The CFAES Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion would like to welcome you to our DEI Student Spotlight! Each month we will be celebrating the diversity of the CFAES student body by highlighting one student (undergraduate or graduate). This month we are featuring Gary Closs, Jr. who is a PhD candidate in the Department of Food Science and Technology. Gary also conducts research at the Center of Food Animal Health (formerly the Food Animal Health Research Program) and is training in food safety, microbiology, and animal health which will strengthen his ability to become a comprehensive scientist. After graduation, he plans to use the skills and knowledge he has learned to further the food and one-health fields while advocating for effective science communication.

**What is your field of study?**
I am a PhD candidate in the Food Science and Technology department but conduct research at the Center of Food Animal Health (formerly the Food Animal Health Research Program).

**How do you plan to use your degree in CFAES in your career?**
My unique situation has allowed me to get training in food safety, microbiology, and animal health; strengthening my ability to become a comprehensive scientist. After graduation, I am eager to use the skills and knowledge I have learned in CFAES to further the food and one health fields while advocating for effective science communication.

**What challenges have you faced while achieving your goals?**
Pursuing a degree between two campuses and departments has come with a host of challenges. However, through each obstacle, there have been chances for me to grow as a young professional and scientist.

**What has helped you thrive toward your goals?**
Fortunately, in the face these hurdles CFAES staff, faculty, and mentors have been dedicated to helping me navigate the unknown and ease the difficulty to ensure my success. Their help, my family, and my faith have allowed me to achieve my goals.

**What experiences as a member of the CFAES community have helped shape you as a person?**
Serving as a Graduate Teaching Associate with the Summer Research Opportunities program re-energized me and shaped my later years as a PhD student. Helping other, mostly underrepresented, undergraduate students strengthen their research skills and desire to attend graduate school was a rewarding experience. It also gave me a real-time look back at the program that was so instrumental in my academic and research success. Despite progress, there are still things that can be done in the college to create an inclusive environment.
What can the college do to continue to create an inclusive environment?
The college can continue to create an inclusive environment by amplifying the voices of the most marginalized and granting those students the resources necessary to matriculate their respective degrees successfully. Moreover, I think the college can work to establish a stronger diversity and inclusion presence on the Wooster campus to mitigate what can be a culturally isolating experience.

What ways do you suggest that someone could get involved in DEI work in the college? Where do you wish more people would get involved?
During this time where so many things are virtual, I think it is a great chance for people to attend the workshops the office of diversity, equity, and inclusion are offering. Graduate students can benefit from student support groups. There are always things we can learn when it comes to DEI work, reaching out to the staff in the office, being respectful to colleagues, and actively seeking further training can be great ways we can continually catapult CFAES in the right direction.