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Expanding Opportunity

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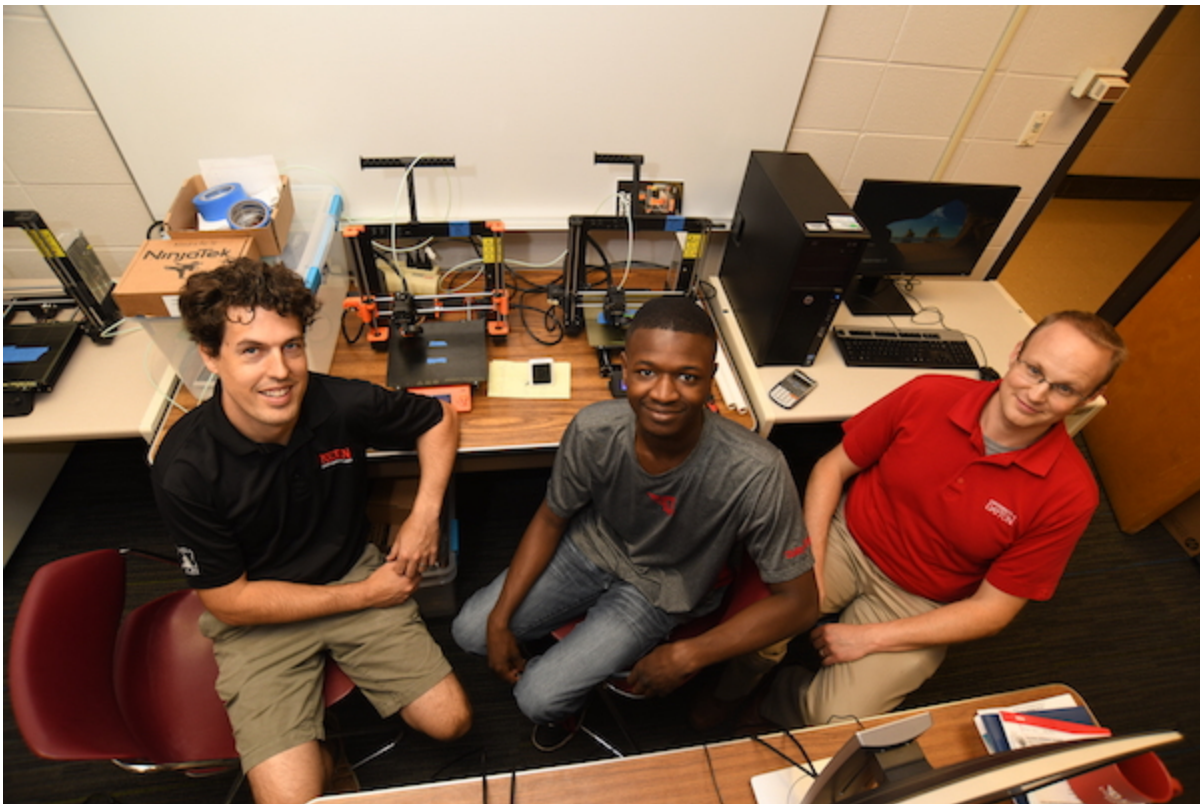
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Expanding Opportunity

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Monday September 30, 2019

By Eric F. Spina

London Ayton stopped by academic adviser Judi Butts' office and meticulously detailed for a visitor how he's developing and testing 3-D printed prosthetic fingers as part of a research team.

This is truly life changing — both for future patients and for a young researcher preparing for a promising career.

Under the mentorship of mechanical engineering faculty members Robert Lowe and Tim Reissman, London has learned how to print ultra-stretchable thermoplastic polymers and perform tension tests as researchers work to improve the basic science. Besides patient-customized prosthetics and orthotics, their research someday could be used to build replacement parts for aircraft and ships.

It's an impressive endeavor for any undergraduate, made even more remarkable by the fact London began the project before enrolling full-time on our campus. When he joined the UD Sinclair Academy, he automatically received all the privileges of being a student on both

campuses, including research opportunities, extracurricular activities and advisers to help him navigate the journey.

The UD Sinclair Academy, now in its fourth year, enrolls approximately 140 students from diverse, often untraditional, backgrounds. Along with the launch of the Flyer Promise Scholars Program and a renewed recruitment outreach to veterans and international students, we are focused squarely on expanding access and opportunity for all talented students.

Yet we will fumble as educators if we don't provide all UD students with the kind of hands-on learning and discovery that London found in the lab. As we work to put a bachelor's degree within reach of a new generation of students, we must double down on our efforts to support, retain, and graduate all students.

Faculty and staff are taking that imperative to heart.

A team of administrators — Jennifer Creech, Tim Kao, Justin Keen, Cynthia Payne, and Aaron Witherspoon (our newly appointed director of University advising initiatives) — recently participated in the American Talent Initiative Summer Institute at Georgetown University and returned home energized and committed to launching a pilot Student Success Champions Program by next academic year. They are laser-focused on cultivating a campus culture where every student is supported and encouraged to reach high — not just by their academic advisers but by “coaches” in various roles all over campus.

I can envision a grants writer, perhaps a first-generation college graduate herself, informally offering advice to an English major about professions. Or a department chair sharing his journey — the ups, the downs, the doubts — with a student considering graduate school. The possibilities are endless, and while these conversations happen every day on our campus, we want to create an official network, offer ongoing training to the success coaches — and build our capacity to inspire and encourage our students to achieve their dreams.

From administrative assistants to cashiers in dining halls, from academic advisers to faculty, we all can help students reach their potential and blossom.

That's the Marianist way.