

EXCELSIOR



CLASS
OF 2019 p.6



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ON THE COVER: Dairra Boss was one of more than 400 graduates to attend Commencement 2019.

PHOTO: KRIS QUA

Fulfilling the Promise

Almost 50 years ago, Excelsior College was founded as a noble experiment: a higher education institution focused on providing adult learners with a flexible and affordable pathway to a credential—and to a middle-class life. We initially achieved our mission through the assessment of learning and the aggregation of credit earned from inside and out of the classroom. Soon after, we added credit by examination. In the early 2000s, Excelsior stood among the first to develop and offer college classes via fully online instruction.

Our success can be attributed, in my view, to an unyielding resolve to meet students where they are, academically and geographically, and the courage to adapt what we do and how we do it as the marketplace demands. We were founded to disrupt, but we succeeded by adapting to changing preferences—first, with credit by examination and, later, with online instruction.

Today, we have unleashed a transformational agenda. The Great Recession, demographic changes, and globalization have ushered in a new knowledge-based economy. State investment is retreating; alarm bells on the rising costs of an education and the value of a degree have reached a crescendo, and student choice is moving rapidly beyond traditional notions of education and credentialing. As a result,

higher education institutions everywhere must consider how to best navigate this challenging terrain to fulfill their promise.

At Excelsior, we are creating a learning ecosystem that strengthens and seamlessly integrates all our offerings: instructor-led and self-paced courses, independent study for credit by examination, prior learning assessment, and stackable credentials. We'll offer not only traditional associate, bachelor's, and master's programs but also articulated degree pathways and skill-based professional development opportunities created in concert with employers. Excelsior students and alumni will be true lifelong learners who can engage with the College at any time of their life to meet their personal and professional goals.

For us, exceptional service manifests in compassion, agility, respect, trust, and empowerment. Our commitment to putting learners first is the foundation of this new ecosystem. We can develop the highly responsive level of service today's learners need so they can stay competitive in our evolving knowledge-based economy. With our integrated academic offerings, we can ensure the promise made at our inception—to provide learning when, where, and how it is needed—fulfills the promise of Excelsior College.

Ever upward.



A handwritten signature in black ink, which reads "James N. Baldwin". The signature is fluid and cursive, written in a professional style.

JAMES N. BALDWIN, JD, EdD
PRESIDENT

John Caron Becomes Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs

In July 2019, John Caron was named the new provost and vice president for academic affairs at Excelsior College. He is the College's second-ranking officer with strategic responsibilities that span the entire institution.

Caron has worked for more than 20 years in higher education in various senior leadership positions. Caron was provost at Endicott College; associate dean, Krieger School of Arts & Sciences at Johns Hopkins University; senior associate dean, academic and faculty affairs at Northeastern University; associate dean, School of Professional Studies at Brown University; and interim dean of admission and the first year at Bennington College.

During his career in higher education, he has worked to remove barriers to success, managed recruitment, provided academic strategic direction, and revamped, retired, and launched new programs. Caron has served on senior leadership teams and led strategic priorities to align with the vision of the institution.

Caron was drawn to Excelsior's unique story and way it serves underrepresented students. He continues to be inspired by Excelsior's people who care about adult learners and says, "Unlike other colleges and universities that are scrambling to serve different populations in new ways, Excelsior has stayed true to its mission."

As provost and vice president of academic affairs, Caron's vision for Excelsior's future consists of four strategic pillars. In his own words:

- "Offer high quality courses that are engaging and relevant to our learners' experiences. If we achieve this goal, students will register for more courses and tell their friends and family about Excelsior. Word-of-mouth is still a powerful way to expand the value proposition of an Excelsior education.
- Remove barriers to success. Removing barriers to admission, course registration, financial aid, and advising will lead to increased retention and persistence.



I also believe we need to position the College to be a partner for life with our alumni. If we want to have a partnership for life with our students, our learning ecosystem needs to include multiple pathways for our alumni to stay engaged with the College.

- Position prior learning assessment to be a game changer for the College. Many competitors are now branding themselves as a degree completion school. Moreover, major companies like Walmart, Amazon, and Google are offering training for college credit as a way to acquire and retain talent. I believe Excelsior is uniquely positioned to evaluate and award college credit for training.
- Revamp existing programs and offer new programs and credentials aligned with industry needs. Today's learners are consuming information in different ways and at lightning speed. The workforce of the future demands that workers acquire skills they need quickly and affordably."

↑ John Caron, the new provost and vice president for academic affairs, has a vision to elevate the student learning experience at Excelsior College. PHOTO: MIKE HEMBERGER

Though the pillars are Caron's overall hopes for the future, there are some things that faculty and students can expect to see during the next few years. For instance, courses that will create a more meaningful interaction between instructors and students, integrate career readiness skills, and inspire faculty to be creative and innovative are in development. Excelsior has also hired a company to conduct an external review of the student experience from discovery to graduation so that the College can improve outreach strategies where needed.

"As provost, Dr. Caron will be a key driver in developing academic offerings and strategies that are aligned with the changing landscape of higher education, so that Excelsior may maintain positive growth and advance its position among peer institutions," says President James N. Baldwin. ■ – J.K.

Two-Time Graduate Kane Tomlin Becomes President of the Alumni Association

As an executive consultant with the Florida Department of Transportation, a professor of applied cybersecurity for Tallahassee Community College, and an instructor of national security for Excelsior College, Kane Tomlin is familiar with leading teams and seeing projects through to completion. That experience plus his extensive background in project management and two degrees from Excelsior College make him a good fit for the role of president of the Excelsior College Alumni Association.

Tomlin, of Tallahassee, Florida, has been a member of the Alumni Leadership Council since 2015 and became president of the Alumni Association in July 2019. Tomlin has been managing projects in information technology, military operations, and law enforcement for 20 years. He is a former special programs administrator for the Florida Department of Law Enforcement and is one of the original subject matter experts for the CompTIA Project Management Certification exam. He is a PMI-certified project management professional, a certified technical trainer, a certified e-business professional, a CompTIA certified project manager, a cyber certified expert, and a certified security professional.

Many people would be surprised to know that Tomlin is also a retired master diver from the U.S. Army. That's not the most interesting thing about him, though, he says. Tomlin and his wife are building an elderly dog rescue in their home city for older dogs who are often overlooked at shelters. Given that you can often find Tomlin enjoying bonfires with his wife and dogs in their backyard, it's no wonder he has a soft spot for canines.

Tomlin started college in 1998 at Texas A&M, and after changing schools a few times while working and trying to finish his degree,

he enlisted after 9/11. In 2006, Tomlin discovered Excelsior College while he was on active duty in the Army and enrolled as soon as he learned he was only a few credits away from finishing his degree. He earned a Bachelor of Science in Business in 2012.



Although it took him 14 years to earn his undergraduate degree, he earned a Master of Science in Criminal Justice just two years later in 2014. Tomlin went on to earn a doctorate in strategic security from the Henley-Putnam School of Strategic Security at National American University, a post-graduate cer-

“I’ve met some truly huge leaders in their fields. Being able to text a question to a rocket scientist, or a chief nurse, or a retired CEO ... Excelsior alumni make up some of the smartest and hardest-working people I have ever met.”

—Kane Tomlin

tificate in leadership development from the University of Louisville, and a post-graduate certificate in project management from Florida International University.

As president of the Excelsior College Alumni Association, Tomlin also leads the Alumni Leadership Council and is an ex-officio member of the Excelsior College Board of Trustees. He will serve a two-year term.

Here's more from Tomlin on his experience with the College and his interest in the Alumni Leadership Council.

What impact did the College have for you? It would not be an understatement to say Excelsior changed my life. Once I re-enrolled in college, I was promoted faster, and I was encouraged to complete my master's and doctorate, and then to enter

academia and begin teaching. I would never have thought of myself as a college professor prior to Excelsior. After I left the service, I was also able to find rewarding and lucrative work fairly easily, which I attribute in no small part to having multiple degrees from Excelsior on my resume.

How did you become involved with the Alumni Leadership Council? I received an alumni email and noticed a link at the bottom to apply for the ALC (then called the Alumni Advisory Board) and I decided that it would be pretty cool to give back to the College once I had some extra free time after my master's was complete. During my phone interview, I got to know the other members of the ALC, and then I really got excited about possibly being selected. My first Commencement was when I met the other ALC members in person and from that moment on, I felt like a part of an awesome family of Excelsior alumni. The members of the ALC compose a dream team.

What motivates you to keep engaged with the College? I think staying engaged with Excelsior College is a huge win-win. My personal network has expanded, and I've met some truly huge leaders in their fields. Being able to text a question to a rocket scientist, or a chief nurse, or a retired CEO, or countless others I've met on the ALC is immensely rewarding personally and professionally. Excelsior alumni make up some of the smartest and hardest-working people I have ever met. Selfishly, I gain a great deal of insight and mentorship by being able to interact with them. I also think the College and ALC benefits from my involvement and desire to give back to our community.

What's the best career advice you've received? My Dive School commander, Captain Shawn English, used to tell us all the time to "choose the harder right, over the easier wrong." It might sound cliché, but he lived it every day. His advice and example have inspired me for my entire Army career and beyond. He was killed in action on December 3, 2006, but I hope I've made him proud since. ■ —J.K.



Rep. Paul Tonko Receives an Honorary Degree

On September 3, 2019, President James N. Baldwin awarded an honorary degree to Rep. Paul D. Tonko, a sixth-term member of the U.S. House of Representatives, representing New York's 20th Congressional District in the Capital Region.

"Throughout his career, Congressman Tonko has been a champion for the working class and advancing policies that create jobs. He has been a champion for the underserved and underprivileged," said Baldwin, heralding Tonko as an advocate for education and for adult learners.

Tonko had planned to attend Excelsior College's 48th Commencement on July 12 and receive the honorary degree, but he was needed in Washington, DC, for a critical vote on the 911 Victim's Compensation Fund. He opted to speak to graduates via a recorded video.

In recent years, Tonko has worked with Excelsior College on many initiatives and events, such as the Nyquist Leadership Series and Workforce Development Strategy and Policy Forum, and supported a grant for Excelsior College to develop the Diagnostic Assessment and Achievement of College Skills (DAACS). In 2014, he helped the College with a grant establishing new and creative uses of technology to increase college opportunities for low-income students.

PHOTO: MIKE HEMBERGER



CELEBRATING THE CLASS OF

2019



NUMBER OF GRADUATES

6,001

NUMBER OF DEGREES EARNED

6,054

NUMBER OF ASSOCIATE DEGREES

1,947

NUMBER OF BACHELOR'S DEGREES

3,482

NUMBER OF DUAL DEGREES

57

NUMBER OF MASTER'S DEGREES

568

AVERAGE AGE OF GRADUATES

36

Course Prepares Faculty to Improve Student Writing

Excelsior College offers a professional development training for college-level faculty who are interested in improving their students' writing skills for academic, career, and life success. The free, self-paced Writing in the Disciplines Certificate Course includes assessments and optional networking discussion forums during which faculty who wish to can share resources and collaborate on designing assignments related to writing in the disciplines.

The training consists of four modules: Introduction to Writing in the Disciplines, Creating Effective Writing Assignments, Peer Review and Revision, and Effective Feedback and Rubrics. Each module includes readings and videos. It is hosted on the popular MOOC (massive open online course) platform within the Canvas network.

Upon successful completion of this course, faculty receive a downloadable certificate in Writing in the Disciplines (WID). Writing in the Disciplines is a subfield of Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC), a nationwide movement designed to ensure students have frequent

and significant opportunities to write, revise, and discuss their writing in their classes.

"We think this is an excellent professional development opportunity for faculty in any discipline," says Ben Pearson, PhD, co-chair of Excelsior College's Writing Across the Curriculum initiative. "Writing is a crucial 21st-century skill, and it's not something students can master in just one to two required writing courses. The more opportunities that we can create for high-impact, high-quality writing assignments in our classes, the better prepared students will be for life and career success."

This certificate training was developed by a team of about 10 faculty members with experience in teaching writing across a variety of disciplines and was supported by a grant from the Booth-Ferris Foundation. Many key elements of the training were developed as part of grant-funded collaboration among Excelsior College, SUNY Rockland, SUNY Clinton, SUNY Monroe, and other colleges.

"This certificate course was a labor of love for our team," says Anna Zendell, PhD, MSW, co-chair of the Writing Across the Curriculum

initiative at Excelsior College. "We wanted to design a course that equips faculty to support students in their writing. Faculty often feel quite confident in teaching course content,

"This certificate course was a labor of love for our team ... This course provides faculty with the tools to teach students robust writing and revision skills within the context of what they are writing about ..."

—Anna Zendell, PhD, MSW

but much less confident helping students with writing challenges. This course provides faculty with the tools to teach students robust writing and revision skills within the context of what they are writing about, rather than compartmentalizing writing mechanics from disciplinary content." ■ —M.S.



PRESIDENT BALDWIN TO RETIRE IN JULY 2020

James Baldwin, the president and chief executive officer of Excelsior College, will retire on July 3, 2020. Baldwin was appointed to the role by the Excelsior College Board of Trustees in October 2016, after serving as the executive vice president of the College since September 2014.

A strong proponent of the transformational power and enduring value of education, Baldwin has focused the College on providing adult learners with degree completion and career readiness opportunities. "He has done an excellent job of providing leadership to the College at a time filled with change," said Helen Benjamin, chair of the Excelsior College Board of Trustees, in announcing Baldwin's plans. "The Board and I are proud of his work and feel strongly that he has set the College on a course for future success."

A national search is underway for the next president, who will be the fourth since the College's founding in 1971.



← Keith W. Wilson, of the Army's Soldier for Life program, encourages communities to establish a network of services for veterans.

PHOTO: JASON HUGHES

Welcome Back

NYQUIST LEADERSHIP SERIES EVENT CONSIDERS HOW COMMUNITIES CAN STREAMLINE SUPPORT FOR MILITARY VETERANS

With about 200,000 servicemembers leaving the military each year, opportunity exists to ensure veterans make a smooth transition to the civilian workplace. On October 17, 2019, during the latest event in Excelsior College's Nyquist Leadership Series, representatives from military- and veteran-focused organizations, businesses, higher education institutions, government agencies, and economic development organizations brainstormed ways to collaborate for the benefit of veterans and our communities.

The Veteran Workforce Collaboration, presented by Excelsior College in coordination with the Center for Economic Growth in Albany, New York, and the Mental Health Association of New York State, drew about 50 participants from New York's Capital Region and beyond. Participants heard from panelists and participated in two breakout sessions to discuss topical issues related to

transitioning servicemembers and veterans. Topics included:

- › Veteran workforce attraction
- › Improving resource and service coordination
- › Strengthening education-workforce partnerships
- › Service mental health and wellness in the workplace
- › Enhancing veteran training and retention programs
- › Making proper accommodations for veteran workers
- › Igniting communities to recognize and support servicemembers

Discussions centered around what is working well, where there is opportunity for improvement, and recommendations for actions. A common theme emerged from the breakout sessions: with more alignment

and collaboration—as well as some improvements—transitioning servicemembers and veterans will have access to robust and helpful resources when they need them.

An informal network that relies on referrals already exists, but the challenge is in coordinating and publicizing the services available to transitioning servicemembers and veterans. “What we don’t have is a formalized network of some sort where everyone has access to those same services and those same resources,” said Keith W. Wilson, a lieutenant colonel in the U.S. Army and director of the northeastern United States and Europe for the Army's Soldier for Life Program. Wilson facilitated discussions on igniting communities to recognize and support servicemembers.

During the event, speakers and participants brainstormed ways workplaces, government offices, educational institutions, and communities can support servicemembers, veterans, and their families.

Although this was a local event, the topics are relevant to communities universally and the takeaways could prove meaningful for others. “There are many resources available for veterans and sometimes accessing these resources can be confusing,” says James Lettko, chief operating officer of Excelsior College, who participated in the event and is a retired U.S. Army general. “This collaboration brought together many of the local and regional providers and afforded an opportunity to collaborate on the most effective way to communicate to veterans about available services and how to best serve their needs.” ■ —M.S.

To view highlights from the recent discussion, visit www.excelsior.edu/page/nyquist-leadership-series.

The Nyquist Leadership Series explores New York State's most pressing contemporary challenges through the eyes of prominent government, education, and industry leaders. The series honors the late Ewald B. “Joe” Nyquist, a civil rights leader and former New York State education commissioner who played a key role in efforts to desegregate New York schools. The “visionary author” of Excelsior College, Nyquist fought to extend quality educational opportunities to learners of all ages.

Alumni Receive Awards in Recognition of Achievements

Three alumni were honored for their outstanding achievements at the College's annual Awards Convocation on July 11, 2019. Dwayne Hanford '05, Alumni Association president, and Mark A. Bowman '00, chair of the Awards Committee of the Alumni Leadership Council, presented the awards.

The three award recipients shared anecdotes from their educational journeys, including observations from their time spent with Excelsior College. A common theme was that each felt they would not be where they are in their careers if it hadn't been for their Excelsior experiences. Alumni Achievement Award recipient Jeffery Baker said he would not have been able to go on in his career teaching at many universities and volunteering at various non-profit organizations if it hadn't been for participating in the former Regents External Degree Program. C. Wayne Williams Award recipient Christine Robinson-Cooley was grateful to the College for allowing her to work and go to school at the same time, saying, "Having a career and a family should not bar a person from getting an education. It should enhance that experience." Carrie B. Lenburg Award recipient Greta Kostac added, "I wouldn't be here if it wasn't for Excelsior College. Excelsior made me feel that I could succeed; that I could get to do what I wanted to do."

Read more about the recipients:



Jeffrey Baker, Alumni Achievement Award Recipient: Jeffrey Baker '73, '75, of Fairport, New York, is an adjunct psychology professor at Monroe Community College in Rochester

and has taught for several universities, including Rochester Institute of Technology, Walden, Buena Vista, and Thomas Edison State. He has worked as a learning specialist for students with disabilities and has worked for Excelsior College in a variety of capacities. He is president of the New York State Conference of the American Association of University Professors, president of the Learning Disabilities Association of New York State, and a member of the American Psychological Association. Before becoming involved in higher education, he had a more than 20-year career in broadcast technology. Baker has an Associate in Arts in Liberal Arts and a Bachelor of Science with a major in psychology from Excelsior College, a master's degree in counseling from Syracuse University, and a PhD in psychology from Capella University.



Christine Robinson-Cooley, C. Wayne Williams Award Recipient: Christine Robinson-Cooley '97, of East Greenbush, New York, is an assistant re-entry manager with the New York State Department of Corrections. She has held a variety of positions within the state criminal justice system, working with inmates, parolees, victims, and their families, and continues to volunteer her time with mental health advocacy groups. She is a teacher for National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Rensselaer Family to Family, a free educational program for family, significant others, and friends of people living with mental illness. She is a member of the New York State Corrections & Youth Services Association, American Correctional

Association, and National Association of Blacks in Criminal Justice. She is a walk volunteer, conference presenter, and ribbon cutter for NAMI New York State, and a crisis intervention training panel presenter. She has a Bachelor of Science in Liberal Arts from Excelsior College, an AAS from Hudson Valley Community College, and a master's degree in social policy from SUNY Empire State College.



Greta Kostac, Carrie B. Lenburg Award Recipient: Greta Kostac '91, of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, is a family nurse practitioner with Aurora Medical Group in Fond du Lac and a visiting professor in the nurse practitioner program at Chamberlain University in Downers Grove, Illinois. She has been a nurse for over 40 years. She is a member of the Wisconsin Nurses Association and American Nurses Association and is a past member of both the National Organization for Nurse Practitioner Faculties and Sigma Theta Tau. She volunteers extensively, and in 2015, received the Graduate Teacher of the Year–Marian University award for her excellence in teaching and service to the university and students. She earned an Associate of Science from Gogebic Community College, an associate degree in nursing from Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College, a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Excelsior College, a master's degree in nursing from the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, and a Doctor of Nursing Practice from the University of Minnesota–Twin Cities. ■ –J.K.

To view the Awards Convocation and hear the remarks of the award recipients, go to <https://www.excelsior.edu/commencement/>.



From Cornerstone to Capstone

NEW FIRST COURSE POSITIONS LEARNERS FOR SUCCESS
THROUGHOUT THEIR DEGREE PROGRAM

To help provide students with an engaging start to their learning experience at Excelsior College, all undergraduate students admitted to the College as of November 1, 2019, are taking a Cornerstone course that will provide them with foundational skills and the resources needed for academic and career success. The 8-week, 3-credit course will introduce students to the skills, resources, tools, and mindsets that are critical for success throughout all their coursework—and beyond to their careers.

The course encourages what are referred to as the “5 Cs”—confidence in students’ ability to achieve their educational goals, comfort with online learning and available resources, courage to think deeply on open-ended questions, intellectual curiosity, and a sense of community. The course focuses on giving students a “smart start” for their educational journey and skills to rely on as they progress through their degree program.

Many, if not most, students start at Excelsior with no previous experience with the Canvas learning management system or the College’s other digital resources and

platforms. As a result, it takes them some time to reach a comfort level and develop confidence with how the courses work, including where to submit assignments, how to see their weekly schedules, and where to contact their instructor, says Mary Berkery, the faculty program director for the Cornerstone course. “The Cornerstone provides a safe place to land and get comfortable in a low-stakes environment where everyone is learning the LMS and the resources at the same time, with plenty of help from their instructor,” says Berkery.

In developing the Cornerstone experience, Excelsior’s faculty program directors also recognize that some adult learners who are returning to college after many years express a lack of confidence in their abilities, such as writing academic papers or navigating the technology. “Starting college with a mindset of ‘I’m not sure I can do this’ is a recipe for failure as opposed to adopting a growth mindset and believing you can and will be able to finish your degree,” says Berkery. “The Cornerstone is a place where students can build their confidence over the eight weeks

“The Cornerstone is a place where students can build their confidence over the eight weeks and recognize that they have everything they need to be successful in their next courses.”

— Mary Berkery

and recognize that they have everything they need to be successful in their next courses.”

That focus on student success is the motivation behind developing the course.

“The Cornerstone course is an innovative way to give adult learners the best possible start on their journey toward achieving the goal of degree completion,” says John Caron, provost and vice president for academic affairs at Excelsior College. “We talk a lot in higher education about meeting the learner where they are at. The Cornerstone course gives our faculty and advisors the ability to assess each learner’s level of readiness and get them on a degree pathway that is personalized to their academic success.”

The interdisciplinary Cornerstone course was developed in two versions—one for students entering Excelsior College with more than 60 credits and one for students entering the College with fewer than 60 credits. Both courses cover the same material, but they are tailored to the academic experience of students. The Cornerstone course consists primarily of activities, such as readings, videos, multiple choice questions, and reflections, and discussions within eight modules:

› **MODULE 1:** Is There Anybody Out There? Why You're Not Alone in Your Pursuit of a Degree

› **MODULE 2:** Is Intelligence Predetermined? Why Passion and Perseverance Matter More in Future Success

› **MODULE 3:** What Is the Future of Human Thought? Critical Thinking, Reasoning, and Argument in the Digital Age

› **MODULE 4:** Is This the Dawn of the Post-Truth Era? Determining Truth in a Glut of Information

› **MODULE 5:** Why Do I Need to Take that Class? How General Education Can Save Us from Dystopia

› **MODULE 6:** Will the Robots Replace Us? How to Remain Employable in the Unpredictable Future of Work

› **MODULE 7:** What Makes Us Human? Diversity, Bias, the Workplace, and Ourselves

› **MODULE 8:** Can We Create the Future? What We Can Take Away from the Course and What's Next

Through the module topics and their associated discussions, students will hone their skills and increase the flexibility of their minds to help them navigate the change and uncertainty in our future societies, workplaces, and selves. They will plan and write a research paper during the course that they will upload to an online portfolio in the final module. As they take other courses, students can continue to upload work to the online portfolio.

The Cornerstone course stands apart from other Excelsior courses in another way: A section of the course might consist of the most diverse group of students one will encounter during their studies. Because it's a required course for all undergraduate students, those registered for any given section reflect a variety of degree programs. The different interests and backgrounds of the students add to the overall learning experience.

FOCUS ON STUDENT SUCCESS

The Cornerstone course was piloted in the Fall II term and made available to all new students for the Spring I term. It is one of three courses students are required to take at Excelsior College rather than transferring in credit to meet the requirement. The others are Information Literacy—a self-paced 1-credit course that focuses on cyber literacy, library research, academic integrity, and critical reading, thinking, and writing skills—and the Capstone, the culminating experience of all degree programs. The Capstone course has traditionally been required to be taken at Excelsior College since it's an opportunity for students to show their cumulative knowledge of their chosen discipline and for instructors to evaluate that knowledge.

With these changes in requirements, maximums for credit acceptance and awarding toward undergraduate degrees has changed. Excelsior College will now accept all but 7 credits transferred from other institutions of higher education institutions, earned through exams, awarded for workplace training and professional certifications, or from other options toward a bachelor's or associate degree. This change reflects efforts to ensure Excelsior students have the knowledge and skills they need for academic and future success.

ALIGNMENT WITH CAPSTONES

Each degree program has a Capstone experience, typically a project or paper that gives students the opportunity to demonstrate knowledge acquired throughout their course of study. With the addition of the Cornerstone

course, students will gain stronger preparation for all their coursework, including the rigorous experience of the Capstone. Since all students will complete an independent research project during the Cornerstone course, they will gain skills in locating credible information, citing information correctly, and creating an academic argument—all skills they'll use again throughout their course experience, including in the Capstone. In addition, most students will use the online portfolio again in their Capstone course.

While faculty have been working on giving students a strong start to their Excelsior experience, they have the Capstone experience. LA 498 Liberal Arts Capstone, the largest of the Capstone courses in terms of enrollment, is being revised and will premiere for Summer I. The updated course focuses on this question posed to the student: What problem do you want to help solve?

"The course is designed to allow students to be experts on different topics and facilitate problem-solving and support their peers in discussion formats," says Amber O'Neil, the faculty program director for the capstones in liberal arts. "All formal weekly discussions in this course are focused on group discussions where students serve as experts on things critical to the Capstone like global issues, writing, interviewing, internships, and cultural diversity."

In the course, students must choose a short experience that informs their project—the problem they want to help solve—and also highlights the importance of having experiences in the learning processes, says O'Neil. Students are also required to have a draft of their final paper reviewed by a professional in the field, and then they must share the feedback with Capstone faculty and incorporate it as appropriate into the final paper.

The Cornerstone and Capstone courses complement each other, with the Cornerstone laying groundwork with broad interdisciplinary perspectives and the Capstone completing the degree program with work focused on a specific discipline. "The Cornerstone and Capstone are meant to serve as bookends to a student's Excelsior experience," says Berkery. ■ – M.S.

Excelsior Welcomes New Members to Board of Trustees



In January 2020, four new members joined the Excelsior Board of Trustees: Kent Clark, president and chair of the board of Clark Advisory Group and former CEO of AMVETS National Service Foundation; Jennifer Gentry, chief nursing executive, Providence Portland Medical Center; Karen Kocher, global general manager, skills and employability, 21st Century Jobs; and Quintessa Miller, a plastic surgeon practicing at Fort Walton Beach Hospital NWF Multispecialty Physicians LLC.

A military veteran, **Kent Clark** is certified in board and advisory work in cybersecurity, governance, finance, audit, strategic planning, and development for nonprofit and for-profit organizations. Prior to joining AMVETS, he was chief appropriations advisor and national security director for the office of U.S. Rep. C.W. Bill Young. Clark is the non-executive director of the National Association of Nonprofit Organizations and Executives and is the past national commander general in the Military Order of Foreign Wars. Clark earned a Master of Arts in Public Policy Management from Georgetown University. He earned a Bachelor of Arts in Liberal Arts from Regents College in 2000, after receiving an Associate of Arts in Industrial Technology and Business from Pierce College.

In her role as chief nursing executive, **Jennifer Gentry** is responsible for nursing strategic plans, quality outcomes, and caregiver wellness across the Providence Portland Medical Center facility. Previous to her current role, Gentry worked for Christus Spohn Healthcare System based in Corpus

Christi, Texas, from 2012 to 2017, as a nurse manager, director of nursing operations, regional chief nursing officer, and chief nursing officer. Gentry is also an instructional faculty member and clinical examiner for Excelsior's associate degree in nursing program. She is a member of several organizations, including the American Nurses Association, Texas Nurses Association, and Del Mar College Nursing Advisory Board. A three-time graduate of Excelsior College, Gentry earned an associate bachelor's, and master's degree in nursing, in 2004, 2011, and 2015, respectively. She received her practical nursing education from Coastal Carolina Community College.

Karen Kocher has held senior human resources, health care, and sales leadership roles in insurance, information technology, consulting, and business outsourcing across the United States, Europe, and Asia. Prior to her current position, she was the chief learning officer and talent executive for Cigna Corporation; the global content executive, Software Division at IBM; and vice president/P&L leader at New England Learning Services Business for IKON Office Solutions. She is a member of six boards, including the Glint Advisory Council, Jobs for America's Graduates, and UpSkill America's Business Champions. She has received many awards, including the Women Super Achiever Award, a Global HR Excellence Award, 2015. Kocher has been featured in several publications, is the contributing author of three published works, and has earned the Chartered Property Casualty Underwriter

↑ Trustees new to the board are (left to right) Kent Clark, Jennifer Gentry, Karen Kocher, and Quintessa Miller.

(CPCU) designation. She earned a Bachelor of Arts in Political Strategy and Communications from DePaul University.

A highly decorated member of the Air Force, having achieved the rank of colonel, **Quintessa Miller** has served as commander for the 96th Surgical Operations Squadron. In addition to practicing at Fort Walton Beach Hospital NWF Multispecialty Physicians LLC, she is a staff plastic surgeon at Eglin Hospital, Eglin Air Force Base. Her areas of specialty include breast reconstruction, massive weight loss surgeries, wound care, body contouring, facial cosmetic surgery, Mohs reconstruction, generalized reconstruction, and injectables. Miller is board certified by the American Board of Plastic Surgery. She is a fellow of the American College of Surgeons and a member of the American Society of Plastic Surgeons, the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery, and the Florida Medical Association. Miller's honors include the Surgeon General's Award for Best Scientific Paper Presented in Plastic Surgery by The Society of Air Force Clinical Surgeons 50th Annual Meeting, the Paul W. Myers Award for Excellence in Resident Research Competition Award, and the Air Force Achievement Medal, among others. She earned an associate degree in mathematics from El Camino College, a bachelor's degree in mathematics from the U.S. Air Force Academy, and a medical degree from the Morehouse School of Medicine. ■ – J.K.

You're More Creative Than You Think

HOW EMBRACING YOUR INNATE CREATIVITY COULD BE JUST THE LIFT YOU NEED By Caitlin Abram

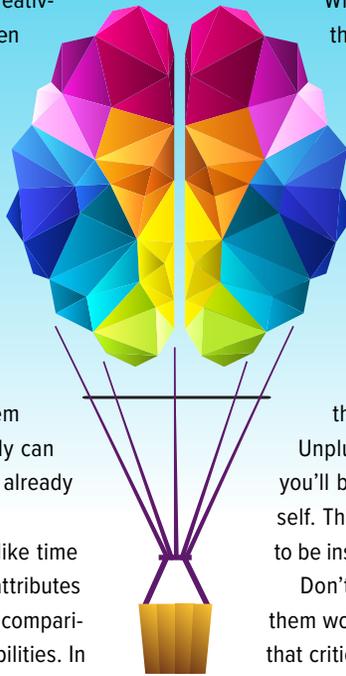
For all its artsy, free-flowing connotations, “creativity” can be a little intimidating, especially when it comes to the workplace. In recent years, it’s become hard not to notice the word has grown into a trendy, business world, catch-all concept with experts touting the “creative economy,” “creative consultants” popping up all over the place, and people increasingly titling themselves “a creative” on their resumes.

Creative thinking and fostering a creative office atmosphere are becoming increasingly valued in the workplace—and for good reason. Creativity fuels innovation, innovation solves problems, and problem solving is a skill highly prized by employers. Not only can creativity help you be more successful at the job you already have, it can help you land that dream job as well.

Creativity is considered a “soft skill.” Soft skills, like time management, flexibility, and empathy, are personal attributes that relate to how well you work with other people. In comparison, hard skills are learned, measurable, technical abilities. In early 2019, the professional networking site LinkedIn looked at thousands of job postings and ranked the most sought-after hard and soft skills employers were seeking. Predictably, “cloud computing” and “artificial intelligence” were the top-rated hard skills, but the most in-demand soft skill was something a little more human: creativity!

Creativity is often mistakenly equated with having an artistic talent, like design or music, so you could be forgiven for thinking that calling yourself a creative person is a privilege reserved for those who work in offices with free soda, neon furniture, and scooters in the hallways. The truth is, you can be a creative thinker no matter what field you work in or the color of your office. Productive creativity is agile, resourceful, persistent, and not afraid of the unconventional. Does that sound like you? Then you’re probably more creative than you think. While we’re all born with an innate imagination and curiosity, that doesn’t mean that creativity doesn’t take a little work, especially for those of us who haven’t been challenged to think creatively before.

So how do you “do” creativity? It’s possible to practice and strengthen your creativity just like you would with any other skill.



While it may seem counterintuitive, creativity can actually thrive with a little structure. Putting constraints, either real or imaginary, around your brainstorming sessions forces you to find different solutions to problems and approach even ordinary tasks in new ways. A good way to get started is to run some thought experiments. For example, imagine you had \$100,000 to spend on improvements to your company. How would you spend it? Or, try taking an everyday object and thinking of a new way to use it. If you’ve ever seen a child play, they’ll spin random games and stories out of seemingly nothing. They’ll forget about the new toy and instead play with the box it came in. Unplug and let yourself be bored, with no distractions, and you’ll be surprised at what you can come up with all by yourself. Think like a kid again and use what’s already around you to be inspired.

Don’t expect every idea to be great. In fact, expect a lot of them won’t be, but remember that nothing kills creativity faster than criticism. So, if you’re trying to think more open-endedly or are encouraging others to do the same, allow for some safe, “no comment” space to throw out ideas. There will be time to pick out the best bits and delve into details later, so keep things judgment-free to give your creativity space to roam unencumbered.

Everyone works differently, but in general, creativity doesn’t like a vacuum. Talking to and working with a variety of people with different perspectives encourages sharing and idea creation. If you’re leading a team, the more diversity present usually makes for a more creative group. Find a trusted colleague or friend to bounce ideas off of and you’ll be surprised what a difference a second or third pair of eyes and ears makes.

Still feeling stuck? Take a break and do something else that allows your mind to wander. Take a walk, get out of your chair, doodle. Take up a hobby outside of work and try something completely different than what you’re used to. If you work with your hands, try something that involves being still and exercising your imagination. If you sit at a computer all day, try something active. After all, sometimes your most creative ideas can happen when you least expect them to. ■

Caitlin Abram brings creativity to her writing as marketing coordinator at Excelsior College.

Scott Dolan

Dean,
School of Graduate Studies



Scott Dolan was named dean of the School of Graduate Studies in May 2019, after serving as associate dean of graduate studies. He joined Excelsior College in 2014 as director of assessment and program evaluation for all the degree programs in the former School of Business & Technology and was promoted to roles of increasing responsibility within the school, including associate dean for business. PHOTO: MIKE HEMBERGER

How is graduate education changing? It is pretty clear to me that the demand for graduate education is increasing, and I expect that to continue into the future. Data shows that a graduate education is a real differentiator. Only about 10 percent of people in the United States under the age of 29 have a master's degree or higher, while nearly 20 percent of all jobs posted over the past year require a graduate or professional degree. This means a graduate degree is a distinction with great potential value and can unlock opportunities to well-paying careers.

How is Excelsior responding to challenges in graduate education? First and foremost, we are developing our academic programs to meet the needs of our students and the mission of the College. We are focusing on increasing the access to and affordability of a graduate education. This means we need to continue to price our graduate programs competitively. This will allow us to serve our diverse student population, prepare them to be leaders in their field, and unlock opportunities to great careers. Education remains one of the key drivers of economic mobility, and in a society with increasing economic inequality, we are striving to be part of the solution.

Second, we are focusing on our strengths, which is meeting students where they are by leveraging our fully online delivery model. This gives us a significant competitive advantage over other institutions, which are often averse or wary of online education despite the increasing demand for it.

Third, we are committed to being agile and innovative. We know we need to invest more fully in different types of educational offerings, including certificates, badges, and non-credit offerings. We will be developing smaller “chunks” of learning to meet the demand of the market and our students, and we will look for ways to stack them into and on top of our full master's degrees. Building smaller components of learning aligns with our innovative mindset and allows us to be more nimble and take some risks in adapting

to emerging markets without assuming all of the costs associated with full program development.

And finally, we will provide students with co- and extracurricular learning opportunities through internships—both virtual and on the ground—and through student and professional associations. Our graduate students are career-oriented and are either looking for skills that can help them advance within their current career or are looking to change their career. Internships provide experiential learning opportunities, where they can take what they have learned in our courses and apply that learning to the context of tasks and jobs in the field. With our student associations, we are trying to build community with students, expose them to emerging trends within the profession, and help them to build their peer networks. From the literature, we know this impacts their success while in the program, but we also think these opportunities expand their professional networks and allow them to develop their professional identity and presence.

Taken as a whole, we are really trying to think of ways to develop programs that mirror the changes in the field itself.

What about the graduate programs sets up students for success in their careers and future endeavors? Graduate programs are designed to help people assume positions of leadership in their fields. This means we are developing people to take their discipline forward and to operate at the forefront of their field. The problems and issues that we face in the world today simply cannot be solved without an open, agile coordination across sectors and disciplines. The world needs people who are comfortable with complexity, can think broadly, and work collaboratively to seek innovative solutions. And because the nature of work itself is dynamic and changing rapidly, the world needs people who are learning continuously. An advanced education shows a student is willing to adapt with the changes around them and will invest in themselves to be successful into the future.

What skills can a student expect to gain from the graduate experience? We expect our master's-level graduates to assume leadership positions, which will require them to communicate with and influence diverse sets of stakeholders, think critically and analytically, and make strategic, evidence-based, and ethically appropriate decisions. We want our students to graduate fully equipped to be highly ethical and effective leaders in their organizations and in their fields. Our work infusing these competencies into our program is really starting with our 6-credit interdisciplinary core but will evolve as we redevelop the curriculum for each of our programs.

You've said that graduate school changes a person. How did your graduate school experience change you? It changed me in some really profound ways. It taught me that there is a community of people who are committed to searching for answers and truth, and that this community of people has mechanisms to hold each other accountable for our perspectives and statements about the world. This is no small statement, especially in a world where fact and truth are often questioned publicly.

It also taught me that searching for answers requires you to be a good critical thinker and analyst. To me, this means that you need to know how to ask good questions, and to learn that there are methods and processes for gathering information that can help you answer questions. It taught me that I also need to understand the limits of my own views, and to be courageous enough to question my own assumptions. Graduate education taught me that my world or personal orbit was small. It opened me up to a universe of new ideas and ways of looking at the world, which really makes me appreciate the diversity of worldviews. And finally, it provided me with a network of colleagues and friends who I still engage with today, albeit in different ways, but it gave me the support of a network of people who I can call on as needed. ■

3+1 = MOR

PARTNERSHIPS
WITH COMMUNITY
COLLEGES RESULT IN
MORE AFFORDABLE
BACHELOR'S
DEGREES

BY CAITLIN ABRAM

Two years at a community college, then transfer to a four-year school. It's a well-worn formula that has become a standard path for budget-conscious learners and the first choice for a growing number of students who see the value in the small class sizes, flexible schedules, and low tuition at their local community college.

For many students, however—especially non-traditional students—the decision to transfer to a four-year school comes with its own challenges. Will they be able to afford tuition? Will they be able to apply all their credits to the bachelor's program they choose? Will they be able to work a longer commute and different class schedule around a job and family?

Excel­sior College recognizes that although many students leaving community college want to continue on to earn their bachelor's degree, they face significant obstacles in making the transition to a traditional, four-year school. Seeing an opportunity to work with community colleges and extend its mission of educational opportunity for all, Excelsior developed the 3+1 Bachelor's Completion Program in 1990. Providing a unique pathway to earn a bachelor's degree, the 3+1 program lets students earn credit at their community college for an additional year after earning their associate degree and then, in consultation with Excelsior's academic advisors, seamlessly transfer into one

of Excelsior's bachelor's degree programs to earn the remaining 30 credits toward their degree. The 3+1 program benefits are available to students from any accredited community college nationwide, regardless of whether the institution has a partnership with Excelsior College, although students from partner schools also receive special pricing.

SUNY Broome Community College located in Binghamton, New York, has been an Excelsior partner for nearly three decades and its president, Kevin Drumm, has seen firsthand how the program benefits students. His college has been a partner of Excelsior's since the program's inception and is one of its most robust supporters. "We've had many students through the years tell us that they wish they could stay at

SUNY Broome to earn their bachelor's degree. Partnerships like the one we enjoy with Excelsior College makes this possible," he says.

By allowing students to earn more credit at the community college level, the 3+1 program is a substantially more affordable way to complete a bachelor's degree compared with the cost of two years at a traditional four-year school. Excelsior's online degree programs are an added benefit to students looking for flexibility. Drumm encourages SUNY Broome students, especially those working while in school, to consider the 3+1 program. "While most students choose Broome for our strong academic programs, many also choose SUNY Broome for the cost savings," says Drumm. "Excelsior continues this affordability dynamic upon transfer. Add in Excelsior's common-sense approach to transferring credits, and a student just can't lose. You get a great education at low cost... We know that our online partner colleges, such as Excelsior, play an important role in making higher education accessible to all. Without online options, these students may find it very difficult to continue their education to the bachelor's level and beyond."

A key benefit of the program is that Excelsior offers students transfer guides and the opportunity to work with an admissions counselor during their final year at their community college to devise a course plan that makes the best use of their time and credit. These transfer guides ensure students take only the courses they need to earn a bachelor's degree, which in turn means even greater cost savings and a stress-free transfer into the Excelsior College bachelor's degree program of their choice.

Columbia Greene Community College, in Hudson, New York, is another early adopter of the 3+1 program and Bill Mathews, professor and department chairperson of advising, has seen the benefits the program has had for the college's students. "It [the 3+1 program] provides an amazing opportunity for our students to receive their bachelor's degree while remaining at Columbia-Greene for extra credits beyond their associate degree. The partnership provides clearly stated degree requirements, professional advisement, and tremendous cost savings for our students," he says. Columbia Greene's most popular 3+1 degree path is the nursing program, Mathews reports, noting



that the online classes are an added incentive for students balancing work and family. “Excelsior provides flexibility, which is greatly needed and appreciated by the busy working adult student,” he adds.

As of 2019, the Kentucky Community & Technical College System is Excelsior’s newest partner and was specifically attracted to the partnership because of the 3+1 program, reports Lisa Romano-Arnold, Excelsior’s regional director of government and workforce partnerships. “KCTCS makes every effort to create lifelong learning opportunities for our graduates, staff, and faculty. Our new partnership will provide additional access to higher education to help [them] achieve their educational goals of advancing their degrees, advancing their careers, and improving their lives,” says Harmony Little, career pathways director at KCTCS.

In addition to helping students on the path toward their degree, Excelsior’s 3+1 program supports the mission of community colleges and the vital educational opportunities they provide to communities all across the United States. Broome Community College books approximately \$200,000 of tuition and fee revenue annually from the program based on current fall 2019 data and projected spring 2020 enrollment figures. Drumm reports, “Of the current 47 students enrolled in our bachelor’s partnership program, 45 have earned their associate degree at the college—which is, statistically speaking, a completion rate of more than 95 percent. That’s an extraordinary student success rate matched only by the top universities and

📌 From Eastern Europe to the Empire State, Elena Honovich makes a seamless transition to her bachelor’s degree with Excelsior’s 3+1 program. PHOTO: SARA FORBES - SUNY BROOME PHOTOGRAPHER

colleges in the nation. How could they not be satisfied alumni with success at that level!”

Elena Honovich is one SUNY Broome graduate making the most of the 3+1 program. Originally from Moldova, an Eastern European country located between Romania and Ukraine, Honovich moved to the United States in 2012 and is the owner of a restaurant in Endicott, New York. After she observed one of her employees succeed in earning degrees at both SUNY Broome and Excelsior College, Honovich enrolled at the community college in 2017, earning an associate degree in homeland security in 2018.

Through consultation with a transfer counselor at SUNY Broome, Honovich chose to pursue the 3+1 program with Excelsior College. “I met with [a counselor] and spoke with her and told her what I wanted to do, and she told me this would be a great opportunity for me because I didn’t want to move out of the area. I own a restaurant full-time. I work and study and manage a lot of different businesses. She suggested the Excelsior program because it’s online and I could do it on my time,” Honovich says, mentioning another advantage was the ability to stay longer at the SUNY Broome campus. “While looking at the program, I saw a lot of courses I could take while still on the campus at SUNY Broome. So, I reregistered for another year

“I take 8-week courses and that’s allowed me to finish up my degree in a year. I started in January and I’m done now in December as opposed to being in school for another two full years, so that’s a great benefit.” –Elena Honovich

and got another associate degree in individual studies, and I am now taking my last two courses at Excelsior.”

Honovich was able to transfer 68.5 credits to Excelsior College using the 3+1 program and plans to graduate with a bachelor’s degree in criminal justice with a concentration in investigative forensics in 2020. The flexible course schedule was one reason she was able to finish her degree faster than she expected. “I’m taking compressed courses, so instead of 15-week courses, I take 8-week courses and that’s allowed me to finish up my degree in a year. I started in January and I’m done now in December as opposed to being in school for another two full years, so that’s a great benefit,” she says.

She plans on eventually pursuing a career in the federal government, a professional path she feels will make the most of her passion for criminal justice and her unique linguistic skills. “I could have applied with my associate degree to be in the local police department, but I wanted to aim higher. Plus, I know a couple diverse languages, so all my professors kept telling me I should aim for the U.S. Marshals or the FBI,” says Honovich.

Honovich is just one of many students who took advantage of the 3+1 program to complete coursework for a bachelor’s degree in 2019. Excelsior anticipates the program growing exponentially into the future as more students seeking to complete their degrees with minimal debt see its benefits. ■

Editor’s note: To find out more about the Excelsior College 3+1 Degree Completion Program, visit <https://www.excelsior.edu/partners/academic/>.

HOW THE 3+1 PROGRAM WORKS

After earning an associate degree, community college students can seamlessly transfer to Excelsior College to pursue a bachelor’s degree in business, health sciences, liberal arts, nursing, public service, or technology. By taking up to an additional 30 credits at their community college and the remaining credits at Excelsior College, students can save on the overall cost of their bachelor’s degree.

There are four easy steps:

1

Students earn an associate degree at a community college (usually 60 credits).

2

Students talk with an Excelsior College admissions counselor to determine credit requirements for their program of interest.

3

Students start on their bachelor’s degree by taking additional courses – up to 30 credits – at the community college, at the community college’s tuition rates.

4

Students earn a minimum of 30 upper-level credits with Excelsior College via online courses, independent study for credit by exam, or a mix of both options.



CAREER TOOLS

GENERAL EDUCATION CAREER COMPETENCIES PREPARE

STUDENTS FOR THE FUTURE OF WORK

BY ANDRE FOISY

“[The Liberal Arts] system has striking advantages, preparing students for their multiple future roles in a much more adequate way than a narrow single-subject system.”

– Martha C. Nussbaum, Distinguished Professor of Law and Ethics, University of Chicago

Many adults go back to college to gain the knowledge and skills that will help them advance in their current career or start a new one. As students engage in their program of study at Excelsior College, requirements in the majors focus on helping students acquire the career-specific skills necessary to work in a chosen profession.

Career-specific skills, however, are no longer enough for working professionals.

To meet the needs of a rapidly changing workplace, professionals today are required to constantly update their skills and adapt to a changing landscape. To ensure graduates are prepared for the future of work, Excelsior College community members, including faculty, academic support staff, and students, developed general education career competencies. These competencies define cross-cutting skills in areas such as communication, problem solving, and ethical reasoning. By focusing on these transferable skills, the general education curriculum ensures graduates are lifelong learners positioned to meet the needs of a constantly changing workplace and environment.

There is uncertainty among employees and employers about what the future of work will look like, but the increased use of automation technology will continually impact the workforce. Jobs will not disappear but will instead shift, requiring workers

to possess new sets of skills. In “The New Division of Labor: How Computers are Creating the Next Job Market,” authors Frank Levy and Richard J. Murnane argue that workers of the future will need to be able to quickly process new information, solve unstructured problems, or perform non-routine manual tasks. The general education career competencies will help prepare learners to meet these kinds of challenges.

The general education career competencies encompass seven areas: oral and written communication; mathematical and scientific problem solving; information literacy; cultural diversity and expression; global understanding; ethical reasoning; and professional presence and self-awareness. These areas reflect the most important soft skills employers seek in employees. In an article in *Nurse Education Today*, Andrew McKrie, faculty of nursing and midwifery at Robert Gordon University, emphasizes the importance of this foundational learning for nurses, stating that this liberal arts curriculum “can influence student nurses’ sense of discernment, enhance their own responsibility for learning, support ethical regard for others, provide different perspectives on human experience and contribute to a balanced curriculum.” Today’s graduates — regardless of their area of study — need career-specific skills to enter the workplace and transferable skills to adapt to change and uncertainty in their professions and lives.

Increasingly, these foundational skills are incorporated into coursework at Excelsior College. Written communication



EXCELSIOR'S GENERAL EDUCATION CAREER COMPETENCIES

According to employers, career-specific skills (hard skills) are no longer enough for long-term success. Research indicates that cross-cutting skills in areas such as communication, problem solving, and ethical reasoning (soft skills) are necessary for career entry and advancement.

To best prepare students to excel in their careers and lives, Excelsior College has developed general education career competencies based on findings from employer-based research. These competencies are the foundation of the curricula in both undergraduate and graduate programs. Students encounter these competencies by meeting the requirements for general education and their program of study.

ORAL AND WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

Communication serves many purposes in the workplace and in society – to inform, persuade, argue, educate, and entertain. The competencies in this area will help students speak and write effectively for a variety of audiences, use communication technologies appropriately, and apply the standard conventions of the context they are in.

Related skills: Oral presentation, technical writing, interpersonal communication, argumentative analysis, social media, conflict resolution, executive summaries, etc.

MATHEMATICAL AND SCIENTIFIC PROBLEM SOLVING

To advance and succeed in an increasingly complex workplace, professionals require stronger quantitative and scientific reasoning skills than ever before. The curricula helps students develop the ingenuity, problem solving, scientific, and quantitative reasoning skills needed to succeed in the 21st century.

Related skills: Data evaluation, graph and chart analysis and creation, scientific reasoning, logic, critical thinking, big data, inference and prediction, etc.

INFORMATION LITERACY

Everyone interacts with information daily, via websites, newspaper articles, television, social media, business communication, or scholarly writing. As students engage in their program of study, they learn to be a discerning and effective information consumer, communicator, and creator who can use information in an effective, ethical, and legal manner.

Related skills: Scholarly research, legal information use, evidence review, understanding bias and perspective, resource gathering, source analysis and evaluation, etc.

CULTURAL DIVERSITY AND EXPRESSION

This competency helps students develop a grounded understanding of the human condition and an appreciation of the variety of forms of human expression. In addition, this competency promotes a respect for cultural diversity, a desire for equity, and an awareness of social identity, for example, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, social class, religion, ability, and national origin.

Related skills: Cultural fluency, cross-cultural sensitivity, multicultural team building, emotional intelligence, inclusive communication, self-awareness, mindfulness, etc.

GLOBAL UNDERSTANDING

To be effective thinkers and communicators, workers today need an understanding of the global forces that have shaped and continue to shape human behavior and interactions. Through this competency, students develop a better understanding of their own community and of complex and diverse global communities.

Related skills: International leadership, global civic engagement, international business communication and etiquette, cross-cultural sensitivity, contextualization, historical analysis, etc.

ETHICAL REASONING

Employers need workers who can find innovative, ethical, and practical solutions to a wide variety of problems. Through this competency, students learn to reflect and analyze positions and issues from a variety of ethical perspectives.

Related skills: Ethical leadership, integrity, understanding and addressing bias, familiarity with legal and ethical guidelines, recognizing and upholding personal morals, comfort with ambiguity, etc.

PROFESSIONAL PRESENCE AND SELF-AWARENESS

Successful workers are not only proficient in their roles, but also aware of their own strengths and interests, and able to exhibit the behaviors consistent with the rules, norms, and expectations of a professional setting. Surveys of employers confirm that professional presence and self-awareness are important competencies in the people they hire.

Related skills: Career management, ePortfolio creation and management, understanding job market trends, professional growth, short-term and long-term goal setting, personal branding, digital reputation management, business etiquette, emotional intelligence, etc.

– J.K.

skills, for instance, are embedded across the Excelsior curriculum, including in the core requirements for a major. However, it is not possible for courses in the majors to cover all of the necessary foundational skills when the specialized abilities needed by students to enter and advance in these professions keeps increasing. By directly exposing students to these intellectually demanding competencies, students will be able to better learn them. By integrating these requirements in a way that complements majors, Excelsior faculty members will be able to best prepare students to transfer their knowledge across courses and to their future careers.

FOCUS ON PROFESSIONAL PRESENCE AND SELF-AWARENESS

One unique component of the new competencies is the focus on professional presence and self-awareness. Surveys of employers confirm these traits are important in the people they hire. For instance, Hart Research Associates conducts a survey for the American Association of Colleges and Universities on the extent to which graduates are prepared on key skills and abilities. In the 2018 survey, skills associated with professional presence and self-awareness were identified as some of the most important traits sought by employers.

Excelsior community members defined two specific competencies in the professional presence and self-awareness category that are most appropriate for our working adult students. One competency requires students to articulate the norms and conventions of their ideal career field. By requiring students to explain and reflect on these norms, the curriculum is designed to prepare them with the skills and attitudes needed for success in their specific fields. The other competency requires students to develop a career planning strategy that incorporates their strengths, interests, abilities, and values. Through creating individual strategies, students identify the next step in their development as professionals. The revised curriculum also makes students aware of the resources available to assist them on their journey.

COMPETENCIES PRESENT FROM THE START

Undergraduate students will first encounter the general education career competencies in a new component of the curriculum—the Cornerstone course. The Cornerstone is an opportunity for students to chart their career trajectory and to reflect on their mindsets and ambitions. The course was created to help students begin with a strong start as online learners at Excelsior College, and it positions students to be lifelong learners, critical thinkers, and problem solvers. Throughout the course, students learn through responding to questions without a clear right or wrong answer. Through engaging with

these questions, students challenge their prior assumptions, consider society’s future dilemmas, and propose solutions to complex problems.

The Cornerstone is oriented thematically around questions about the future, says Mary Berkery, faculty program director for the Cornerstone course. “As part of that focus, the course looks at how the skills learned through general education prepare students for their academic and career futures and can positively impact society, she says. For example, one discussion asks students to consider the future value of higher education and the necessity of teaching concepts like cultural expression and global understanding.”

Once undergraduate students complete the Cornerstone course, they continue into other courses aligned with the general education career competencies and discipline-specific learning outcomes.

At the graduate level, there are nine competency areas incorporated into all programs and these competencies are steeped in general education. “We expect students to focus on their: 1) ethical decision-making; 2) ability to lead and influence; 3) oral and written communication; 4) strategic and analytical thinking; 5) technological literacy and aptitude; 6) innovativeness and entrepreneurial spirit; 7) professional-identity and presence; 8) financial acumen; and 9) awareness of global diversity and inclusion,” says Scott Dolan, dean of the School of Graduate Studies.

Near the end of their undergraduate or graduate studies, students complete a capstone experience. Capstones require students to apply their learning from earlier in their studies or lives. Students demonstrate their mastery of program learning goals and general education career competencies through the integration of what they have learned. Capstone experiences vary by program. In some programs, Capstones involve research projects requiring students to draw upon key skills related to critical thinking, oral and written communication, information literacy, and professional presence and self-awareness. In other programs, Capstones may consist of clinical experiences, requiring them to demonstrate clinical, technological, inter- and intra-personal communication skills, and the ability to integrate professional standards in this work. Regardless of the type of experience, Capstones are intended to foster deep learning and skill mastery.

Both the Cornerstone course and Capstone experiences provide students with the opportunities to engage in deep learning. The mix of general education and program-specific curriculum helps to ensure each of Excelsior’s academic programs effectively prepares students for career entry and advancement in a rapidly changing environment. ■

Andre Foisy is the executive director of institutional outcomes assessment at Excelsior College and president-elect of the Association for the Assessment of Learning in Higher Education.



A Step Ahead

INTERNSHIP
COURSE
EQUIPS
STUDENTS
TO MOVE
FORWARD IN
THEIR CAREERS

BY JENNA KERWIN



At Excelsior College, virtual and in-person internships are a way for adult students to build on their education as well as to gain experience in the workplace and explore different career opportunities. Internships can even — as they have in some instances — serve as a stepping stone into new jobs.

Excelsior's internship program, the undergraduate course INT 400, officially began in fall 2018 with the first cohort of four students taking part in virtual internships, but the idea for an internship program started long before. Will Trevor, faculty program director for undergraduate business programs and chair of the internship committee, says the idea predates him joining the college in 2016, but he took the lead turning the idea into reality. In early 2018, Trevor and a committee of other faculty program directors and subject matter experts developed the course, making sure its curriculum followed the National Association of Colleges and Employer's career competencies, which include critical thinking, collaboration, professionalism, and communication, among others, that help ensure career readiness.

After the successful pilot, the INT 400 course was made available over 15 weeks in the Fall I, Spring I, and Summer I trimesters. Students enrolled in the course are required to find their own internship and complete 135 hours of work during the trimester, including various academic and career-relevant activities. The interns also complete a final project relevant to their placement organization. Successful students gain 3 credits toward their degree, which is applied as elective credit. Currently, the internship is limited to students at the bachelor's level, but a pilot may be in store for the graduate level. "The INT 400 Internship with Excelsior College is a powerful way for a student to boost their resume with an experience that adds value to their career," Trevor says, "You can show a potential employer that you do have experience already."



The students in the fall 2018 inaugural group took part in four virtual internships; three students were placed at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in Vienna, Austria, and the fourth student worked as a social media intern at Excelsior College. Despite some challenges, such as time zone differences, all the students expressed satisfaction that the internship had provided a useful and valuable experience. The first cohort was so successful that a subsequent survey was sent to undergraduate students about their interest in the internship course. More than 800 students expressed interest in taking part in the program. Some of the successful interns from the fall 2018 and spring 2019 trimester cohorts include Ginger Hamblin, Patricia Dugger, Angela Cheek, and Tara Beers.

GINGER HAMBLIN USES HER INTERNSHIP TO GAIN EMPLOYMENT



Ginger Hamblin, of Fort Hood, Texas, is pursuing her liberal arts degree with an emphasis in professional and technical writing with Excelsior. After taking a few years out of work to take care for her sons with special needs, Hamblin decided it was time to head back into the workforce, and knew she needed some experience along with a degree. That’s when she decided a virtual internship with Excelsior would fit in with her plans.

Hamblin enjoys writing papers, generating documentation, and exploring new technologies; she says it lets her explore her creativity. So, it was only fitting that she found an internship where she could practice her writing abilities and develop new technical skills. After registering for INT 400 and expressing interest in interning with someone at Excelsior, she was placed with Frank Crocco, then the director of the Excelsior Online Writing Lab (OWL). The OWL contains a variety of interactive multimedia activities, quizzes, videos, interactive PDFs, and games designed to help writers understand important concepts about writing.

During the three-month internship, Hamblin wrote posts for the OWL’s blog, “Hoot,” created infographics, and developed posts for the OWL’s Facebook page. Crocco reviewed

and edited her work, and with the aid of other Excelsior staff working on the OWL, she learned how to use the WordPress platform and Canva, an online graphic design tool website. Hamblin says the experience working on the OWL was enjoyable and beneficial because she was “able to create what I wanted to create, and then got the feedback on how it could be improved, so that I can improve my skill.” She adds that, “I don’t think any experience is good or bad, it’s just what you make of it, and I took what I could from it.”

Hamblin used her experience interning with the OWL to apply for other internship opportunities. She says she included the Excelsior internship experience on her resume and posted it on LinkedIn to show potential employers that she is able to work virtually, independently, and can succeed without being micromanaged. She soon came across GenM, a company that matches candidates with virtual apprenticeships. She was matched with two businesses: one with a naturopathic doctor in Ottawa, Canada, and the other with an entrepreneur in Bainbridge Island, Washington.

Hamblin interned with the entrepreneur in Bainbridge Island, helping the businesswoman secure funding for a patent-pending product she was developing. Hamblin maintained the small company’s Instagram and Facebook accounts, wrote blog posts, and helped develop media kits. She also reached out to key influencers and donors to ask for their collaboration and donations. The best part, says Hamblin, was that before finishing the internship, she was offered a job with the company. “If I hadn’t done that [Excelsior] internship, I wouldn’t be where I’m at right now. So, I’m super happy,” she says.

PATRICIA DUGGER GAINS REAL-WORLD EXPERIENCE FROM HER INTERNSHIP



Patricia Dugger, of Havre de Grace, Maryland, is the coordinator of the fitness and wellness center on the Dundalk campus of the Community College of Baltimore County. She enjoys helping people and has an associate degree in general studies, focused in English and Psychology, from Harford Community

College in Bel Air, Maryland. Dugger decided, however, that she needed to return to school to make a change from her current career. “My passion is in mental health. Entering this field would require specialized training that, unfortunately, would require me to come back to school so that I could actually do a complete and total career change,” she says. Dugger says she was interested in an internship because it would give her an inside look at the mental health field before she made a final decision about switching careers.

Dugger did not complete a virtual internship; rather, she was one of Trevor’s first students to complete an in-person internship. Trevor says Dugger’s internship was an important milestone in the internship program because it meant that INT 400 was flexible and customizable enough for students who wanted either a virtual or real-life experience. It could be applied to students with different lifestyles, in different parts of the country or world, and looking to fulfill specific needs.

Dugger searched websites for interning opportunities with rehabilitation and mental health facilities in her area and after several possibilities fell through, Dugger landed an internship with Key Point Health Services based out of Aberdeen. The organization is a private, non-profit mental health care facility providing treatment for a wide range of psychiatric and psychological health concerns. Computer training, counseling, academics, domestic, janitorial, ceramic, clerical, and physical education classes are offered in the psychiatric rehabilitation programs, geared toward people transitioning from the hospital back to the community.

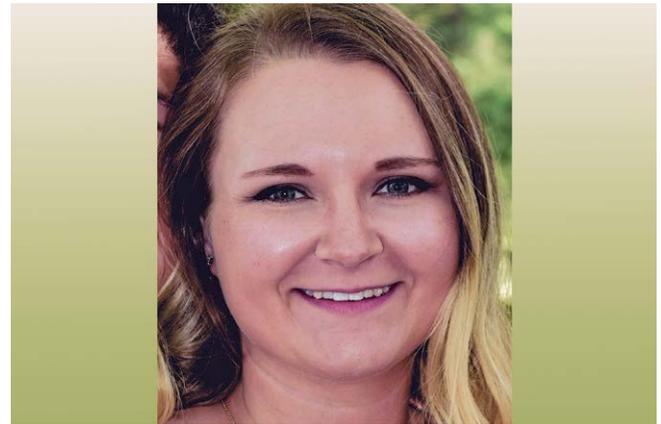
Dugger says “What you put into your internship is what you’re going to get out. If you don’t go in with a positive attitude...you’re not going to get anything out of it. You have to actually do the work.” As for her, Dugger gained valuable experience working directly with people with mental health issues. She assisted with Key Point Health Service’s daily operations, but also helped the rehabilitation counselor in the rehabilitation programs by passing out papers and reading parts of the day’s lesson. She even filled in for a counselor one day and taught a lesson on effective communication.

As the final project part of the INT 400 course, Dugger focused her research and work around sound therapy. In sound therapy, or sound healing as it is often called, sounds produced by the human voice, music, or other special instruments are used to help improve brain wave functions. Dugger focused her project on how music can be used to treat mental health disorders. After researching, designing, and selecting appropriate music, Dugger conducted a sound therapy session for clients in an adult psychiatric rehabilitation program. Dugger gave an overview prior to starting and provided art supplies, including paper, color markers, and color pencils, to those who wished to draw while listening for added stress reduction. The overall

objective was to reduce stress and to support treatment and recovery goals.

From her project, Dugger learned sound therapy works best in smaller settings and recommended that Key Point Health Services conduct any future sound therapy sessions in smaller rooms with a limited number of participants. Dugger was so inspired by her findings that she has decided to conduct a larger study on the topic, perhaps when she pursues her master’s degree in applied psychology at Walden University. She hopes to one day work in a therapeutic setting in crisis intervention.

ANGELA CHEEK’S INTERNSHIPS GIVE HER AN EDGE OVER THE COMPETITION



Angela Cheek, of East Moline, Illinois, is a mail carrier for the United States Postal Service, but her goal is to develop and design websites. She is pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Information Technology with Excelsior because, she says, the online format allows her to obtain a quality education while being able to balance life, work, education, and maintain a more flexible schedule. Since she enjoys Excelsior’s online course setup, Cheek thought she would pursue a virtual internship with the College. “I felt that participating in an internship would give me valuable experiences and skills that I couldn’t get anywhere else, and use them towards my future career field in information technology,” she says.

Cheek had the opportunity and the necessary amount of elective credits available to take two internships, the first in fall 2018 with the International Atomic Energy Agency in Vienna, Austria. The IAEA is an international organization that seeks to promote the peaceful use of nuclear energy, and to prevent its use for military purposes. In this internship, Cheek created a survey she then sent to nuclear program directors at universities across the United States. “Once I collected the survey results, I analyzed the data to determine what kind of nuclear programs would be the most effective,” she says. With the results, IAEA chose a nuclear program that fit its needs based on price, materials, and other data that Cheek uncovered.

Cheek's second internship took place during spring 2019 with Move the Mindset, an organization based in Louisiana whose mission is to promote social justice. Cheek worked with a member of the organization to develop a website that showcases Move the Mindset's mission, campaigns, and contributions. During the experience, Cheek learned how to use the WordPress platform, which she says was somewhat of a challenge. In the end, she says she was able to create a website that was "functional and easy for someone to make adjustments later on if need be."

"Two of the main skills I acquired from my internships are data analysis and web design and development," says Cheek, noting that these are important skills in the IT field. She says that having participated in the internships with the IAEA and with Move the Mindset has "given her an edge" over others who are going into the same career field as her.

TARA BEERS USES HER INTERNSHIP TO IMPROVE HER RESUME



KRIS OUA

In spring 2019, Tara Beers, of Gambrills, Maryland, graduated from Excelsior with a Bachelor of Science in Psychology. She is a Korean language analyst with the U.S. Navy, but in the future, she wants to be an educational psychologist. She would like to work in schools to help create a more socially and emotionally healthy environment for children, teachers, and administrators.

Originally, Beers joined the Navy because her husband was also in the Navy and his experience seemed like something she might also be interested in. A few years in, while she was pregnant and reading parenting and psychology books, Beers rediscovered a love of psychology.

"When I was little, I was always curious about what was causing people to behave certain ways... I was always curious why someone was doing that, and why someone was acting out, or why they were going out of the way for certain things," she explains. Excelsior's online bachelor's program fit in with Beers' busy schedule and was especially helpful since she has ADHD. Attending college online was a good option because there was

no requirement to be in class a certain amount of time and the format allowed her to focus on her assignments one at a time.

Beers thought a virtual internship would be a good experience; it would allow her to gain credits toward her degree and also allow her to build up her resume. "I saw it as a good opportunity to...gain skills and experiences that would help me move from the job I'm in to a job in the future that would be closer to what I want to do," she says.

During her time as an Excelsior College social media intern, Beers analyzed social media traffic and researched different methods to increase online engagement. For instance, she experimented with different blog posts, images, Facebook posts, and other content to see what resonated best with audiences. She studied the various school Facebook pages Excelsior had at the time to see whether combined pages would function better for the College. She also explored competitor institutions to see how they used social media. "My internship experience taught me the complexities of internet engagement, the positive outcomes that come from engaging others online, and helped me learn a new skill and gain connections," says Beers.

Beers hopes to use what she learned from her internship as she progresses in her career: "In the future when I change careers, I believe the internship experience and the connections I made will help me."

THE IMPORTANCE OF AN INTERNSHIP PROGRAM

Participating in an internship will have an impact on the students beyond the trimester. "You [the student] are going to develop a range of skills and competencies that will benefit you in the workplace and aid you in your career," says Trevor. He has identified five specific advantages he believes can be gained from an internship: it allows for career exploration, it's a powerful resume builder, it can be considered an extended job interview, it allows development of a professional network, and it's an opportunity to gain career-relevant skills. An internship lets students see whether they need to improve certain skills and helps them determine if a certain career is a good fit. It can also help add experience to a resume, he says.

Based on the experiences of the fall 2018 and spring 2019 cohorts, Trevor believes INT 400 has been valuable in helping students explore careers and improve their resumes, and there are plans to expand the program in the future. As evidenced by the feedback received, many students have seen much success from their internships so far. Trevor expresses enthusiasm for the program, saying that "Ultimately, the real-world experience gained from an internship will help these students stand out in a crowded employment market and enable them to smash their job searches." ■

Jenna Kerwin is a writer/editor at Excelsior College.



“I was getting credit for my work experience through Pizza Hut and the training that they did.”



SECRET TO SUCCESS:
Sticking to a schedule



BIGGEST HELP:
Daughter



NEXT PLANS:
Pursue a dual BS/MS degree



ISLAND PHOTOGRAPHY

SONYA BORDEN

Earns Her Degree Through Partnership with Pizza Hut

When Sonya Borden’s daughter graduated from college, Borden thought it was time she pursued her own college education. Borden, of Hudson, New Hampshire, is a restaurant manager for GC Pizza Hut, a franchise organization of Pizza Hut LLC. She has been with the restaurant company for 28 years, since she started as a hostess when she was 16 years old. She took advantage of Pizza Hut’s partnership with Excelsior College to earn her Associate in Applied Science in Business in 2018.

With Pizza Hut’s Life Unboxed EDU program and the company’s partnership with Excelsior, she didn’t have any excuse not to earn a degree. Through the partnership, Borden was eligible for reduced tuition and fees, which saved her money and made earning a degree more feasible. Excelsior also awards credit for certain workplace training, so Borden came in with just under 70 hours of workplace training.

The option to study independently and earn credit by exam as well as receiving credit for workplace training were the main reasons she chose to attend Excelsior. “The online and

at your own pace, the price...the fact that I was getting credit for my work experience through Pizza Hut and the training that they did, that was a big factor,” says Borden of the aspects that led her to choose Excelsior. “It really just made me decide that it was something I wanted to do.”

Borden faced some challenges when she first started the program. She had been out of school for a long time and had difficulty understanding the online format. She had help from her daughter, who was used to online learning environments, and spoke with her classmates and asked them for advice. She says, “Just having a good support system around you...it’s not easy, it’s difficult, but reach out to the resources that are offered to you; talk to an advisor, talk to some of your peers; use the things that are given to you to make it happen.”

Time management was also difficult to master, but eventually, Borden learned to stick to a schedule. She developed a routine of fitting in assignments and studying after work and on weekends. She set up parameters to prevent distractions. She says when she retired to her basement to take a test

or study, no one was allowed to bother her. She was determined to complete her degree so she could say she graduated college. She had instilled in her daughter the importance of education, so she wanted to also better herself by earning a degree.

Achieving her degree was an import milestone, one Borden encourages her coworkers to reach. She tries to inspire her younger coworkers to enroll in school and follow in her footsteps. She tells them about Excelsior’s programs and encourages them to sign up for the Life Unboxed EDU program. She thinks if they see she has successfully earned a degree, they will think they can too.

Borden is the first of her parents and siblings to earn a degree, and she says she feels accomplished to have earned it. Her original plan had been to attend college after high school, but life happened, and she thought she would never achieve that goal. Now she is happy her grandchildren can say their grandmother graduated from college. She says, “I want it to be natural, I want them to just think, you know, that’s what you do, you continue your education; that’s what you need to do.” ■ – J.K.



FREE TIME FUN:
Music and the gym



SUPPORT SYSTEM:
Mom and Dad



DREAM JOB:
Diplomat



KRIS OUA

AKILA SOORIYABANDARA Is Going Places

Logging more than 29 hours on planes, trains, and automobiles, Akila Sooriyabandara has the distinct honor of being the student who traveled the farthest to attend Excelsior’s 48th Annual Commencement Ceremony in Albany, New York, in July 2019. However, Sooriyabandara’s truly epic trip from his hometown of Kadawatha, Sri Lanka, an island country located off India’s southern coast, almost didn’t happen at all.

The 23-year-old information technology graduate had plans to bring his entire family with him to the United States but with only a few weeks to go before the big day, his VISA appointment at the U.S. Embassy was rescheduled. With time running out, Sooriyabandara was fortunately able to secure his own VISA, but his family’s paperwork did not come through in time and he was forced to make the long trip alone. Meeting up with an uncle located in Washington, DC, he made the final leg of his journey to Albany by car the day before the ceremony.

Sooriyabandara’s journey to Commencement actually started years earlier as a student at the American College in Sri Lanka

“Before this, I had never taken online courses. So this was a whole new experience for me. And it was quite challenging. But I really liked it.”

where his professors recommended he continue his education at Excelsior, which was then an educational partner of the college. Interested in computers from a young age, he knew right away he would pursue a degree in technology and enrolled in the Bachelor of Science in Information Technology program in 2016. He had never taken online classes before and was nervous about navigating the distance and time differences. “Before this, I had never taken online courses. So this was a whole new experience for me. And it was quite challenging. But I really liked it.” He ended up relishing the new connections he made with his instructors and classmates. “They have discussions, where you had to discuss everything related to your classes. I got to meet the other friends who were in my classes. It was really nice,” he says.

In addition to exploring his talent for technology with his international classmates, favorite courses like Operating Systems and Computer Systems Architecture and Human-Computer Interactive Design showed him new ways of looking at the world—an ability that will be useful as Sooriyabandara is already pursuing a postgraduate degree in diplomacy and world affairs in Sri Lanka. With future plans to work in international relations as a diplomat, Sooriyabandara’s next adventure will surely include a focus on helping those less fortunate than him. “I like to help others by giving them something, or even just seeing them happy, it’s such a feeling you can’t describe,” he says.

He credits his parents with his success so far and although they were unable to join him at Commencement, they weren’t far from his thoughts on that day.

“I especially want to thank my mom and dad for making this dream come true. They believed in me when I wasn’t even believing in myself,” he says. “So all the credit goes to my mom and dad. And I want to thank Excelsior College, because it gave me the chance to do this degree.” ■ –C.A.



“I want to be the best in my field. I want my kid and grandkids to be proud of me.”



FORMER CAREER:
Missile Technician, U.S. Navy



BUCKET LIST:
Teaching high school students



DEGREE PROGRAM:
BS in Electrical Engineering Technology

MIKE HEMBERGER

ROSENDO RAMOS

Aspires for More than Degree Completion

When Rosendo Ramos began looking for a bachelor’s program in electrical engineering technology, he knew he wanted to enroll in an ABET-accredited program. He also knew he wanted to pursue his degree online. That was two factors in Excelsior’s favor. The third factor was a nostalgic one: Excelsior was the name of a junior college in Ramos’ native Puerto Rico, so when he heard the name in reference to an online ABET-accredited program in electrical engineering, it was memorable.

Ramos, of Pittsfield, Massachusetts, is a senior systems engineer for General Dynamics, an aerospace and defense company. He joined the company in April 2014 after retiring from the U.S. Navy, where he served 13 years as a missile technician on submarines. While in the Navy, he attended the University of Central Florida part-time when stationed in Florida and began learning about ABET accreditation while working at the Naval Ordnance Test Unit at Cape Canaveral.

When he enrolled in the Bachelor of Science in Electrical Engineering Technology program in August 2017, Excelsior accepted

24 credits toward the degree. He is on track to complete his coursework for the bachelor’s degree in the spring 2020 term. “Excelsior College offers one of the finest programs in the country, and I consider myself fortunate to attend,” he says. “The program allows adults like me to continue our education with different options to accommodate work and school schedules.”

He has been able to fit coursework within his work schedule, which is typically 9-hour days with a day off every other week unless there is a project milestone to meet. That was the case recently, when he completed three consecutive days of working 6 a.m. to midnight. When the client is the U.S. government and the project is developing a replacement for the submarine now in use by the Navy, missing the milestone is not an option. “It’s part of your pride,” says Ramos. “At the same time, it’s a challenge.”

Challenges are something Ramos welcomes. He has four courses in addition to the capstone to complete, but the courses are not required for his degree. He’s taking them, he says, because it will help him determine what to focus on when he enrolls for a

master’s degree. “I would like to get some base knowledge. Degree credit I don’t need, but intellectually, I need it,” he says.

Ramos enjoys his work. He started at General Dynamics as a nuclear safety engineer analyzing software and hardware requirements to evaluate modifications to ensure compliance with the Department of Defense and safety requirements. He says his degree plan was discussed as part of his interviews, and he’s had two promotions, first to a systems tester and then to his current position. “They know that I am not an engineer yet, but because of my experience in the Navy and the courses I’m taking, they gave me a real engineering position,” says Ramos, and adds that the company has tuition reimbursement and his yearly performance evaluation includes a discussion of what he’s doing to become a better professional.

Earning a bachelor’s degree in electrical engineering technology—and then a master’s degree—is central to that plan.

“I want to be the best in my field,” says Ramos, who is the first in his family to attend college. “I want my kid and grandkids to be proud of me.” ■ –M.S.



THE REX REPORTS NEWSLETTER

To maintain open communication with alumni and students in the early years of the College, the Rex Reports newsletter—Rex for Regents External Degree Program—began in spring 1976.

In the first issue, Director Donald J. Nolan called Rex Reports an “extra effort” meant to make communication between students, faculty, and administrators more seamless. Published four times a year, the newsletter contained information about degree options,

test dates, student spotlights, alumni news, Commencement information, questions from readers, and news specific to the College.

Rex Reports lasted in its form for nearly 20 years before the inaugural issue of Live & Learn was published in winter 1995. Over time and as student communication shifted to email, Live & Learn moved from a newsletter to a printed magazine format. It began including more editorial content, like human interest stories and feature articles,

and was mailed to students and alumni. Then, in fall 2014, Live & Learn became the magazine that many are familiar with today, Excelsior College Magazine. The magazine is shared with alumni, students, and friends of the College.

Together with the Life at Excelsior College blog, the magazine keeps members of the Excelsior community informed about the people, programs, and progress of the College. ■ —J.K.



Sometimes, just knowing someone cares enough to help is all the encouragement a student needs.

“ **You are the first to take a chance on me, and I am forever grateful ... Your generosity has inspired me to help others and give back to the community.**

I hope one day I will be able to help students achieve their goals just as you have helped me.”

– 2019 scholarship recipient

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large or small—will go toward a student scholarship. Your gift helps students focus less on financial obstacles and more on learning. Our students are thankful for the financial help they receive.



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