It's a natural extension of LTU's strengths in business."

When we think of sports management, we often picture major league sports jobs that get the most prominence on television or in the news, like general manager, coach, and trainer. Fulfilling sports management jobs also exist in city recreation departments across the country, middle and high school sports programs, and non-profit recreation and development programs, like Detroit's Police Athletic League, that have great impact on children, families, and communities. From the perspective of Mary Ann Meltzer, LTU's athletic director, "Integrating sports management into the curriculum not only enriches the educational offerings of the institution but also provides valuable opportunities for student-athletes to pursue their passion while preparing for fulfilling careers in the sports industry. The diversity enhances the overall academic experience and attracts a wider pool of students. Go Blue Devils!"

Stavros has been teaching many of the skills that students will learn in the sports management program to current LTU student-athletes, particularly SOAR. She says, "SOAR is a strategic way of thinking, planning, and leading based on knowing your Strengths, Opportunities, Aspirations, and Results." Created by Stavros based on the findings of her dissertation: "Capacity Building: An Appreciative Approach," "SOAR is about a relational process of building your team and organization's future knowing that the driving force is people and what they are most capable of doing." A unique program called "Student-Athlete Academic Success Workshop: Blue Devils SOAR" has been designed and delivered by LTU's FAR (Faculty Athletic Representatives) that focuses on academic success and overall wellbeing. Co-created by Stavros and Ty Faulkner in the College of Arts and Sciences, the workshop series "goal in putting this program together," said Stavros, "is to develop those skills, habits, and behaviors to help our student-athletes (SAs) successfully navigate their LTU journey as both a student and athlete. There are six foundational pillars."

Stavros outlined the workshop series' goals, highlighting its comprehensive approach to student development. She explained, "Our series equips students with the tools to foster a positive-growth mindset, leveraging the PERMA™ [Theory of Wellbeing—encompassing Positive Emotion, Engagement, Relationships, Meaning, and Accomplishment]. Beyond that, it delves into cultivating self-awareness, self-discipline, and resilience. The curriculum also addresses leadership, both of oneself and in a broader sense, and underscores the importance of critical thinking. It prepares students for future challenges by promoting social conscience, altruism, and service. Ultimately, it guides students to 'SOAR' into their potential, driven by a sense of purpose."

You can learn more about SOAR at www.soar-strategy.com.

Business Data Analytics: Practical Research That Can Save T

In LTU'S College of Business and Information Technology (CoBIT), graduate students Keerthana Mahalingam, Pavan Paravada, and Rup Boyana have been analyzing data in the hope of making Michigan roads safer.

As graduate research assistants (GRAs) to Areej Salaymeh, assistant professor of information technology, they have been expanding their understanding of data analytics on a rather unique study.

In Salaymeh's ongoing research, she wants to find out if "instead of having pre-programmed traffic signal controllers, could we have adaptive traffic signal controllers? Could we solve the problem of congestion and unpredictable traffic patterns?" Salaymeh believes that "Intelligent Transportation Systems" would help our economy by reducing the time and money needed to transport goods. "Truckers would be safer, too, by not having to be on the roads as long," she said.

Her three GRAs are conducting this research by studying GPS data and Michigan Traffic Crash Reports provided by the Michigan Department of Transportation. "As an extension of Areej's traffic research, we're looking at the placement of traffic signals at the intersections of main roads," Paravada said. Boyana explained further that "we're using GPS data where there are no signals and finding the hot spots when traffic gets stopped or slows down frequently." All with the goal of reducing traffic accidents and fatalities.

Mahalingam came to LTU with a Bachelor of Science in Electronics and Communications Engineering and nearly five years as a Java program developer. A Master of Science in Information Technology student (MSIT) who expects to graduate in December '24, she aspires to be a technical manager one day. Paravada holds a Bachelor of Science in Electrical and Electronics Engineering and spent nearly five years working for a supplier to companies like Caterpillar and auto manufacturers doing data migration. With his experience working with auto-related companies armed with an MSIT, he sees himself as a data scientist working on autonomous vehicles.

Boyana comes with a Bachelor of Science in IT and three and a half years' real-time experience working on multiple projects in India. "As my past experience is different from what I'm currently studying, I am looking to be a data analyst or data engineer and then jump to being a data scientist," he said. Boyana shares the same sentiment as his fellow GRAs when he says, "To upscale my career, I chose to do my master's degree at LTU."

ANTHONY SHEVENOCK, BSCME'23:
SUCCEEDING WITH AUTISM

by Pam Houghton

Anthony Shevenock wasn't the first in his family with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). But he was the first to be diagnosed. And that diagnosis opened up a world of possibilities, giving Anthony and his family access to resources not readily available to previous generations.

Like the peer group in grade school that volunteered to help him and other ASD students understand social cues, often through the practice of daily greetings. "We had great schools and excellent teachers," said his mom, Kathy, who immersed herself in conferences that helped families find ways to support their ASD children. When it came time to choose a college, Anthony was favorably disposed to Lawrence Tech, thanks to a family that had gravitated toward LTU's technologically-focused education. Anthony's two sisters and brother-in-law had graduated from the University, and in 2008, his uncle, Ken Grezlik, also an LTU grad, created an endowed scholarship for LTU students majoring in mechanical engineering.

But the transition from a high school routine to a more varied schedule in college can be formidable, especially for ASD students, who often experience higher levels of stress and anxiety when routines change. And Anthony was no exception. "It was a bit hard in the beginning," said Anthony, who needed another semester to bring his performance back up after a difficult start adjusting to different class times throughout the week.

Luckily, LTU's faculty and staff made a difference. "The professors read Anthony's IEPs (individualized educational plans) from high school so they were able to intervene if there was a problem," said Kathy. They also seemed skilled in handling the communication styles of ASD students, who have difficulty deciphering figurative language such as sarcasm or irony. "If teachers are too flamboyant with their speech or use a lot of idioms, it can get confusing for ASD kids because they have to take a moment to mentally decipher what the teacher is saying," said Kathy.

According to Anthony and his family, Professor Lisa Anneberg's straightforward approach suited Anthony's needs. "The way she spoke and how she explained things was very concise and he had an easier time understanding her," Kathy said. Anthony agreed. "She was really good at explaining things and helped me understand what needed to be done in class and with homework."

ASD students can also struggle socially; it's not unusual to miss a verbal cue or the meaning behind a facial expression, even though many ASD students wish to be sociable. And group settings can be particularly distressing. That may have been the case in one of Anthony's math classes although his professor, Mike Rosen, witnessed a change in Anthony's demeanor over time. "In the beginning, he always kept to himself and never really wanted to say anything. But just before break, he was finally talking to other students and telling stories."

Rosen's style of teaching may have been just the thing to ease Anthony's anxiety. "I'm always very encouraging and jovial with the students, so maybe he finally felt comfortable opening up." Anthony's unusual math skills also became evident in Rosen's class. As Kathy tells the story, Rosen called Anthony a "true genius" who solved a doctorate level math problem in six minutes "like it was nothing."

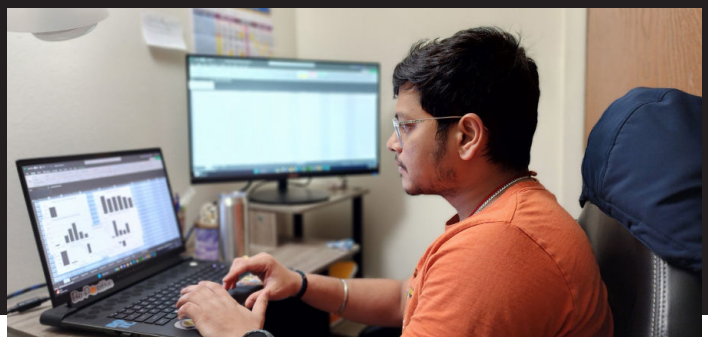
"Students don't usually get the answer so quickly," said Rosen. "He's quick with numbers." Anthony graduated magna cum laude with a degree in computer engineering. His sister Stephanie gave him his diploma during the commencement ceremony, conveying their deep ties to LTU's theory and practice education; Stephanie has bachelor's and master's degrees in mechanical engineering from Lawrence Tech. "That was really special," said Kathy. Like Anthony's future.

Time, Money, Lives

by Renée Ahee

He was particularly interested in an MBA degree that "could give me the data side and the business side. During my research on universities, business data analytics interested me very much." Boyana graduated in May '24 with a Master of Science in Business Data Analytics (MSBDA).

GRAs are learning about artificial intelligence (AI) in Salaymeh's class as well as by applying generative AI to help her with another research project: affordable and "smart" housing. All three students know that understanding and working with AI will help them in their careers.



Mahalingam said, "AI is booming, growing, and becoming more and more sophisticated. As a grad assistant, I'm learning AI, which will definitely support my future career!"

"The opportunity for international students to get the type of practical, hands-on research experience that a GRA position gives them in our college," said Interim Dean Matthew Cole, "positions them to be considered for a job in their field with an American company. Through its Career Practical Training (CPT) program, the U.S. Department of Homeland Security offers foreign students the chance to stay in the country provided they have full-time employment and could possibly extend their stay through the Optional Practical Training (OPT) program."

Salaymeh believes that Mahalingam, Paravada, and Boyana are making valuable contributions to her research projects. "These are highly intelligent, motivated learners and employees," she said. "With their prior education, work experience, and multiculturalism, they bring a diverse perspective and fresh ideas to their work." While they are working on their master's degrees, graduate research assistants are allowed to work 10 hours per week and are paid a stipend.