and the help of faculty and educators, Keith has helped reinstate the Mining Engineering Technology program at Bluefield State. With much gratitude to his Alma Mater, Keith is dedicated to giving back to the university and ensuring that future Bluefield State students have the ability to pursue mining engineering technology and meet the ever-increasing demands for energy.



Keith keynoted the scholarship fundraiser dinner at Fincastle Country Club which was attended by mining sector personnel

Keith's advice to current BSU students is this: "You can learn something from everyone. Chew up the good and spit out the bad. Don't act like you know it all; stay humble. You always have something more to learn."

Keith Sigmon is just one example of Bluefield State's successful and exceptional alumni. He is regarded by his peers and colleagues as a dependable man, a hard worker, a dedicated civil servant, and a proud alumnus. ■

SHANNON “SMOOVE” SMITH ———

A Multi-Faceted Creative Talent

By Jacob Lawless, Feature Writer



Smooove Shannon Smith at his keyboard in his studio in downtown Bluefield

Shannon “Smooove” Smith describes himself as a lover of art and a creative person in every sense of the word, and no description could be more fitting. He is a member of the 2003 graduating class of Bluefield State University (then “Bluefield State College”). Though he received his B.S. in Computer Science and a degree in Technical Communications, Smith now earns his living as a musician and creative guide for aspiring and established artists in the Bluefield area.

In 2012, he established SKS Productions, an audio/video production studio located in Bluefield. SKS Productions’s services include: album recording and production, videography, photography, and music lessons. Additionally, Smith serves as a keyboardist/minister of music at the Truth Christian Church of God. Beyond his musical aspirations, Smith also creates and, occasionally, sells works of visual art, and has held several exhibitions at Bluefield State. If that were not enough, he is an appreciator and writer of poetry, and has participated in public readings of original works.

Shannon “Smooove” Smith is a multifaceted creative talent, someone for whom it seems natural to do “a little bit of everything.” And this spirit of diversity is not new for Smooove – he was a decorated student who seemed to have a hand in most every on-campus activity.

“I was involved,” he says, “with SGA, Ministries on the Move, Greek Council, Emerging Leaders, Americorps, the baseball team, and was a member of the Kappa Alpha Psi fraternity.”

If you ask Smooove, his time at Bluefield State is still very much with him. He will tell you that Bluefield State shaped him immensely in both the



Smooove, in the center holding a certificate, was BSC King

personal and professional spheres. When asked to elaborate, he had the following to say:

“My time at BSU shaped me professionally through my involvement with a variety of organizations, which enhanced my ability to both listen and learn while interacting with others to achieve certain goals. In addition, Bluefield State helped to sharpen my ability and created a new awareness of different ways to approach or respond to other viewpoints. I was prepared for success in leadership, from organizing, to appointing, to meeting deadlines, all from an all-inclusive, conceptual point of view.”

Later, he would say, “From Campus Life events, to travelling to other states for learning projects, I enjoyed being thoroughly involved.”

Smooove says that Bluefield State fostered and aided his creativity by equipping him with the practical abilities to plan/organize events and host activities while responding to and learning from others (one may credit this to his many extracurriculars). So, though he was not trained in the creative arts at Bluefield State, Smooove was able to apply what he learned to the work he does now, and his creativity was given room to grow. This is

a testament to the lasting lessons students should be prepared to learn while attending Bluefield State.

Moving forward, Shannon Smith hopes to continue his many creative pursuits. He looks to inspire young people by showing them that the arts are a viable means of self-expression and community building, and that it is never too late to redirect your life to engage with your true passions. In addition to all his responsibilities, both professional and personal, he performs occasionally on campus as a member of MOMENTUM, a band composed of BSU alums and a member of the faculty. ■

CARL BOYD

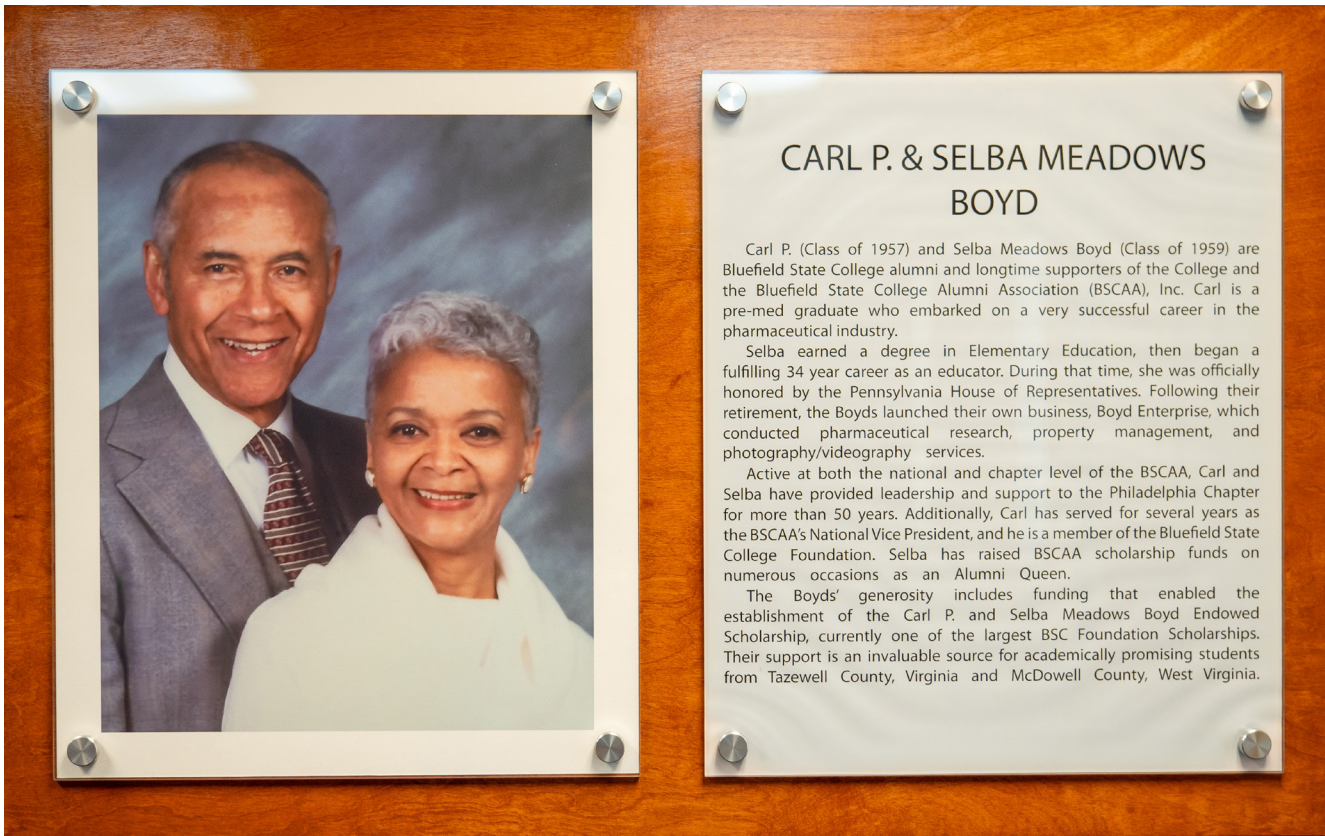
A Life of Learning and Giving

By Jacob Lawless, Feature Writer



Dr. Carl Boyd

Dr. Carl Boyd is a Bluefield State graduate (Class of 1957) who, alongside his wife Selba (Class of 1959), devoted much time and effort to helping others succeed, and achieved distinct professional success along the way.



Memorial Plaque in Boyd Conference Room
[Image Contributed by Paige Whittington]

Carl's career history is in pharmaceuticals, while Selba's was in education, both subjects they studied while attending Bluefield State. Dr. Boyd credits Bluefield State with offering him the skills set necessary for success in all areas of his career.

His professional history is a rich one, manifested in decades of experience with eight different companies. Dr. Boyd spent 24 years with Wyeth Pharmaceuticals as a clinical research associate, and 14 years with DuPont Pharmaceuticals as a senior research associate. At DuPont, according to Dr. Boyd, "We provided clinical studies for thousands of patients in the areas of heart disease, RA, Alzheimer's Disease, Phase III anti-inflammatory studies, anti-hypertensive studies, and psychotropic studies."

Dr. Boyd states that, due to the intensive coursework at Bluefield State, as well as the rich insights into the professional world he gleaned from his time as a student, he felt prepared to "take on any work post-graduation," a sentiment echoed by many Bluefield State alums. For Carl Boyd, Bluefield State shaped him in a way that prepared him for his every professional challenge.

A sense of generosity defined the couple's post-graduation years: through substantial contributions to scholarship programs, grants, the Bluefield State University Alumni Association, and donations to Bluefield State archives (located on the second floor of the campus library), the Boyds gave to the university in more ways than one.



Boyd Conference Room in Conley Hall

Additionally, the couple provided supplies and funds for soup kitchens and homeless shelters in the Philadelphia area, where they made their home, for 48 years. Dr. Boyd's other charitable contributions and involvements are too plentiful to list here. Suffice to say, he is a man for whom helping others is paramount.

Certainly, BSU equipped the couple, and Dr. Boyd in particular, with the skills necessary to have professional success, and it is such professional success that enabled them to be so consistently generous. However, on a more fundamental level, Carl Boyd attributes it all to his late wife, Selba. When I spoke to Dr. Boyd via text message, he had the following to say:

"I would like to emphasize my wife... She was very instrumental in all that we were able to accomplish, here in Philadelphia and at Bluefield State University. Most of the pictures taken of me include my wife... We were always together."

For Dr. Boyd, his wife was the soul of the operation, the driving force behind every achievement. He, along with all who knew her, remembers her for her compassion, drive, and humanity. The Boyds' story

serves as a poignant reminder of the enduring power of love and generosity in the face of life's hardships.

Not only was BSU the catalyst in bringing Carl and Selba Boyd together, but it also formed them as people, both professionally and personally. The Boyds are a testament to the powers of focus, determination, and generosity, all cornerstones of Bluefield State University. ■

FALL 2025

FROM AMMAN TO APPALACHIA: MY GLOBAL UGRAD JOURNEY

By Omar Altamimi
Global UGRAD from Jordan, Spring 2025



Omar at East River Mountain Overlook, which offers a panoramic view of the two Bluefields and Princeton, West Virginia

As a third-year computer science student from Jordan, I had a unique life changing opportunity to study at Bluefield State University through the Global Ugrad exchange program in the small, scenic city of Bluefield, West Virginia, surrounded by nature and mountains, bipolar weather from rain to sun in a few minutes -- a big difference from the busy, fast-paced life of Amman, the capital city of Jordan where I grew up.

At first, adjusting to life in a quiet rural town was a bit difficult, since I was from a large metropolitan city filled with constant movement and noise, but I embraced the lifestyle shift as an opportunity to explore. I strolled around the city, visited convenience stores, and hiked around occasionally.

People were very friendly and eager to engage in conversations: they asked about my background and culture, they would always keep a smile on their faces, greet me warmly, and engage me in small conversations – which I hadn’t experienced in any other country. I had thought everyone in America minded their own business, but it turned out that they were very nice and caring. Students were very helpful and outgoing; I realized they kept themselves busy academically, athletically, socially and with work



Omar shared with Bluefield High School students insights about Jordan and its culture on Multicultural Day

- which I admired because everyone pursues their passions.

Living in college dorms near the campus, with unlimited food in the cafeteria, residing with close friends, and participating in any event that happened was lots of fun. One memorable activity was the cookout at the park: all the students and athletes were enjoying their time, cooking hotdogs and hamburgers on the grill. I played baseball and American football for the first time, which were interesting and exhilarating experiences.

I used to hang out with everyone, drive to nearby cities, play basketball, exercise at the gym, organize and participate in student club activities, and sometimes golf with the men’s golf team. The experiences allowed me to make the most of my four-month stay and even allowed me to share a little bit of my culture.

Academically, I took courses in different fields— politics, pre-medicine, IT, and English. They were both engaging and practical. In my politics class, I explored American governance and civil rights movements, which deepened my understanding of democratic structures compared to Middle Eastern systems.



Omar enrolled in IT courses such as cybersecurity and penetration testing



Omar plays in the Sandbox

In pre-medicine courses, I studied nervous, muscular, circulatory systems, and engaged in complementary lab practices. The IT classes were hands-on, emphasizing real-world applications in cybersecurity and penetration testing.

The English course, Writing in the Professions, taught me how to structure formal proposals, business pitches, and technical reports, a valuable skill I hadn't fully developed in Jordan. In this course, I learned how to transform an abstract business idea into a realistic, fundable master plan.

The small student-to-professor ratio and the strong support for research created an enriching learning environment. Unlike the more lecture-based system I was used to, classes at BSU encouraged active participation and independent thinking. Professors expected us to ask questions, challenge ideas, and

apply concepts practically. This shifted my learning approach from memorization to exploration. I became more confident in contributing to discussions, seeking feedback, and thinking critically about problems—skills that I will carry forward in my academic and professional career.

Outside the classroom, I fully immersed myself in both campus and community life. I joined the robotics team and worked with Arduino to program BSU's latest robot prototype for competition against top universities. I also helped organize and participate in events of the Office of International Initiatives, including giving a major cultural presentation at Bluefield High School, where I gave a long engaging presentation showcasing my country.

Additionally, I actively participated in STEM club activities and I was also privileged to guide new

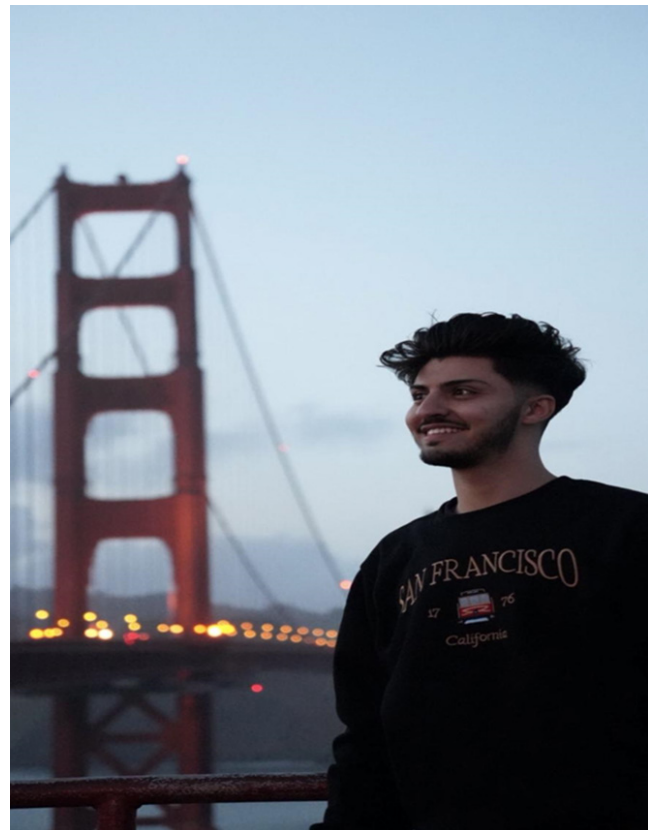
BREAKING BLUES



At the VFW whose hall was decorated for Valentine's Day by Omar (center) and fellow Global UGRADS Brandon Velasquez De Paz of Guatemala, Shanujan Jesurasa of Sri Lanka, Radjikou Kane of Niger, Noythida Simmavong of Laos, and Dea Basha of Albania



At Griffith Observatory with fellow UGRADS



At San Francisco's Golden Gate Bridge



At Dollywood, near Pigeon Forge, Tennessee

students around the Student Center, giving them a warm introduction to life at Bluefield State. Career Services Director Rebecca Hatch, who coordinates career fairs for Bluefield State students, was always available to answer any questions Global UGRADS had about volunteering.

One of my favorite experiences was working on the AR Sandbox project, where I fine-tuned and programmed the system, deepening my skills in both hardware and software.

During spring break, I visited several other states. I explored the capital, Washington, D.C., and the lively city Charlotte in North Carolina. I also experienced the vibrant music, food culture and stockyards of Louisiana and Texas. Going coast to coast—feeling awe around skyscrapers in New York City, enjoying the sunny beaches of Florida, and finally making it to the iconic cities of Los Angeles and San Francisco -- it was truly an impactful time that allowed me to gain a perspective of the United States, the incredible diversity of its people, its landscapes, and its lifestyles.

My fellow Global UGRADS and I took part in meaningful community service at the VFW Auxiliary, thanks to Christina Sammarco, BSU Director of

Admissions. She took us to Dollywood (pictured above), the Greenbrier, and Washington, D.C.

While Bluefield was very different from what I was used to, I discovered that growth often happens outside of your comfort zone. I made lifelong friendships, gained fresh academic perspectives, and developed a deeper appreciation for diversity, resilience, and community.

Although it was a world away from Amman, it became a second home. It wasn't just about academic learning—it was about personal growth, cultural exchange, and discovering the beauty of the American dream. I am back in Jordan with unforgettable memories, valuable skills, and a global mindset that will guide me in the years ahead.

Thank you, America! ■

KAYCEE COTY

Discipline, Leadership, and Service

By Honors Scholar Anthony Bright, Feature Writer and Breaking Blues Co-Editor



Kaycee was recognized with the Top Dawg award
[Image contributed by Paige Whittington]



Kaycee doing her thing on the soccer field
[Image contributed by Paige Whittington]

From Peoria, Arizona, Honors Scholar Kaycee Coty came to Bluefield State as a standout soccer recruit, bringing with her not only athletic talent but also a drive for excellence in academics and leadership. A Criminal Justice major, Coty has built an impressive record of achievement on the field, in the classroom, and across campus. [Note: Kaycee graduated in December 2025.]

Coty made the President's List every semester, earned the Bluefield State of Mind Award as a sophomore, and was honored with the Top Dog Award during her junior year.

Beyond academics, Kaycee stepped into leadership roles as Captain of the Women's Soccer Team and Vice President of Programming for Alpha Sigma Alpha, experiences that have strengthened her confidence, communication, and ability to lead by example.

Kaycee's time in BSU's Honors College has also been formative, offering memorable opportunities such as a trip to Washington, D.C., service learning, and internships. Kaycee points to BSU's small class sizes

and dedicated professors as key to her success, noting the close professional relationships she has built with faculty have prepared her for graduate school and beyond.

Maintaining a 3.9+ GPA was no accident—Kaycee credits her disciplined approach to weekly planning and determination to stay ahead in her studies. This balance of academic discipline and athletic commitment shaped her into a confident leader, ready for the next stage of her journey.

After graduation, Kaycee will enroll in Radford University Master's in Criminal Justice while completing Army ROTC training. She will then be commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the U.S. After her military service, Kaycee plans to enter the field of law enforcement.

Looking ahead, Kaycee says she hopes to give back to BSU through supporting athletic fundraisers and encouraging future generations of student-athletes. Her story reflects the core values of dedication, adaptability, and service that define Bluefield State graduates. ■



- ▶ Students, staff, faculty, and administrators of BSU
- ▶ Students of area public schools and colleges
- ▶ International partners of BSU

2026

Agora



A Celebration of
Creative Expression

you are invited
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Awards will be
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Wednesday
15 April
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- Poetry
- Song Lyrics
- One-Act Plays
- Short Stories
- Personal Essays
- Yarns
- Jokes
- Poster Art
- Paintings
- Pencil Sketches
- Music Compositions
- Photography
- Sculpture

Deadline: March 31, 2026

Written work in MS Word, Screenshots of
Art, Music, Sculpture and Photography
Email: agora@bluefieldstate.edu



JOIN HONORS COLLEGE CHESS CLUB TODAY!

		President Anthony Bright		
Jacob Myers Treasurer		Megan Pendergrass Secretary		
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Open to all students!

To join, please contact:

Anthony Bright

Personal Cell: (276) 920-1206

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FALL 2025

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B I L L C O L E B L U E F I E L D





Bluefield State University welcomes students from around the world and immerses them in community activities



On December 7, BSU students enjoyed learning about how WV laws are enacted