DOUGHERTY FAMILY COLLEGE

Newsletter



DEAN'S CORNER

Every school year, we begin with a lot of hope and joy welcoming a new class of scholars. This year is special because we are celebrating our 10th anniversary. When I reflect on our college's journey over the past 10 years, three biblical virtues capture the essence of DFC, those virtues are faith, hope, and love.

DFC was founded on faith. We trusted God to open doors and pathways that did not exist. We had to walk through many valleys before we could get a glimpse of a mountain top. But God surrounded our college with caring and loving partners who held us close when we faced a global pandemic, the social unrest of the murder of Mr. George Flyod, Operation Metro Surge, federal anti-DEI policies, and state financial aid budget cuts. DFC stands strong today because God and our partners never gave up on us. And our scholars never gave up on themselves.





DFC provides a beacon of hope in our world through our brilliant and resilient alumni. We have graduated over 500 alumni with associates degrees and more than 200 with bachelor's degrees. We have several alumni who have earned master's degrees, and we have a graduate with a law degree. Our alumni embody hope! When you think of our graduates multiply that number by 50 because each graduate will have influence on at least 50 people in their family and community.

The future of DFC is bright because of the abiding love of our DFC scholars, alumni, faculty, staff, the entire Dougherty Family, President Sullivan, President Vischer, our trustees, the amazing DFC advisory board, and our university and community partners.

The love of our collective community built DFC, and I am confident this love will sustain DFC for the next 10 years no matter what political, social, cultural or economic challenges we face. If we love one another from the core, we will be unstoppable and achieve all of our goals.



Today, DFC's graduation rate is consistently 12-15 percentage points higher than the national and state community colleges' graduation rates. In the next 10 years we want to have a graduation rate that is 20-25 percentage points higher than state and national graduation rates. Today, our graduates are emerging young leaders in their companies. And, 10 years from now, they will be senior managers in their organizations, CEOs of their own businesses, and local, national, and global leaders.

We are a great college. Ten years from now, we will be an exceptional college. We strive for excellence because our scholars are worth it. As long as we have faith, hope, and love, DFC will produce transformational leaders for many generations to come. DFC is strong, steady, and mission-driven to create a more just and equitable world.

At DFC we might bend but we will never break, we might pause and pivot, but we will always persist and persevere. We will flourish and thrive. Together, We Rise!

Thank you again for your ongoing support of our scholars and alumni.



Much Gratitude and Love,

Buffy Smith

Buffy Smith, Ph.D.
Dean, Eugene and Mary Frey Endowed Chair
Dougherty Family College

New Professional Internship Program Director



Domonick Fields serves as the Professional Internship Program Director at the University of St. Thomas Dougherty Family College (DFC). With over a decade of experience in education, nonprofit leadership, youth development, and workforce development, Domonick brings a passion for building relationships, creating opportunities, and helping people recognize their potential.

In his role at DFC, Domonick focuses on connecting scholars with meaningful internships, career exploration, and professional development opportunities. His work includes building partnerships with employers and community organizations, creating programming that prepares scholars for the workplace, and helping them develop the confidence, skills, and connections needed to succeed. He believes that learning extends beyond the classroom and that real-world experiences play an important role in helping scholars discover their interests and possibilities for their futures.

"My passion has always been about people, building relationships, removing barriers, and creating opportunities. I've been fortunate to have people and programs invest in me throughout my life, and I understand firsthand how much of a difference that can make. That's what drew me to DFC. I want our scholars to know that they belong in these spaces, that their experiences and perspectives have value, and that they have people in their corner who genuinely want to see them succeed."

Before joining DFC, Domonick held leadership roles at the Citizens League and Black Men Teach, where he helped develop programs and partnerships focused on leadership, representation, and career pathways. He holds a bachelor's degree in Sociology and Anthropology from St. Olaf College and a master's degree in educational leadership from Saint Mary's University of Minnesota.

For Domonick, the work is about more than helping scholars secure an internship. It's about building confidence, opening doors, and making sure scholars have the relationships, resources, and experiences to take their next steps with purpose.

The Power of Interships

Domonick Fields, Professional Internship Program Director

At Dougherty Family College (DFC), we want our scholars to have opportunities that help them grow professionally while also connecting them to work that matters to them. Our partnership with 825 Arts is one example of what that can look like. Located in St. Paul's historic Rondo community, 825 Arts creates space for people to come together, express themselves, and use the arts to strengthen their community. For Mercedes Yarbrough, Community Engagement Director at 825 Arts, that work starts with listening. Known in the community as Mizz Mercedes, she has been with the organization since 2023. I first met Mizz Mercedes a few years ago through the Josie R. Johnson Leadership Academy. Connecting again through DFC has been an opportunity to build on that relationship and learn more about the work she is doing alongside our scholars.

Mizz Mercedes describes her role as connecting with community members, hearing what they need, and helping them see the possibilities in a space built for them. "I look for people who may not see themselves as artists and encourage them to use our space to make their dreams come true," Mercedes shared.

Mercedes explained that 825 Arts grew out of a vision that Rondo and Frogtown community members worked for years to make possible. As the neighborhood continues to change, the organization is committed to preserving its history, celebrating its many cultures, and making sure young people have a place to learn, create, and lead. Its work also gives community members a way to respond to issues affecting their lives through art and connection.

The Power of Internships

The relationship between 825 Arts and DFC began in 2024, and it started with a former DFC scholar. Mercedes shared that the scholar, who was a part of the organization's youth arts leadership team, recognized the connection and encouraged 825 Arts to get involved with the internship program. Since then, the partnership has grown through internship opportunities with a shared focus on helping young people build skills and see future possibilities.

That connection comes full circle for DFC scholar Basil Bell. Before becoming an intern, Basil was already familiar with 825 Arts through the youth choir that used the space. Now, as an intern, Basil gets to experience the work that happens behind the scenes and contributes to it directly. Basil shared that no two days are quite the same. Responsibilities include preparing the building for events, welcoming guests, helping with art projects, and supporting community activities. During a school board-related event, Basil greeted visitors and created an entry sign on a chalkboard. With nine years spent developing artistic skills, the internship has provided an opportunity to bring Basil's personal strength into the workplace.

The experience is also helping Basil develop skills beyond the arts. From learning how to communicate with visitors to understanding the importance of taking initiative, the internship offers real opportunities to grow. Basil also expressed an interest in one day owning a small business while continuing to give back to the community. "A piece of community engagement is creating the vibe and energy for the space that people are coming to," Mercedes explained. She has already seen Basil take an interest in building those skills and becoming more comfortable engaging with the community.

What stands out about this partnership is the opportunity for scholars to contribute, learn from people doing meaningful work, and recognize the value of the skills and experiences they already bring. For 825 Arts, it is another way to invest in the next generation of community leaders. As we continue building relationships with organizations across the Twin Cities, partnerships like this remind us why these opportunities matter. When scholars can explore their interests, build confidence, and make a difference in the communities around them, they are building a foundation for what comes next.

New Class, Big Impact: Dougherty Students Serve the Community

Linsey Koeritz-Madanamohanan, Professor of First-Year Experience Seminar

Serving the Common Good is part of the core mission of the University of St Thomas. Dougherty Family College first-year scholars are supporting this mission through service within the First-Year Experience (FYE) course. This year, we brought scholars from the First-Year Experience course to Second Harvest Heartland in Brooklyn Park as part of a service-learning project designed to teach scholars about food insecurity within the Minnesota community. Through this process scholars learned about the advocacy and support that Second Harvest Heartland provides as part of the Make Hunger History Campaign to help 90% of Minnesotans become food secure by 2030. One hundred and twenty-two first-year scholars sorted and boxed 35,516 pounds of apples and 311 boxes of cereal.

First-year scholar Uriel Gutierrez connected what he studied in the classroom with his volunteer experience at Second Harvest. He noted an article read in class that highlighted how diverse work groups yield better results. He believed the diversity of DFC as a work group "helped us come together for a common good and work together as a team to serve food for those in need." He also reflected on how the work of Second Harvest Heartland could benefit any of us at any point in our lives.

Scholars will also have opportunities to volunteer in Professor Monica Jarvi's Introduction to Sociology course and Professor Tanden Brekke's Justice and Peace course as they continue their studies at Dougherty Family College.



Empowering Scholars through Financial Aid Workshops

Lindsey Tafeana, College Financial Aid Counselor

Dougherty Family College (DFC) financial aid workshops and events provide scholars with opportunities to build financial knowledge, develop practical money management skills, and connect with resources that support their college experience. Through engaging activities, interactive discussions, guest speakers, and financial wellness sessions, scholars are encouraged to explore the financial decisions that can influence both their academic journey and their future.

Throughout the academic year, DFC hosts events that make financial education accessible, informative, and engaging. From learning about banking services, understanding credit and loan information, and recognizing the importance of saving to exploring scholarships, grants, budgeting, and responsible spending, these experiences help students strengthen their understanding of personal finance. These events also connect scholars with campus and community partners who can provide additional guidance and support as they navigate college and the responsibilities of adulthood.

By creating an environment where scholars can ask questions and participate in meaningful conversations, DFC strives to make financial education a welcoming and valuable part of the student experience.





The Power of Financial Aid Events: Knowledge, Confidence, and Opportunity

The purpose of financial aid events extends beyond explaining how scholars pay for college. These events help scholars understand the relationship between financial wellness, academic persistence, and long-term financial planning. Providing scholars with reliable information and opportunities to seek assistance can help them feel better equipped to navigate these challenges.

Financial aid education is especially important because scholars enter college with different levels of financial knowledge, access to resources, and experience managing money independently. Workshops help bridge these gaps by offering practical information scholars can apply in their everyday lives; each opportunity can contribute to greater financial awareness and confidence.

These events reinforce an important message: *scholars do not have to navigate their financial questions alone.* We connect scholars with financial aid staff, campus partners, and knowledgeable guest speakers who help them navigate financial challenges.

Empowering Scholars through Financial Aid Workshops

When scholars gain the knowledge and confidence to make informed financial decisions, they are better positioned to advocate for themselves, recognize available opportunities, and plan for their future. At DFC, financial wellness is not simply about dollars and cents; it is about supporting the whole student, strengthening a sense of belonging, and helping scholars build a foundation for success during college and beyond.

Selected Quotes from Scholars

“The workshops helped me understand financial aid better and how to pay for college. I’m thankful for the help and support.” - First-Year DFC Scholar

“The workshops made me less afraid of credit cards.” - First-Year DFC Scholar

“The workshops helped me think more about money and credit cards, especially when planning my future. I really need these skills with finding an apartment and building savings.” - First-Year DFC Scholar



College Fair

Padra Xiong, Transfer Counselor

As the fall semester continues, we're excited to celebrate the success of our Dougherty Family College transfer events. These events continue to play an important role in helping our scholars explore and prepare for what's next after they graduate from DFC.



One highlight of this year was our annual college fair, which was held in October 2026. Admissions representatives from Augsburg University, Hamline University, Metropolitan State University, Minneapolis College of Art and Design, Saint Cloud State University, Saint Mary's University, University of Minnesota- Morris, University of Minnesota- Twin Cities, and the University of St. Thomas were all present. Scholars filled the TMH Atrium with energy and engaged in great conversations with our college partners.

Sophomore student Diana Yupa Pinguil shared her experience: "The college admission counselors were inviting, nice, and very considerate of DFC students' timeline. I talked to MCAD, Metro State, and U of M- Morris. They gave good information and shared a lot of the options that they offered. This provided some relief for me."

Max Thao, a sophomore student, enjoyed the college fair. Thao said, "The college fair was fun, and everyone had a variety of programs. They answered all the questions that I had and provided more details than I anticipated."

College admissions representatives also appreciated the opportunity to connect with DFC scholars. Brian Studebaker shared that it's always great to meet scholars at DFC. He understands that our scholars are on a different path to pursuing their bachelor's degree. Therefore, he strives to provide as much information as possible to help them navigate their options. Studebaker also shared that DFC scholars ask thoughtful questions and have a good sense of their future direction.

College Fair



Makenna Schluter, an admissions representative from Metropolitan State University, emphasized the importance of completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) or the Minnesota Alternative State Financial Aid Application when she talked to scholars. Metropolitan State University is among the public universities in Minnesota that participate in the North Star Promise Program, which covers eligible students' remaining tuition and fees after other gift aid is applied. To be considered for the program, students must meet the eligibility requirements and complete the appropriate financial aid application by June 1.

From liberal arts colleges to specialized programs, scholars were able to explore a wide variety of educational pathways that align with their goals and interests. This also gives scholars a chance to start building strong relationships with potential transfer institutions. We are thankful for the collaboration between DFC and college partners for making the college fair a success.