

Kevin Windham only student in St. Louis leadership program

By Kayla Gaffney

Kevin Windham, a senior at Southeast Missouri State University, has been selected into the inaugural class of FOCUS St. Louis' Impact Fellows Program.

Windham was the only student selected to the leadership program; the rest of the members are executive professionals from the St. Louis area. The program is designed as a way for its participants to gain training and experience in change management, problem solving, systems thinking and project management. The Fellows will be using the Ferguson Commission report as a guidepost for their work in hopes of putting the report into action.

Windham said after applying for the program he wasn't expecting to be selected, but has positive feelings about the team that has been assembled.

"I had low expectations of being selected just because of my age, but as I go through a couple meetings and as I dialogue with some of the other members of the team ... I don't know just how we fit together yet, but I know we were all selected for a reason," Windham said. "We've just got so many walks of life, it's going to be interesting to see how we pull it all together to make something that's going to help the community."

Although he is the youngest member and the only student, Windham sees his age as a benefit he can bring to the program.

"Being able to speak for my generation, it's kind of pressure, but I consider the pressure a privilege," Windham said. "The pressure is on you for a reason and that reason is because you're actually capable of doing something with the opportunity that you have."

Windham first heard about the leadership program from Trent Ball, associate dean of students and director of Educational Access Programs at Southeast, who suggested he apply.

"I think Kevin is very much a budding leader. I wanted to put him in an environment where he would be able to expand his leadership capabilities, but also put him in an environment to have a really strong passion that will turn into leadership," Ball said.

Ball said he believes this opportunity will not only be beneficial for Windham, but also will benefit the university.

"I think that he can bring something back to the institution as well, and he can also grow simultaneously. I think it's a good fit for him," Ball said.

In the years Windham has been at Southeast, he has been involved in many different leadership programs and has taken quite a few leadership roles. He first got involved his freshman year when he participated in Southeast's First Year Leadership Program and Emerging Leaders.

"That really broke me out of my shell, really taught me some new techniques in leadership styles and taught me more about myself as a leader," Windham said.

Windham now serves as secretary of Southeast's Black Student Union, a senator for the College of Liberal Arts in Student Government Association and an ambassador to the Student-Athlete Advisory Committee.

In 2014, Windham started supporting and participating in campus protests before being appointed to the Southeast President's Task Force on Diversity Education.

"We protested on campus; eventually we got the attention of administration," Windham said. "We had quite a few meetings and then eventually that turned into president [Ken Dobbins] announcing that he was going to assemble the President's Task Force on Diversity Education."

Although originally having doubts about the task force, Windham said his fears were quickly put to rest.

"I was kind of skeptical of the task force originally," Windham said. "I thought it was just going to be another stand-still committee, but the committee and the committee chairs really surprised me because we actually ended up jumping right in even on the first meeting -- they made me less of a skeptic."

Windham credits much of his success in leadership to Southeast and said the leadership skills he has acquired at the university will follow him in his future.

"The university, itself, kind of gave me the opportunity to step up and take on that role, because if I was in a larger university, I would have just been another student," Windham said. "Being at a more intimate university, it gave me that platform -- 'If not me then who, if not now then when?'"