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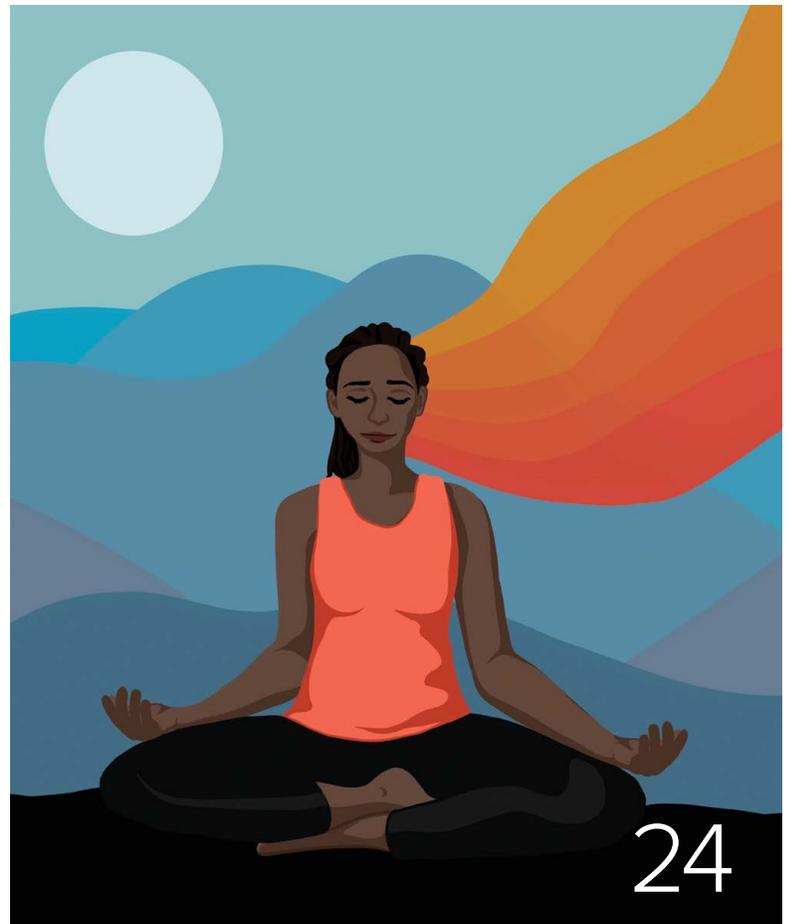
Servant Leader

Believing that his role as president is to serve the employees and students of Excelsior College, James N. Baldwin leaves a legacy of providing educational opportunity and ensuring long-term stability.

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Mind over Matter

The practice of mindfulness helps keep thoughts focused on the here and now — producing benefits that truly last.



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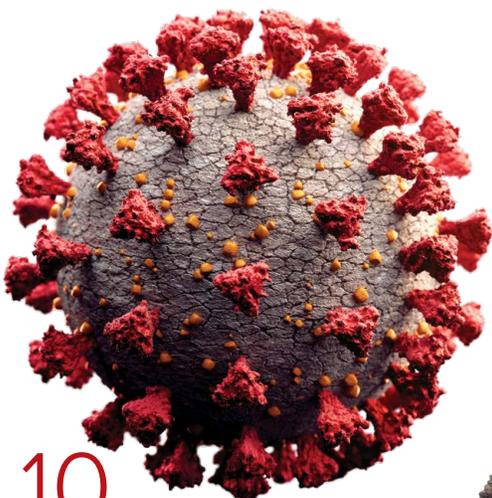
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EXCELSIOR

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For general information about Excelsior College, call 888-647-2388.

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ON THE COVER: An Excelsior College staff member and his family participate in a thank-you to nursing alumni during Nurses Week in May.

A Stronger, More Responsive Excelsior

In 2016, I became president of Excelsior College and assumed the awesome responsibility of sustaining the institution — with its outstanding history of supporting students as they work toward degree completion — and preparing the College for a robust future, during a dynamic period in higher education.

Now, as Excelsior approaches its 50th anniversary, we are financially stronger; far more accountable and efficient; and laser focused on providing the most engaging, personalized, and responsive student experience possible.

Guided by our insistence on integrity, transparency, and accountability, with a steadfast commitment to financial stability and “students first,” we have affirmed the mission and values of the College by:

- **Shifting focus to our academic programs** and improving the quality of those that best serve the needs of our students and represent our future.
- **Reframing our organization and business practices** to be student-centered, efficient, responsive, effective, and accountable.
- **Implementing significant and sustained investments in technology** that are vital to our future.
- **Daring to question long-held assumptions**, experimenting with new ideas, and committing to fulfilling the dream of a fully integrated learning ecosystem for our students.

As I write this letter, our lives have changed dramatically. Health and safety are at the forefront as the world copes with the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, everywhere I look, I see the strength of Excelsior — our nursing and health sciences alumni on the front lines, our MBA graduates leading their companies or departments through change, our military students supporting public health initiatives throughout the country, our colleagues here in Albany moving from office- to home-based work without missing a beat, and our courageous students who persist through the uncertainty toward degree completion.

Throughout my leadership of the College, I have adhered to my belief that the primary obligation of a leader is stewardship of and service to the organization they lead. I have been blessed with a board of trustees and a leadership team that have supported and enacted those leadership values with me.

Serving the College and its students has been a great privilege. What has always been special about Excelsior College is its pioneering work as a completion college and a resolute dedication to its mission.

As I look ahead to the future of Excelsior, it is my honor to welcome David Schejbal as the College's fourth president. It is now time to celebrate our accomplishments and focus on the opportunities that new leadership can offer.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James N. Baldwin". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a light grey background with a subtle diagonal line pattern.

JAMES N. BALDWIN, JD, EdD
PRESIDENT

Excelsior College Welcomes New Members to the Alumni Leadership Council

Three new members will join the Alumni Leadership Council in July: Steven Marciano, a clinical standards and policies and procedures coordinator with BayCare Health System; Oliver Queen Jr., president and cofounder of Organizational Cultural Assessment Instrument (OCAI) Professional Solutions Group; and Samuel T. Watkins Jr., a cybersecurity program analyst for the Information Warfare Division, Air Combat Command, at Langley Air Force Base.

Steven Marciano

Steven Marciano, of Palm Harbor, Florida, is a nursing professional with a vast background in business and finance management, clinical standard and health care policy, leadership, and project management. He is the manager of business operations for St. Anthony's Hospital within the BayCare Health System. His duties include strategic business partnership with 17 nursing units. He is a certified hospice and palliative nurse, and holds health and life, and property and casualty insurance licenses.

Marciano's current memberships include the American College of Healthcare Executives, American Public Health Association, American Grant Writers' Association, Florida Organization of Nurse Executives, Tampa Bay Organization of Nurse Executives, Healthcare Financial Management Association, Hospice & Palliative Nurses Association, and Society for Human Resource Management. He earned a Bachelor of Science in Public Health from Excelsior College in 2018. Marciano was the 2019 recipient of Excelsior's Michael J. Cooley Memorial Award for high academic achievement in health sciences. He is pursuing a Master of Science in Health Care Administration at Excelsior College.

Oliver Queen Jr.

Oliver Queen Jr., of Chantilly, Virginia, is an accomplished senior executive professional and operations and program manager with more than 28 years of acquisitions, procurement, life-cycle logistics, program and project management, operations, global supply chain,



Marciano



Queen



Watkins

sales, and executive training expertise. With OCAI Professional Solutions Group, he was instrumental in the development of a comprehensive IT transition and post-implementation plan that moved the Millennium Challenge Corporation from the Automated Acquisition Management Solutions' contract-writing tool to the Oracle Contract Lifecycle Management system under budget and on time.

Queen is a member of the Defense Acquisition University Alumni Association, the National Society of Black Engineers, and the Harvard Kennedy School Alumni Association. He is also involved in many community organizations, including serving as the facilities committee chairman at Dawson Corner Community homeowner's association, a volunteer-assistant boxing coach at the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, and a volunteer at the DC Central Kitchen.

In addition to a Bachelor of Science in Liberal Arts from Excelsior College in 2006, Queen earned an Associate in Arts from Valdosta State University, a Master of Arts in Organizational Dynamics from the University of Oklahoma—Norman, a Master of Arts in National Security and Strategic Studies from the U.S. Naval War College, a Master of Business Administration from the Johns Hopkins Carey Business School, and several certificates. In addition, he has completed executive education programs from the Kennedy School at Harvard, the University of Virginia-Darden Business School, and Syracuse University. He is pursuing a PhD in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math Education and Professional Studies at Old Dominion University.

Samuel T. Watkins Jr.

Samuel T. Watkins Jr., of Virginia Beach, Virginia, is an experienced counterintelligence professional with prior military active-duty and private-sector experience in researching, developing, presenting, and publishing intelligence products at the tactical, operational, and strategic level. His background includes project management, requirement analysis, project coordination, and customer technical support. As a cybersecurity program analyst, he supports cyberspace operations, training, and the development and use of cybersecurity weapons systems, capabilities, training requirements, and instructional developments. Watkins served as a lieutenant (ret.) and instructor with the Portsmouth, VA Sheriff's Office Auxiliary and Training Unit and is a former police officer who began his career in law enforcement in 1998.

Watkins is a member of the International Law Enforcement Educators and Trainers Association, the National Sheriffs' Association, and the Fraternal Order of Police. He has won the American Police Hall of Fame Life Saving Award in 2009 and was nominated for the Military Intelligence Corps Hall of Fame in 2013. He was the 2009 recipient of the Excelsior College Alumni Association's C. Wayne Williams Award for outstanding academic achievements and professional, personal, and community contributions.

A 1999 graduate of Excelsior College with a Bachelor of Science in Liberal Arts, Watkins also earned an Associate of Arts in Liberal Arts from St. Leo University and a Master of Science—Criminal Justice Track from Columbus State University. ■ —J.K.

Adult Higher Education Advocate David Schejbal Becomes Excelsior’s Fourth President

Throughout his career, David Schejbal has focused primarily on making education accessible, affordable, and flexible for all students. His vision for inventing ways to reach beyond the traditional higher education model to meet the needs of an increasingly changing student spectrum has made him a leading voice in adult and non-traditional higher education and makes him a perfect fit for the role of Excelsior College’s next president.

The only child of two only children, Schejbal and his parents immigrated to the United States in 1968 from then Czechoslovakia (now the Czech Republic). They arrived two weeks before Soviet tanks rolled through Prague during the period of political liberalization and protest.

Perhaps his unique background has prepared Schejbal to excel at providing leadership and advocacy for online learning, adult students, and increasing access to higher education. He previously served as vice president and chief of digital learning at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Prior to joining Marquette, he was dean of continuing education, outreach, and e-learning at the University of Wisconsin-Extension, working across all 26 campuses of the system to extend the resources of the university to communities throughout the nation.

A graduate of Iowa State University, Schejbal earned a Doctorate of Philosophy and Master of Arts in philosophy from the University of Connecticut. Schejbal has received many awards, including the Julius M. Nolte Award for Extraordinary Leadership, which is the highest award given by the University Professional and Continuing Education Association (UPCEA). His affiliations with industry organizations include serving as a member of the executive committee of the Council of Environmental Deans and Directors (CEDD), a member of the governing



board of the Competency-Based Education Network (C-BEN), chair of the U.S. Army War College Board of Visitors, and the past president of UPCEA. Schejbal is a frequent keynote speaker, and his articles about reinventing higher education have appeared in such publications as *Innovative Higher Education* and *Inside Higher Ed*.

His resume lists many academic and cerebral accomplishments, but Schejbal also takes time to enjoy recreational activities. You can often find him woodworking, fishing, and spending time outside with his wife Judee. He admits being a couch potato, too; he’s not opposed to watching an old Western on a rainy weekend afternoon.

Schejbal will be the fourth president of Excelsior in the College’s nearly 50-year history as a distance learning institution for adult learners. Here’s more from President-elect Schejbal and how he sees his future with Excelsior:

Q: What drew you to Excelsior College?

A: I have devoted my career to developing programs and services to meet the needs of adult and nontraditional students, and Excelsior College is one of a small group of institutions designed from inception to serve that demographic. I have been familiar with Excelsior for a long time, and my goals and perspective of higher education align well with the history and mission of the College. As the need for a more educated workforce grows and more and more students come in and out of college over longer periods of time,

the opportunities for Excelsior are growing commensurately.

Q: What excites you most about the future of Excelsior?

A: What excites me most about the future of the College is that the board, the senior leadership team, the faculty, and the staff are all truly committed to making a positive difference in the lives of Excelsior students and ensuring that students succeed and achieve their goals. The students we serve are not traditional college students, and Excelsior is one of the best institutions in the nation to understand what those students need and to provide them with the programs and services to help them succeed. The need for higher education and a more educated workforce has never been greater, and the College has a tremendous opportunity to expand its impact throughout the nation.

“I have been familiar with Excelsior for a long time, and my goals and perspective of higher education align well with the history and mission of the College.”
— David Schejbal

Q: COVID-19 affected traditional education tremendously in the short term. What do you see as its impact long term? How is Excelsior ready to meet those changes?

A: Despite the rapid move to offer education at a distance, it would be a misnomer to say that most of higher education went to online teaching as a result of the pandemic...True online program development takes time and involves collaboration between faculty, instructional designers, media developers, and others to create rich and meaningful learning experiences for students. Hardly any traditional college or university had the time or expertise to do this during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, because Excelsior is a college that offers only online programs, its

entire curriculum is already developed as a high-quality learning experience. In this pandemic, Excelsior students do not have to worry about the quality of instruction that they receive, whether they will get the faculty support and attention they need, or how they remain safe and healthy while they study.

A great deal of speculation and related planning regarding the 2020–21 academic year is underway at nearly all colleges and universities across the country. The challenge is three-fold and exacerbated by the uncertainty of the course of the disease: keeping students, faculty, and staff safe and healthy if there is a resurgence of COVID-19; ensuring that the quality of learning and the broader academic experience is high; and managing enrollments and related finances that depend directly on students living and learning on campuses. Some institutions are trying to address these challenges on their own, but many are looking to partnerships to manage these issues.... Once again, Excelsior is extremely well-positioned both programmatically and institutionally and can be a source of great stability and support for learners throughout the nation.

Q: What's the best career advice you've received?

A: In my second year of graduate school, a senior graduate student befriended me. He was finishing his dissertation, and I was still working through coursework. I asked him for advice about getting through the program, and his advice was very direct: Treat school like a job. Show up every day on time, work hard and don't play during the workday, and go home on time and take the evening off to relax and refresh. I have followed his advice ever since, and it has served me well.

A second piece of career advice that I received was equally instructive: Do what you love well, and success will come. Most people are not good at doing what they do not enjoy. I am one of them, and I have been fortunate to love working in higher education. I find meaning in my work, I enjoy working with colleagues and students, and I am passionate about the role and future of higher education in our society. ■ –J.K.

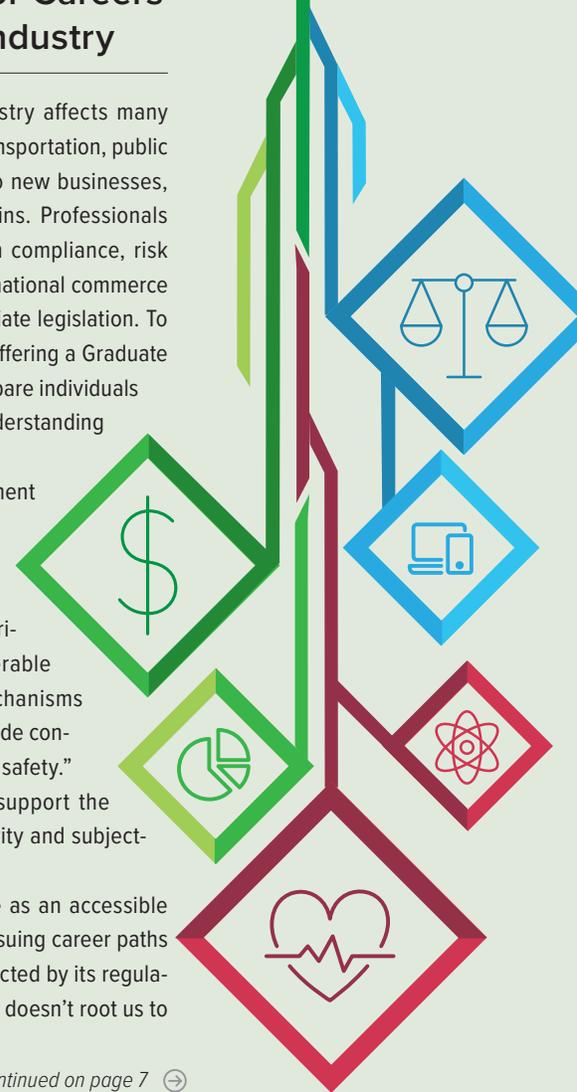


New Certificate Program Prepares Students for Careers in the Cannabis Industry

The growing cannabis industry affects many aspects of society, from transportation, public health, and city services to new businesses, financing, and supply chains. Professionals need a solid foundation in compliance, risk assessment, and interstate and international commerce to do their jobs according to appropriate legislation. To meet this need, Excelsior College is offering a Graduate Certificate in Cannabis Control to prepare individuals who want to enter or expand their understanding of the complex cannabis industry.

According to the New York Department of Health's report, *Assessment of the Potential Impact of Regulated Marijuana in New York State*, "...implementation of a regulated marijuana program will require considerable planning as to the regulatory mechanisms needed to protect public health, provide consumer protection, and ensure public safety." Excelsior's certificate program will support the demand for increased regulatory clarity and subject-matter expertise.

"We see our advanced certificate as an accessible and flexible option for individuals pursuing career paths in cannabis and other industries impacted by its regulation. And our online delivery modality doesn't root us to



continued on page 7 ➔

Excelsior Broadens Opportunities for Degree Completion Through New Partnerships



Through educational partnerships, Excelsior College and participating corporate, association, government, and academic institutions are able to provide adults with the opportunity to complete a degree. Recently, Excelsior welcomed three new partners into its fold: OnlineDegree.com, ReUp Education, and Study.com.

“Excelsior College has teamed up with partners such as Study.com, OnlineDegree.com, and ReUp to expand our commitment to offering degree completion options,” says Kim Lourinia, regional director of strategic partnerships. “Our partnerships provide lower-cost and accelerated completion options, which provide overall cost savings and reduced time to completion. Through these partnerships, individuals will find streamlined pathways to furthering their education that advance their career and personal goals.” Students coming to Excelsior through the partnerships have access to the College’s 40 degree programs, tuition discounts, and flexible online learning.

OnlineDegree.com is an organization that provides 15 free courses in a variety of academic areas such as business, psychology, robotics, and history. OnlineDegree.com uses open educational resources to help achieve its goal of making academic offerings completely free for students. The company also provides coaching services to students and

will assist in marketing efforts to increase Excelsior’s brand awareness, inquiry generation, and enrollments. This partnership is a beneficial way to reach students the College would not be able to reach directly.

“We have a long history of helping students from all backgrounds not just complete their degrees but also chart pathways to success after graduation.”

— James N. Baldwin

Excelsior’s new partnership with ReUp Education will help stopout students — those who have college experience but no degree — return to school and graduate. ReUp Education helps colleges and universities engage and re-enroll stopout students by using predictive analytics technology, data, and personalized coaching. “This is about bringing together technology and mentorship to help colleges re-engage with these learners in ways that reflect — and respond to — their unique needs and challenges,”

says Sarah Horn, cofounder and CEO of ReUp Education.

According to recent research from the National Student Clearinghouse, more than 36 million Americans have some college experience but have not completed their degree. Excelsior’s partnership with ReUp Education will provide support for students who have some college, many of whom are over the age of 25, and are balancing work and family commitments outside of their studies. ReUp Education’s technology enables a team of coaches to conduct outreach to students and support them through the re-enrollment process, as well as provide guidance as they pursue their degrees.

Enrolling in Excelsior through an organization like ReUp is a different pathway to earning an associate or bachelor’s degree but one that many students have already taken. As of mid-June, 124 students have re-enrolled through ReUp’s partnership with Excelsior. These students will be able to finish the degrees they started and avoid becoming a “forgotten student” and part of an education completion crisis.

James N. Baldwin, president of Excelsior College, remarks on how the partnership complements Excelsior’s mission. “We have a long history of helping students from all backgrounds not just complete their degree but



→ continued from page 5: *New Certificate Program Prepares Students for Careers in the Cannabis Industry*

also chart pathways to success after graduation,” says Baldwin. “This collaboration is the next step in our ongoing effort to help adult learners realize higher education’s promise of social and economic mobility and prosperity.”

The third new partnership that Excelsior recently initiated is with Study.com, an online education platform that helps learners succeed academically. Study.com’s online courses, short animated video lessons, and study tools make learning simple for over 30 million students, teachers, and working professionals.

Study.com’s College Accelerator program enables users to cut the cost of college tuition by more than half by taking college courses online. Students can use Study.com to complete courses and then transfer as many as 113 credits to Excelsior College, making it one of the most generous transfer programs in the United States. Students work with a success coach to make a degree roadmap and stay on track.

“Excelsior College has been on the cutting edge of making education accessible by being one of the first colleges to provide online classes—breaking the status quo of university education,” said Chris Mancini, chief growth officer at Study.com. “Our alignment in mission gives us the utmost confidence to accelerate this partnership and work together to flip the current education model on its head.”

With these new partnerships, Excelsior will be able to provide the option for degree completion to students who may otherwise not had the opportunity to finish their studies. “Excelsior’s fully online programs offer a flexible way for students to achieve their degrees while they balance other responsibilities,” says Dawn Gerrain, chief marketing and business development officer at Excelsior. “Building partnerships allows us to reach those students who started on their degree but may not have had a chance to complete it. Completing a degree opens doors for individuals to expand career opportunities and provide more value to our partners.” ■ —J.K.

any one specific state or region, which is important as the industry sees the expansion of multi-state operations,” says Scott Dolan, dean of the School of Graduate Studies and member of the team that developed the cannabis control certificate. “Our program is designed to help students navigate the dynamic regulatory environment of the cannabis industry with an academically rigorous and interdisciplinary approach.”

This certificate program spans multiple disciplines, including public administration, business, supply-chain management, public health, and criminal justice.

This certificate program spans multiple disciplines, including public administration, business, supply-chain management, public health, and criminal justice. Students will learn about the opportunities, challenges, and complexities of the legal cannabis market. They will develop a critical mindset so that they can be prepared to face the important issues confronted by local, regional, national, and international markets. The certificate program includes three courses: CBC 600 Implications of Legalization of Cannabis: Policy and Compliance; CBC 601 Interstate/International Commerce: Policy and Regulatory Environment; and CBC 602 Risk Assessment in Cannabis Control.

In CBC 600, students will learn about cannabis control policy and legal compliance, and the impact of legalization on various institutions, entities, and individuals. Students will study the complexities of licensure and regulations for each step of the supply chain.

In CBC 601, students will analyze the differences between interstate and international commerce. Specific focus will be on issues related to cybersecurity, supply-chain management, and inventory control, and their implications for businesses with varying regulations.

In CBC 602, students will learn about risk assessment in cannabis control and gain skills necessary to evaluate risks in the industry related to cultivation, harvesting, genetic testing, containment, water supply, pests, cybersecurity, grants, product-safety labeling, and workplace testing and safety. Students will also discuss harm-reduction strategies when moving from an unregulated to a regulated market.

The certificate program’s curriculum includes realistic case studies to encourage critical thinking skills and enable students to keep pace with the fast-changing environment. Innovative courses that meld industry and practitioner-based readings with scientific-based research enable the program to offer much-needed subject matter expertise in the industry.

Excelsior is one of a few institutions offering a cannabis control certificate program, and, unlike previous certificates offered by Excelsior, this one does not face stiff competition from institutions already in the space. “Cannabis has a need for certification, but there is no widely recognized industry certification. That’s an opportunity,” says Dolan.

All courses in the Graduate Certificate in Cannabis Control program will also serve as concentrations in the Master of Business Administration, Master of Science in Criminal Justice, Master of Public Administration, and Master of Science in Health Sciences program. Students who complete the certificate will have earned 9 credits to apply toward one of these degree programs. ■ —J.K.

NSF Grant Success

Simulation courses prepare students for a technology career

In 2017, the National Science Foundation (NSF) awarded Excelsior College \$864,000 in grant funding to develop simulations to teach and assess key workplace skills among associate degree technology students. Excelsior partnered with Polk State College in Florida to develop simulations to teach and then assess key skills in power generation and advanced manufacturing to improve the pipeline of technicians into key economic sectors. This was the first NSF grant awarded to Excelsior.

According to Forbes, as of August 2019, there were 7.6 million unfilled skilled labor jobs in the United States. The demand for certain trades, including electrical work, continues to grow. “Educational simulations have the capacity to prepare students, regardless of their proximity to campus, for careers in skilled industry,” says Michael Johnson, who was the associate dean of technology at Excelsior College when the grant was awarded and became its principal investigator. “For the first time, students in online programs will have the opportunity to earn industry certification.”

The simulations were incorporated into three associate degree-level courses within the Nuclear/Power Plant, Electronic/Instrumentation, and Electromechanical concentrations: TECH 180 Personal Protection Equipment for Electrical Work, TECH 185 Blueprint Ready, and TECH 240 Job Tasks and Troubleshooting. Incorporating simulations into these courses closes current gaps in teaching and assessing safety, blueprint reading, and the use of tools and equipment – hands-on skills until now taught only in a laboratory setting.

In the Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) course, 3D simulation scenarios assist students in understanding PPE identification and selection for electrical and manufacturing work. Students apply hazardous awareness to assess the environmental conditions,



Look around your avatar and search for the three hazardous items on it. Click an item to remove it or change it. Once you have removed or changed all hazardous items, head back to donning the PPE by clicking on the back button on the right side of the screen.

“Educational simulations have the capacity to prepare students, regardless of their proximity to campus...”

— Michael Johnson

and adopt safety procedures and tools to identify and select PPE for performing electrical and manufacturing work. “It [the course] prepares the student for most of the safety aspects that are involved in the industry,” says Randy Holt, the course’s instructor.

The Blueprint Reading course ensures students gain knowledge of blueprint components, facility floor plan diagrams, and blueprint reading; select the appropriate blueprint, and identify facility diagrams based on the failing component. Through simulation, the Blueprint Reading course also prepares students to read the blueprint for lockout/tagout, use lockout/tagout practices, and apply and verify lockout/tagout.

In Job Task and Troubleshooting simulations, students perform hazard analysis, read blueprints, inspect work areas, select LO/TO

↑ A screen capture from the Personal Protection Equipment course shows how students use the simulation to learn safety procedures.

equipment, troubleshoot, and repair electrical equipment.

Students have responded positively to the simulations; many users have found the experiences motivating for learning content and would take another simulation course. Many users also reported that the simulations were more effective in learning the course content.

Successfully completing these courses allows students to move into the TECH 260 Energy Industry Fundamentals course. Students can then pursue final assessment on their own with the Center for Electrical Workforce Development (CEWD). Earning a credential with CEWD ensures potential workers gain an understanding of the energy industry as a prerequisite to occupation-specific training. It also ensures they gain an understanding of the careers available in the energy industry as well as of the education and training needed to enter and advance in those careers.

“This innovative use of simulation technology is expanding the possibilities for students preparing for new careers by taking fully online programs,” says Johnson. ■ — J.K.

National Cyber League Competition Offers Real-World Experience to Cybersecurity Students

The National Cyber League is a cybersecurity competition with offensive and defensive puzzle-based and capture the flag games. Excelsior's National Cybersecurity Student Association Chapter participates annually. The NCL is a virtual training that prepares high school and college students for potential real-world situations. Students participate in the preseason, individual, and team games at the level of their choosing, giving them opportunities to be successful and expand their skills. The number of Excelsior students participating in the NCL has steadily increased each season since 2017.

Students who participate in the NCL gain cybersecurity experience, prepare for the workplace, and increase their skill levels for more competitions down the road. The spring season is held from March until May; the fall season starts in October and ends in November. Students register three weeks prior to the start of the season and can practice in the virtual gym before the competition begins.

According to Cyber Skyline power rankings, "Every year, over 10,000 students from more than 300 colleges and universities across the US participate in the NCL competitions." To put into perspective how well Excelsior College has been doing in the NCL, as of spring 2020, Excelsior College is nationally ranked at No. 34; in the fall 2018 season, Excelsior was nationally ranked No. 55. The College ranks No. 13 in the eastern United States. All schools are ranked based on their best team performance, their best individual student performance, and the combined individual student performance.

"Excelsior has consistently ranked on the Top 100 Leaderboard for the past three NCL seasons, which demonstrates how committed our students are in competing on the national level," says Amelia Estwick, director of the National Cybersecurity Institute at Excelsior College and the NCL coach.

"I think the exposure and skills [gained] are the biggest takeaways. You learn things you would never learn in the classroom. This provides you a way to practice everything you learned, too."

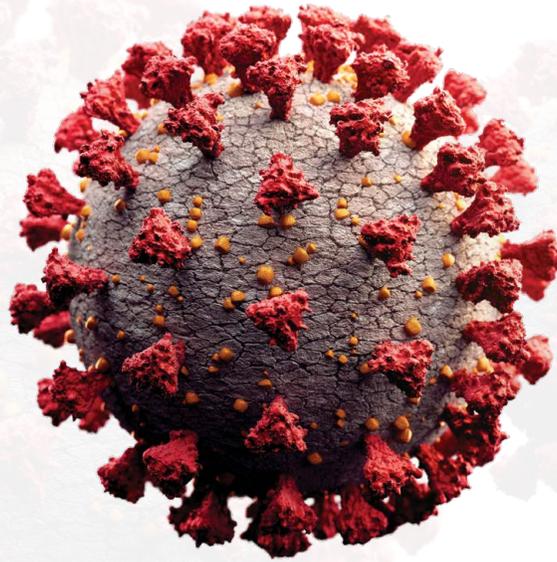
—Melissa Burger

In the NCL 2020 spring season, Excelsior had three teams rank in the top 100. The Oops team placed No. 40, scoring 2,385 out of 3,000 points with a 74.1 percent accuracy rate. In the 2019 fall season, Excelsior had two teams listed as a top performer, placing No. 55 and No. 99 out of the top 100 teams. The Excelsior Gunters team scored 2,195 out of 3,000 points, with an accuracy rate of 89.23 percent, placing them on the leaderboard as No. 55. Excelsior's Cookie Bandits team scored 1,850 out of 3,000 points with an accuracy rate of 66.23 percent, placing them on the leaderboard at No. 99.

Excelsior graduate Melissa Burger, who earned a Associate in Science in Liberal Arts in 2017, a Bachelor of Science in Liberal Arts in 2018, and is pursuing a Master of Science in Cybersecurity, has competed in the NCL with the NCSA chapter. This past fall, she was the captain of the Cookie Bandits team. "I think the exposure and skills [gained] are the biggest takeaways. You learn things you would never learn in the classroom. This provides you a way to practice everything you learned, too," Burger says of the experience. ■ —J.K.

2019
**COOKIE BANDITS
TEAM CAPTAIN**
Melissa Burger





Excelsior College Responds to the COVID-19 Pandemic

The past few months unfolded in a way and at a pace that many institutions planned for but hoped would never happen. COVID-19 had an impact on communities in new ways almost daily. As colleges and universities across the world worked fervently to protect the health and safety of students, faculty, and staff, new challenges emerged.

Confident in Excelsior's place as a leader in online education, the College shares freely with other institutions so that everyone is stronger in the end.

Social-distancing procedures closed many campuses for the rest of the spring semester. Excelsior College is a distance-learning institution, and courses continued smoothly as students continued working from their own spaces. However, nearly 375 employees work on site in Albany, New York. In mid-March, Gov. Andrew Cuomo issued workforce reduction orders for nonessential businesses. First, he issued a 50 percent reduction, then 75 percent, followed quickly by a 100 percent work-remote order. The College converted to fully remote within days. Student services and course instruction remained consistent as staff transitioned to the new normal.

The new physical distance of employees turned thoughts to connecting with the larger

college community. Institutions were moving traditional classrooms to digital, and some faculty and students struggled in the online space. Excelsior is proud of its history in distance learning and found a way to support other institutions through a COVID-19 Peer Resource webpage: a compilation of articles and resources to ease the transition to the landscape of digital classrooms.

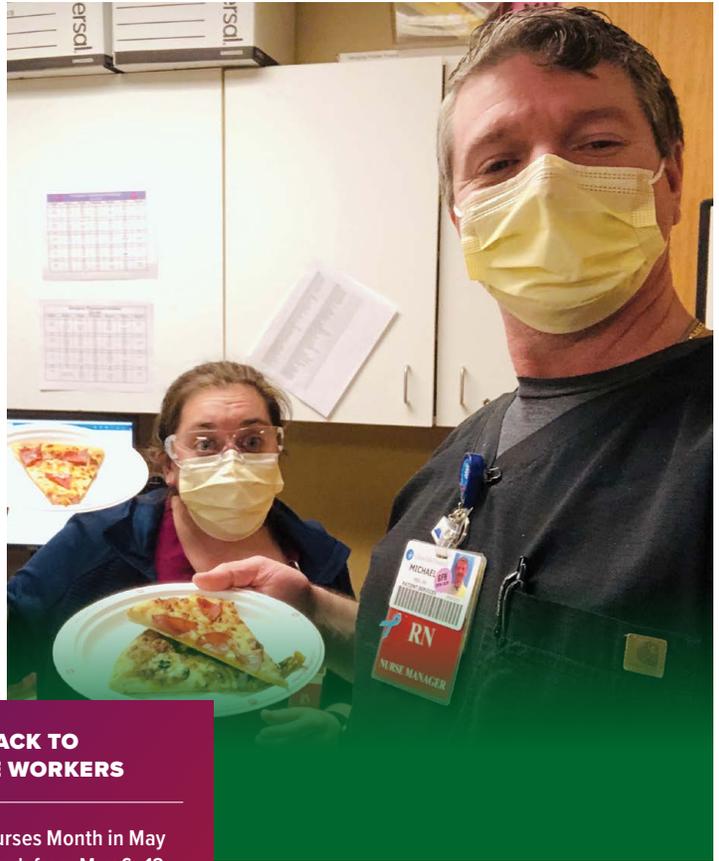
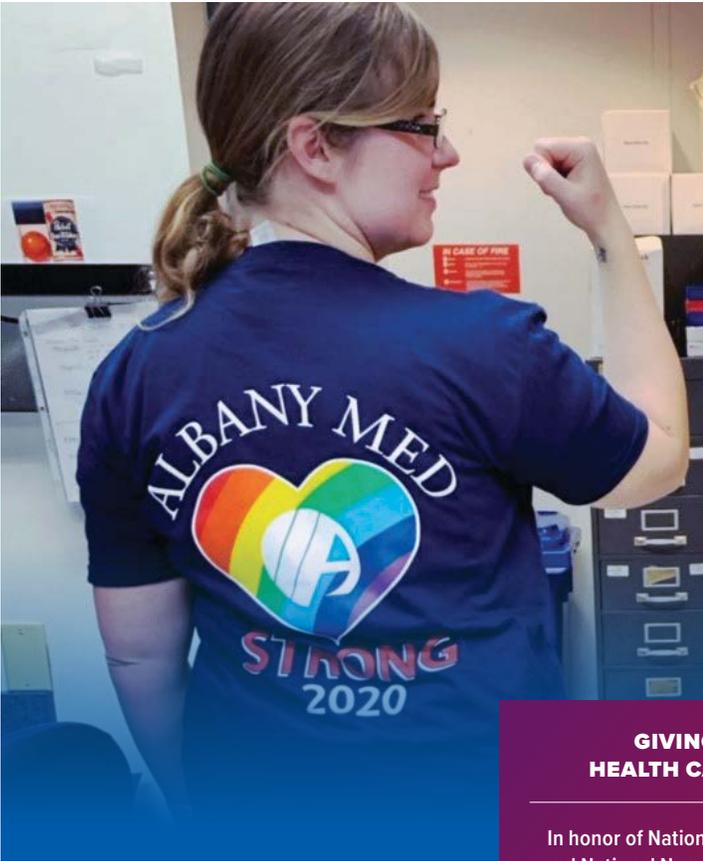
In an effort to help colleges and K–12 schools build their online courses quickly, Excelsior created a landing page with resources on best practices in online teaching and online learning. These landing pages saw web traffic climb, and President James N. Baldwin and Provost John Caron positioned the College to be a thought leader and a resource for distance education. For example, University Business and Evollution published Baldwin and Caron's articles on strategies for faculty and institutional leaders to elevate their online teaching and online learning. "The ramp up to online [teaching and learning] that many colleges and K–12 schools did in response to COVID-19 was impressive. But, as schools move out of emergency mode, they will have to look beyond the basic conversion of face-to-face content and think about how they can create a sustained presence, engagement, and interaction in an online environment," says Caron.

In other outreach, faculty program directors were interviewed by EAB, a provider of technology, research, and services for educational institutions, for advice on building

an online community. Excelsior also partnered with Ellucian, a technology company that provides software and services to the higher-education sector, to host a webinar on the benefits of online learning, evaluation of online teaching and learning, support for online students, and enrollment management.

As news of the crisis that health care workers face unfolded, the College shipped 20,000 exam gloves from its nursing program to New York City for the Javits Center, and, outside of work, some staff members made fabric masks for first responders. Excelsior's partnership team coordinated meal deliveries to six local hospitals for health care workers. Pizza Hut partners exclusively with Excelsior for education and partnered again to bring their best pizzas to hospital staff. Photos and messages of appreciation poured in from hospitals. Excelsior employees honored Excelsior-educated nurses on the front lines, combatting the virus.

Physical distancing has changed Excelsior. Remote work is still the norm, and staff have a deepened appreciation for students learning and faculty teaching at a distance. The College also shined a light on the strong teaching model, robust courses, and the commitment of students. Confident in Excelsior's place as a leader in online education, the College shares freely with other institutions so that everyone is stronger in the end. This community pulls together for support, growth, appreciation, and gratitude. This community is Excelsior proud. ■ –E.C.



GIVING BACK TO HEALTH CARE WORKERS

In honor of National Nurses Month in May and National Nurses Week from May 6–12, Excelsior College and Pizza Hut teamed up to deliver lunch and dinner to six hospitals in New York’s Capital Region as a token of appreciation for all local health care workers. Excelsior and Pizza Hut hope health care workers can take time to rest, refuel, and know the community is thinking of them.





IT CAME FROM BALLROOM A

NETWORKING MIGHT FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE BUT FIND COMFORT IN BEING YOURSELF AND TRUE CONNECTION WILL FOLLOW By Caitlin Abram

This is not your typical networking article. This article won't give you "Four Ways to Cultivate Synergy!" nor will it provide "Ten Success-Boosting Motivation Tips from Millionaire Entrepreneurs!" However, if that's what you're looking for, you're in luck because those are real article titles.

This article is for the name-tag averse, the person wondering if they remembered to peel the size sticker off the blazer they just bought. This article is for the person caught off guard by an impending handshake, struggling to balance their sad little plate of cheese cubes on top of a sweating plastic cup swaddled in a soaked cocktail napkin. This article is for us: the people who dread networking. Let's all take these next 36 sentences to find solace in our unity and wallow in the

soul-crushing vacuity that is networking, then we can go back to pretending we're so totally jazzed our boss has sent us to attend an event in Ballroom A of the Hilton Garden Inn at 6 p.m. on a Tuesday.

We know that networking makes the world go 'round. It's not a myth that if you want to build connections and create a community around your business, it really is about relationships. Smart people tell you these things all the time! So why do we dislike networking so much? To start with the obvious, trying to start conversations with random business-casual-bedecked strangers is awkward no matter what. What I think makes it so painful is this: Everybody in the room wants something, but we're all bound by social convention to act as if we're only there to build those relationships everyone is talking about.

It's the cognitive dissonance of trying to have a normal, human conversation all the while knowing that your actual secret mission is to worm your way closer to getting the thing you want. It would be whole lot less awkward—and more transparent—if people at these events were to walk around with small signs hanging around their neck that list their name, company, and the things they want. That way Jimmy who wants employees, money, and a new office space can easily connect with Jackie who wants a new job, investment opportunities, and an office tenant. With the nuts and bolts of cold, hard commerce out there in the open, you can get things done and maybe even find your way into some naturally friendly chitchat.

It can be done. If you're looking for networking tips from people who thrive on the experience, here are some pointers from Entrepreneur magazine and Monster:

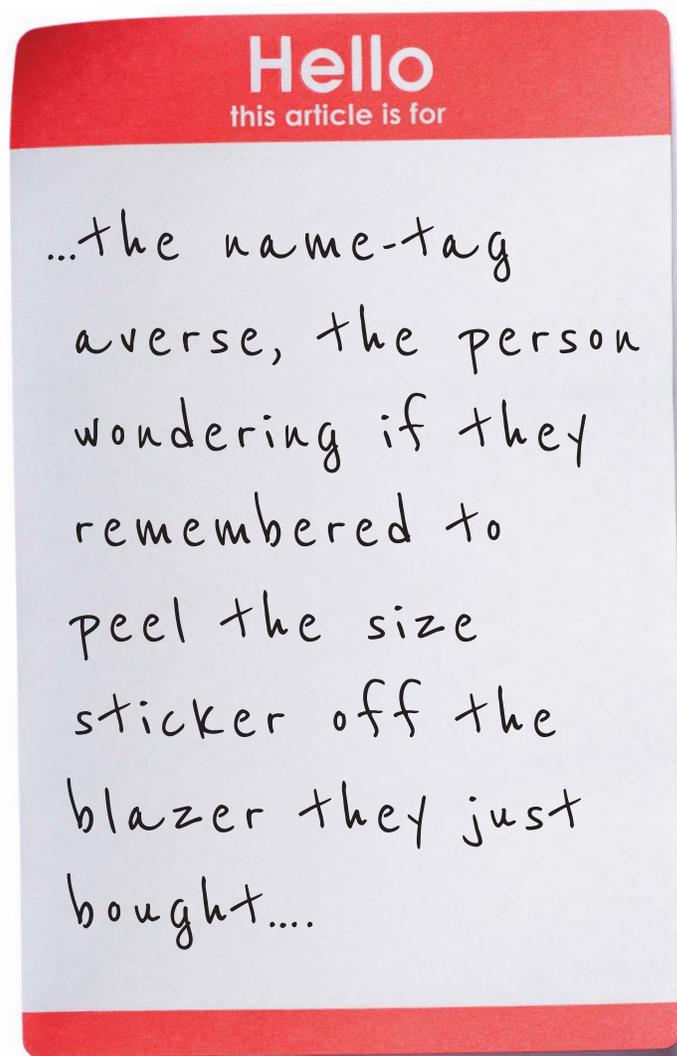
› **LISTEN WELL AND ASK LOTS OF QUESTIONS.** Networking is so much less stressful when you can get other people to do the talking, and most people relish the opportunity to talk about themselves. The more information you can gather now will make it easier to start conversations in the future.

› **TELL A STORY.** When it's time to share information about yourself, resist the temptation to rattle off your name, industry, and title. Tell people a story about who you are and what you do. Make it personal and engaging and people will be interested.

› **BE SINCERE, AUTHENTIC, AND POSITIVE.** Even if you dislike networking, cultivating a positive attitude will help keep things in perspective. Don't take things too seriously and you'll feel yourself start to relax. Remember to bring your sincere and authentic self when interacting with others. It will help those all-important connections stick.

› **ALWAYS FOLLOW UP.** Networking doesn't stop after you've exited Ballroom A. Following up after the fact is just as important. Whether it's by phone, text, or email, make sure you send a quick message letting people know how much you enjoyed meeting them. Extra points if you can work in a fact or a personal detail from your conversation.

Still unsure and want to feel a little better about being an awkward networker? Here's a true story from me to you: A client of mine was holding a grand opening of their high-end commercial interior design showroom. Sent to represent the company and "build affinity," I ended up chatting with a furniture supplier. It was going well! Probably because she thought I was in the market for office furniture (see above: Everybody in the room wants something). As we paused in



front of a brightly spotlighted display of office chairs, she told me her company was the sole licensed distributor of a certain designer in the Northeast. She then raised her hand up to her face looking for all the world like the universal invitation for a high five. Not wanting to leave her hanging, I enthusiastically slapped her hand. I'm also pretty sure I said, "good job!" One look at her confused face and I realized the spotlight from the display has been in her face and the chill "up top!" gesture was just an attempt to shade her eyes.

The motivational takeaway of this is that despite wanting very much to throw all my business cards up in the air as a diversion and scuttle under said designer chair, I finished out the event and lived to network another day. Plus, I came away with a story to add to my "amusingly humiliating anecdotes portfolio," and I guarantee that erstwhile high-five recipient won't forget me anytime soon either. Hey, maybe I'm a better networker than I thought. ■

Caitlin Abram is a member of the Marketing and Business Development team at Excelsior College.



Tammy Spenziero

Director of Career Services

Tammy Spenziero joined Excelsior College in 2019 as director of career services. She is familiar with what it takes to be an adult learner and balance a career, having earned a college degree nontraditionally while working and being a single parent. Since joining Excelsior, she has focused on ensuring that students regard their careers and what they can gain from career services as a critical part of their educational experiences.

PHOTO: MIKE HEMBERGER

What excites you about the career services field? What excites me about the career services field is to help others achieve their goals and realize their full potential. The world is changing and now, more than ever, we have the ability to offer students and alumni educational opportunities and career and professional development that have a positive influence on their lives.

What challenges exist in providing career services in an online environment, and how do you overcome them? Providing career services online is efficient and flexible for students. The benefits outweigh the few challenges that exist now. Challenges that could arise such as time zones, technology learning curves, and technical issues, are easily overcome.

You recently founded a group for online career services professionals within the National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE). What led you to do that, and what opportunities do you see for the group? When I started leading career services at Excelsior College in mid-September 2019, I put out a question on the NACE Community Discussion Board to connect with others in similar online roles. I asked if there were any affinity groups available that I could join. None existed. The idea for a group gained attention and interest from NACE leadership as well as from my colleagues in the field. I worked with NACE to create this new national affinity group, and it now has more than 370 members in universities across the United States and in other countries. I am currently working with them on a series of webinars on the topic of online career services.

What does it mean for Excelsior to be part of the NACE group that you founded? One great benefit of being a member of NACE is the ability to connect and engage with like-minded colleagues. We share ideas and challenges, and we work together to achieve goals toward the success of our students

as well as of the career services field. I am excited because, although it was simply my intention to reach out and make connections with others in similar roles, I am now the founder and leader of a national group that positions Excelsior as a thought leader on the subject of remote and online career services to institutions across the United States.

What can students and alumni expect from career services at Excelsior? Students and alumni will learn more about their career potential, which enriches their educational experience to provide a strong foundation for their future career decisions. They are offered coaching and tools for self-assessment, career exploration, job-search techniques, goal setting, decision making, and other needs. We strive to ensure that all students and alumni are offered the tools to establish their career goals in alignment with their educational pursuits, so they can hone career competencies to position them toward success in the workforce. The mission of career services is to empower students to proactively prepare for their unique careers and life goals, aligning them with meaning and purpose. Our vision for career services at the College is to inspire and encourage students to pursue professional goals that coincide with their life dreams.

What career guidance do you give most often? Always follow your passion, and do what makes you fulfilled and happy. Know your talents, have confidence in all that you offer, continue learning and working on areas in need of improvement, and connect with others.

What was the best career advice you ever received? The best career advice I have ever received is the same advice I give most often: Always follow your passion and do what makes you fulfilled and happy. In addition, be a good listener, and don't be afraid to make mistakes. "Mistakes" can be lessons, big and small, that set your path toward the future.

What's most needed in the field of career services and why? Making a shift to career preparation and planning is needed most, along with assistance in making connections. We need a greater focus on helping students to understand what it takes to be prepared, and to plan and make decisions toward a future that is a best fit for them, their talent, and passion. With technological advances, networking is better than ever and making connections is on a whole new level for students, alumni, faculty, and employers. These connections are most valuable when working toward career goals and going beyond an outdated career center model and into a more interactive, technology-driven practice of networking, which is key.

What do Excelsior students say the impact of career services is on their lives and careers? What I hear most from students is that they have found the most success in reaching their career goals when engaged early on with career services. Those who take advantage of knowing what phase they are in along the career development path find it easiest to set goals when they enroll in college. Many students who wait to set career goals until right before they graduate and expect to reach career goals often fall short and are not able to achieve success in a competitive market.

What job search question do you get asked the most? How can I stand out and get selected for an interview with "X" company? Oftentimes, students have their sights set on a specific job or company and want to land an interview. My advice is to do their homework and research the company's strategic plan, mission, values, work environment, people, and day-to-day operations. See if the company aligns with their own personal values, strengths, talents, and passion. Making connections, finding a mentor in the field, and participating in company information sessions or even volunteer events and internships are good ways to get a feel for whether a company is the right fit. ■



James N. Baldwin was named acting president in May 2016 and elected president of Excelsior College in October 2016. He is the third president in the institution's 49-year history.

PHOTO: KRIS QUA

SERVANT LEADER

JAMES N. BALDWIN'S TENURE AS PRESIDENT OF EXCELSIOR COLLEGE TRANSFORMS THE INSTITUTION WITH HIS FOCUS ON EXPANDING EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY, IMPROVING THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE, TELLING THE EXCELSIOR STORY, AND ENSURING LONG-TERM STABILITY

BY MARIA C. SPARKS

"If Excelsior College didn't exist, someone would have to create it."

That is a statement James N. Baldwin, president of Excelsior College, has said many times. It captures in a few words both his commitment to the College's mission to provide educational opportunities for adult learners and his belief that Excelsior, a degree-completion college, serves a unique — and essential — purpose in higher education.

Throughout his leadership of Excelsior, Baldwin has worked to preserve that mission and shore up the College to serve adult learners well into the future. His tenure as president ends July 31, 2020, after serving in the position since May 2016.

Baldwin has spent most of his career working in education, first in public schools and then as chief of staff and acting

deputy commissioner for higher education in the New York State Education Department. He was also the executive deputy secretary of state for New York from 1983 to 1995. Before joining Excelsior, he served as district superintendent for Questar III Board of Cooperative Educational Services. In that role, he was a regional representative of New York's commissioner of education and the CEO of the educational cooperative that helps school districts operate more efficiently and effectively by pooling their resources and sharing costs.

He has a profound understanding of the impact of ensuring access to education and then building on that access to ensure competency and mastery of the subject matter so that learners

can accomplish their goals. Helping adults to fully realize their potential is something of great interest to him, from the professional as well as from the personal point of view. Education, he says, is the source of his own personal success.

“Everything I have been able to do, to accomplish in my career, to provide for my family, and to contribute to my community has been because I was able to get an education,” says Baldwin.

Originally from Albany, New York, Baldwin grew up in an ethnic, immigrant neighborhood, and his worldview was shaped by the values instilled in him from his parents, extended family, and Roman Catholic elementary school education. He was a first-generation college student and graduated from Union College, in nearby Schenectady, New York, with a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science. He went on to earn a Juris Doctor from Albany Law School and a Doctor of Education in Organization and Leadership from Teachers College, Columbia University.

“Education fused my intellectual development with my emotional, personal, and spiritual experiences. It broadened my perspective, opening my eyes to the larger world,” he said during his remarks at his inauguration. “Over time, I saw how transformative education can be, discovering the connection between the opportunity to be educated, the pursuit of learning by the individual, and how an educated society advances social and economic justice and the human condition.”

Baldwin’s fundamental belief in the transformative power of education has shaped Excelsior College, where his leadership espouses an obligation to expand educational opportunity and to support learners at each step of their educational journeys. His tenure also introduced the concept of servant leadership to the College. In this leadership model, the leader has a service-first mindset and actively seeks to develop and align an individual and a collective sense of purpose with the mission and values of the organization.

Baldwin uses the term “colleagues” purposely because he views all of those employed by the College as his peers, his colleagues. He has encouraged them to activate their own purposes, as well as their creative and innovative dispositions, in their work at the College. This translates to leadership coming from employees throughout the organization to address opportunities and challenges.

“The work gets done where we meet our students,” says Baldwin. “It’s another reason why servant leadership is so important. I’m not the one on the phone with our students every day. I’m not relating to them in a course. I don’t necessarily have the answers; those closest to our students probably do. I work with them to articulate, clarify, and reinforce our organization’s mission and values. And I work to make sure they have what they need to serve our students.”

SUSTAINING THE INSTITUTION

From the start of his tenure, Baldwin recognized that, in an ever-changing global economy, pathways to degree completion for adult learners and the historically underserved are needed more than ever. He believes Excelsior serves a public purpose in meeting this need. He noted that since its inception, the College has served as a beacon of hope for those left behind by traditional educational institutions. He also recognized that for Excelsior to endure and fulfill its promise, it needs to focus on its core mission and execute on its strategies.

The year he became president, the College faced a serious financial crisis, and Baldwin made a commitment to do what was required to create a foundation on which the College could build its future. Consulting with and retaining a variety of experts, he led the College through difficult, often painful business decisions.

“Jim stepped into the presidential role at a time of great uncertainty, and with that came great responsibility,” says alumnus Jerry L. Neff, chair of the Excelsior College Board of Trustees from 2014 to 2017. “He displayed the type of values-based leadership we needed to carry the College forward, and the board of trustees and the College community had the utmost confidence in his ability to do so. Jim was the right person at the right time to take the reins as president and CEO of our College.”

That challenging time resulted in renewed and strengthened board governance, creation of the Office of Risk Management with an internal auditor reporting to the board of trustees, the consolidation of operational units under the direction of a chief operating officer, and key performance indicators (KPIs) for each activity of the College. The budget development and management process was completely transformed with the implementation of training for budget managers, strengthened internal controls, increased accountability, and improved efficiency across the College.

While efforts were underway to return the College to financial stability, resources were redeployed to areas that would strengthen the College for the long term. A new strategic plan focused on three areas: (1) rigorous, engaging academics and an improved student experience, (2) technology investments, and (3) marketing initiatives to enable the College to “tell its story.” Progress in each of these areas was underpinned by a strengthened financial position.

The strategic plan was developed through an inclusive process that involved people at all levels of the institution and the board of trustees. Updated annually, it serves as a roadmap for the College and generates alignment and organization-wide



James N. Baldwin was officially installed as the third president of Excelsior College during Commencement in 2017. In his inaugural remarks, Baldwin stated his vision for Excelsior College. "... I promise you this: We will be relentless in providing access, affordability, and an exceptional student experience. We will reclaim our place as a leader and innovator in higher education based on Excelsior's mission and Excelsior's values. And we will do it all with good and faithful stewardship of this institution and its mission, one day handing it off to our successors stronger and even better."

PHOTO: MIKE HEMBERGER

support for strategic initiatives. With focus on the execution of specific objectives and regular reporting on KPIs, there is steady progress on initiatives that move the College forward. As it did last year, the College will conclude this fiscal year, ending June 30, 2020, with a significant surplus that will be invested in its strategic initiatives going forward.

In addition to the financial turnaround, Baldwin's tenure has seen major accomplishments in the areas of academic programs, student experience, technology, and marketing and business development.

ACADEMIC PROGRAMS

Excelsior has refocused on its core mission of providing learners with opportunities for degree completion. The restructuring of schools and student services in 2018 reduced the number of schools from five to three and phased out less popular degree programs and concentrations, putting the emphasis on in-demand programs that correspond with employment opportunities as well as with student needs and interests.

To address readiness for academic success, the College now requires completion of a Cornerstone course in its undergraduate programs. The first course of each degree program, the Cornerstone ensures that students have a "smart start" to their Excelsior experience and lays the foundation for their success.

Baldwin worked with Excelsior's School of Nursing to focus its nationally recognized associate degree program to certain geographic areas, invest in remote "on-the-ground" capacity to better support and engage students in clinical settings, and to make better use of technology through virtual clinical simulation in courses.

To dramatically improve student engagement and the academic experience, the College retained Ellucian, a technology company that provides software and services to the higher education sector, to work with its faculty and academic leadership to transform its degree programs and courses. The transition to the Canvas Learning Management Platform, which offers far greater opportunities to develop and deliver engaging content, was completed.

Baldwin talks about the potential for an "academic ecosystem" at the College, where transfer credits, credit for prior learning, exam-based credit, and credit from online courses are combined as part of individualized learning plans to help students earn their degrees.

STUDENT EXPERIENCE

Baldwin insists College employees put students first. Progress toward a more student- and academic-centered culture has been significant. By viewing the student experience as a continuum from inquiry to degree completion to alumni status,

the College focuses on expanding support for students at every step of their educational journeys. Baldwin sees more work to be done in this area.

"We've made progress, conversions have improved, transcript analyses are more responsive and complete in several days instead of weeks, and financial aid is packaged once per year so students can smoothly register for courses in the College's six terms," says Baldwin. "But we must adjust our advising and counseling model and make better use of available technology in improving the student experience and our capacity to intervene and offer help where needed. We need to maximize the value that our colleagues bring to their interactions with students by using technology to free them for more person-to-person interaction." Improved technology will enable students to self-serve where they are able to and seek support from their academic advisors when needed.

A commitment to student service also led to an emphasis on student advocacy and the creation of offices to support students with disabilities and ensure fundamental due process to students. In addition, the College adopted the CARES credo (each employee is compassionate, agile, respectful, and committed to excellence and service) that guides interaction with students. All student-facing services are led by an associate provost, who is responsible for the delivery of a high-quality and responsive student experience.

TECHNOLOGY

With an initial focus on addressing millions of dollars in deferred investments in technology and reinventing the College's website, the College now has a technology plan that requires investments in technology as an ongoing priority. Since Excelsior is an online institution, Baldwin sees the technology infrastructure as the College's campus. "We don't have a campus in a physical sense, and we don't need one," he says. "Our technology infrastructure is our campus, and it must be robust and constantly improving."

New systems have improved the operations of the College. These include a new financial information system and a human resources management system, changes in business practices and functions, and the centralized availability of data in a new data warehouse. In addition, regular improvements have been made to other information systems integral to the online learning experience. Achieving the goal of an enterprise resource planning (ERP) system, the centralized system that integrates enterprise functions, has been a challenge and remains a work-in-progress. The process of working toward the creation of an ERP has created opportunities for the College to question its policies and business practices, which is viewed as a positive step toward a successful future implementation.



GRATITUDE



For Thanksgiving 2019, President Baldwin recorded a message on gratitude that was shared on Excelsior’s Facebook page. His words continue to resonate, regardless of the season.

“...Gratitude reminds us of how fortunate we really are. And when things do go wrong, we can find solace, hope, and optimism in the gratitude that prompts us to reflect on what is good and right about our lives, and to be grateful for what we had ... and lost, to learn from setbacks — and to identify the opportunities that adversity presents, to think about how we’ll do better the next time.

When you start or end each day with thoughts of gratitude ... it can be transformative.

... I urge you to take a little time to reflect on the power of gratitude in your own life. Finally, let me express my deepest gratitude for all of you in the Excelsior College Community — our students, alumni, faculty, staff, and board of trustees — all of whom contribute to the richness of our work and the realization of our mission.”

← James N. Baldwin, with his family in the second photo from the bottom, has shown dedication to students and graduates as well as to employees, as evidenced by his involvement in various College activities.

MARKETING AND BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

Baldwin often refers to Excelsior as “the best kept secret in higher education” as he relates the need to tell the Excelsior story and the stories of student success to more audiences.

Marketing has been a strategic area of focus since 2017, and efforts have centered on building the Excelsior College brand and the brand story. The College researched, developed, and launched a brand campaign with the tagline “Life Happens. Keep Learning.” Messaging has focused on the College’s generous credit acceptance and ability to evaluate and award credit for military and workplace training. The College’s redesigned website is constructed to target prospective students. A cost and time-to-degree-completion estimator shows them how starting with more credits can shorten the time to earning a degree and gives them an idea of what expenses will be. A robust content strategy and public relations efforts promote College activities and the achievements of students and alumni.

Related to building the brand is increasing inquiries and enrollments. In addition to traditional routes to admissions, Excelsior has partnerships with employers, associations, and other educational institutions to reach more students. Partnership students save on tuition and the overall cost of earning a degree, and this is one way the College meets its mission and increases the number of working adults with a college degree. New partnerships, such as with educational systems in Kentucky and Texas as well as with ReUp Education, which encourages people who have some college but no degree to re-enroll and provides them with coaching and mentorship, help adults earn the degrees they need for career advancement.

LEADING THROUGH CHANGE

Through disruption, challenges, and successes, Baldwin has been a motivating force for employees to believe in the mission of Excelsior College and continue to put students first. He meets challenges directly and with steadfast calm, a quality held in esteem by many employees. He prefers to work with others to learn about issues and then develop the most promising solutions. He insists on an interdisciplinary approach, and his tenure has challenged the College to improve collaboration among all areas of the institution, to break down silos, and to execute on decisions. “You can have great ideas, beautiful plans, and dreams. You can chase shiny objects forever, but if you don’t execute and implement, you have nothing,” he says.

Baldwin sees his role as asking the right questions to stimulate thinking and discussion. He wants data-based decisions,

and the College has created a data warehouse to facilitate that. He also likes to hear from experts from within and outside the institution. This model regularly comes into play, as evidenced more recently by a task force formed in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Consisting of representatives from each area of the institution, the task force met regularly to address concerns about employee health and safety, maintaining business continuity and the student experience, and working to transition operations from on-site to remote locations.

While the College learns about its capacity to support remote work, Baldwin foresees changes in how people view online learning. He projects that many current high school students will ultimately consider online learning as a first option for college. “That’s why investments in technology, marketing, the quality of what we’re offering, and better student engagement are so critical,” he says. “The students of today and tomorrow are digital natives. They have much higher expectations for what their digital experience ought to be. We must deliver on that expectation.”

Baldwin looks to the future of the institution he righted while reflecting on the opportunities that remain. He describes his tenure as “eventful, challenging, and a privilege” and acknowledges he harbors a few regrets about his time with the College. “We’ve made progress on equity and inclusion but have not succeeded in creating a more diverse institution,” he says. “I regret financial conditions that required us to part with some valued and talented colleagues, and I had hoped we would achieve greater implementation of systems to more rapidly improve student services.”

Just the third president in the institution’s 49-year history, Baldwin came to the College during a unique time. “Jim was faced with challenges that, with the help of his team, he turned into opportunities and set the College on a path of transformation,” says Helen Benjamin, chair of the Excelsior College Board of Trustees since January 2018. “I could not be more pleased with the service Jim Baldwin has rendered on behalf of the College during his tenure.”

Although no one knows exactly how the future of higher education will unfold, change is certain. Baldwin, from his view, has left the next president of Excelsior College with a solid foundation on which to build the future and a team of capable leaders and colleagues committed to working with his successor. “Our leadership team is aligned and highly capable,” says Baldwin. “Our focus on financial stability and strategic priorities is manifest in the progress we’ve made. And you will not find a place more committed to its mission.”

Excelsior College, an institution transformed, welcomes its next president well-positioned to fulfill its purpose. ■

Maria C. Sparks is the executive director of communications and creative services at Excelsior College.



In June 2020, James N. Baldwin participates in the recording of remarks for Excelsior College's first-ever virtual Commencement celebration. The celebration moved online due to the COVID-19 pandemic. PHOTO: MIKE HEMBERGER

MIND OVER MATTER



The familiar concept takes on new meaning with the practice of mindfulness

BY DANA YANULAVICH

PEOPLE HAVE A LOT ON THEIR MINDS THESE DAYS — FAMILY, WORK, SCHOOL, FINANCIAL SECURITY, COVID-19. AND ALTHOUGH YOUR MIND MAY BE FULL WITH ALL THESE COMPETING THOUGHTS, IS IT *MINDFUL*?

Mindfulness is a practice that promotes intense concentration on the present rather than on becoming mired in daydreaming or competing thoughts. It's a way to train our minds to notice what's around us — to experience sights, sounds, sensations, and emotions in a nonjudgmental way. How many times have we driven to work, but when we arrive, we can't recall the trip? That's an example of *mindless* behavior, and that might come as no surprise, because our minds wander nearly half of the time. However, by being mindful of what's around us, a new way of experiencing the world is ours to behold. Mindfulness doesn't necessarily mean "overthinking;" it means "noticing new things," according to Ellen Langer, professor of

psychology at Harvard University and recognized as the "mother of mindfulness."

V. Blue Lemay, faculty program director for the humanities at Excelsior College, explains how mindfulness can lead to better self-awareness. "I'd say that at least for me, it [mindfulness] is certainly being in the present moment, but it also allows me to be aware of myself in the present moment, much more than I would be if I were being distracted. Because of that self-awareness, I'm able to understand who I am at that moment," Lemay states.

In addition, Lemay notes that mindfulness helps her examine her values with the end goal of becoming a better person. ➔

So where was the concept of mindfulness born? Its roots can be traced back to many religious, meditative traditions, but it is most often associated with Buddhism. Mindfulness as practiced today is credited to Jon Kabat-Zinn, who learned to meditate while working on his PhD in molecular biology at MIT. Initially, he applied the concepts of mindfulness to treat chronic pain and published his findings in 1982. Building on his initial success, he developed the eight-week Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program. He also established the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care, and Society at the University of Massachusetts Medical School.

By applying renewed focus and awareness, coupled with living in the moment, mindfulness offers far-reaching positive effects ranging across many aspects of our lives. These include health benefits such as lowering blood pressure, managing pain, and improving sleep. In addition, mindfulness has been proven to promote better mental health by reducing stress and anxiety and helping to address addictive behaviors.

To learn that the value of mindfulness has permeated many aspects of our lives, including health care, the military, the workplace, as well as education, is no surprise. At Excelsior, for example, mindfulness is included among the General Education Career Competencies as a related skill under the Cultural Diversity and Expression competency.

Although focusing on self through the practice of mindfulness might sound like fertile ground for sowing the seeds of self-absorption and narcissism, nothing could be further from the truth. “It doesn’t mean putting blinders up — it means being focused; it’s not self-absorbed,” explains Ellen LaDieu, lead faculty program director for Excelsior’s School of Nursing.

Lemay adds further clarification, “I’m being self-aware because I care about my reactions with others. And so the more I can understand myself, the better my interactions with others will be. It’s about understanding you in that moment. If you choose to change your patterns so that you’re more aware of your values, it can have a profound effect on the world outside you.”

Mindfulness is a distinctly economical practice; it doesn’t require that you purchase specialized equipment or buy into a gym membership to exercise your brain in a beneficial manner. The primary investment is in devoting time to routine contemplation, either through meditation, deep breathing, or visualization to name a few techniques. “Mindfulness doesn’t tend to be very prescriptive at all,” observes Lemay. “You have to find out for yourself. It’s about creation. It’s about being curious.”

Lemay points out that the key to mindfulness is practice. In a contemporary world that is finely focused on achievement and acquisitions, learning to settle your mind and be quiet with yourself takes repetition. She notes, “You can have all the knowledge you want, read all the books you want about

...mindfulness promotes
the here and now,
allowing us to transcend
ingrained thinking habits.

mindfulness, but, unless you really practice it, it’s just another cool trend, another entertaining gimmick that you can sort of be interested in but never fully explore or understand the benefits.”

Thirty minutes of meditation three times a day works best for Lemay. But mindfulness is not a one-size-fits-all tool. Molly Costello, program coordinator for Excelsior’s School of Undergraduate Studies, is a relative newcomer to mindfulness. “During particularly stressful times in my life, I practiced basic meditation for about 20 minutes twice a day,” she says. “However, I have found it more enjoyable and helpful by meditating for shorter periods of time. For beginners, even just taking a few minutes in the morning or at night to ground yourself and clear your mind of interruptions and unhelpful thoughts is very liberating.”

Of course, there are many resources, some free, some paid, that can guide you. For example, LaDieu uses a paid mobile application called Headspace. “It helps people to begin to learn meditation, mindfulness, and to be aware,” she explains. Other popular apps include Insight Timer; Stop, Breathe & Think (now known as MyLife); and Smiling Mind.

National museums offer online visualization opportunities to guide meditation and mindfulness. For example, the Rubin Museum of Art in New York City, which specializes in Himalayan art, culture, and ideas, has the Rubin Daily Offering five days a week. Here, practitioners, artists, teachers, and experts offer insights and tools using the collection’s artwork as inspiration.

Numerous books are available to guide the practice as well. Noted authority Kabat-Zinn has penned many of them, including “Mindfulness for Beginners: Reclaiming the Present Moment—And Your Life.” Both Lemay and Costello cite “The Mindful Leader” by Michael Bunting as an insightful addition to the knowledge base.

The practice of mindfulness has permeated all levels of education. Teaching this skill has been shown to reduce everyday stressors, benefitting both teachers and students. Mindfulness has been linked to improved academic achievement as well as

to enhanced social and emotional learning. By concentrating on the present, students also may achieve better focus.

The Bethlehem Central Middle School in Delmar, New York, for example, has several mindfulness initiatives. “The middle school has been clued into rising mental health concerns for a number of years, and we’ve long espoused a foundational mission and charge of building students’ character as well as their academics,” explains middle school principal Mike Klugman. To that end, the school hosts a Monday Morning Mindful Minute via an announcement broadcast and sponsors a Mindful Morning club. The weekly club continued meeting via Google Meet when the COVID-19 pandemic shuttered schools. School guidance counselor Chynna Marcucci noticed many benefits among club members, including the students becoming more connected and thoughtful toward one another. She notes, “Kids are amazing and have an unexpected ability to practice mindfulness. They try so hard to access the position of calm mind and body.”

Mindfulness also complements the concept of the “presence of the nurse,” explains LaDieu. She was introduced to mindfulness through her interest in holistic nursing. “I need to be really present for the patient, so that’s really being mindful,” she explains, noting that it can be an important healing tool in health care. Studies have shown that nurses who engage in mindfulness develop better active listening and empathy skills. Being mindful can benefit not only the patient but also the practitioner. One study showed the nurses who participated in Kabat-Zinn’s MBSR program experienced reduced burnout and emotional exhaustion, for example.

This simple yet powerful tool has far-reaching benefits into other areas not typically associated with contemplative approaches. The military has tapped into mindfulness to help servicemembers gain focus and reduce distraction. In one case, mindfulness techniques were used to help infantry soldiers focus on when to pull the trigger to sharpen their shooting skills. Another study showed training that included mindful breathing helped participants better grasp important information during chaotic situations, an attribute that could benefit combat conditions. But it’s also used in more-supportive modalities, helping veterans cope with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Here mindfulness can be beneficial in helping the veteran focus on the present while not dwelling on the traumatic experience. The National Center for PTSD, part of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, provides a free Mindfulness Coach mobile application that offers articles on mindfulness, an assessment, as well as practice aids.

Many companies have promoted mindfulness in the workplace primarily to increase productivity, but with the additional benefits of reducing employee stress and also sharpening focus. Among the major corporations that have sponsored mindfulness programs for employees are General Mills, Google, Bank

of America, and Goldman Sachs to name a few. The positive outcomes can be impressive. For example, Duke University studied Aetna, a large managed health care company, where 10,000 employees took part in mindfulness or yoga classes. Participants reported improvement in their sleep quality and a reduction in pain levels. In addition and perhaps most important from a business standpoint, a weekly gain of an hour of productivity was also noted. Studies also show that mindfulness can promote better workplace relationships that can possibly support improved diversity and inclusion behaviors. Other research has shown that mindfulness leads to more ethical behavior, improved safety, and reduced employee turnover.

Not only is there a plethora of anecdotal reports on the benefits of mindfulness, but also there is supporting physiological evidence. For example, in one study, MRI results of participants in an MBSR course displayed increased grey-matter density in the area of the brain associated with learning and memory and decreased density in the areas attributed to anxiety and stress. Lemay cites the body’s fight-or-flight response in supporting mindfulness’s effect on the body. The amygdala in the brain is responsible for anger and fear and other emotional responses, but those who practice mindfulness have shown decreased activity in those areas. She explains, “Studies show that people who do mindfulness meditation have a lot more resiliency.” Other scientific explorations have uncovered that the practice of mindfulness has a positive effect on the treatment and prevention of heart disease.

No doubt mindfulness can be a useful practice throughout our lives, but perhaps even more so during highly stressful times such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Just as many parts of daily life were put on pause to slow the spread of the virus, so too can mindfulness decelerate stressful times while enhancing our overall well-being. Costello states, “One of the tactics that has proven most beneficial to me is simply taking a pause. When life gets hectic, it’s important to slow down and regroup.”

Albert Einstein said, “We can’t solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.” Mindfulness is a great example that shows the validity of his observation. It teaches us to pay attention to the present while embracing the full experience of life without being ensnared in old patterns and becoming distracted and lost. Rather than analyzing things based on our past experiences, mindfulness promotes the here and now, allowing us to transcend ingrained thinking habits. “Mindfulness gives me more opportunity to not get tied up and go off on some tangent,” says LaDieu. “It lets me look at the circumstances and information, and consider what’s going on in a mindful manner, allowing me to weather the punches easier.” ■

Dana Yanulavich is a freelance writer and former senior editor at Excelsior College. She earned a Master of Arts in Liberal Studies from the College in 2008.



DREAM JOB:
Working in Public Health



WORDS OF WISDOM:
“If you really, really, really want it, you can find a way to go back [to school]. You just have to find something that fits you.”



KRIS OUA

LYNDON PORTER Knows How to Adapt

From turning a patient’s hospital stay into a home away from home, to taking care of family in his own home, Lyndon Porter has had to become a master in making it work before bringing home his Bachelor of Science in Health Sciences from Excelsior College in 2019. We spoke to Lyndon about his academic journey, career, and secrets to his success during a visit to Albany, New York, for Excelsior’s Commencement celebration in July 2019.

A veteran from Summerville, South Carolina, Porter left school to join the service. At the time, he didn’t think he was ready for college and credits his time in the military with giving him the structure and discipline he used to succeed years later. After the military, Porter started work in a nursing home and discovered a passion for health care. Porter knew he would need a degree to advance in his health care career, but after a stint at a traditional college, he realized that time spent sitting in a classroom wasn’t going to make his other responsibilities any easier. “You’ve got family, you have to go home, you have to cut the grass, you have to go pay bills,

then you have to go to work, and you have to change diapers, and you have to be everywhere,” he remembers.

Thanks to encouragement from family, Porter discovered Excelsior’s online programs and knew they were the perfect fit for his life, work schedule, and goals. “Once I got exposed to going to school online, I was like, OK, now I can do it. I can make my own time ... I can go review my homework and go in my class and not worry about missing an assignment or falling asleep and having to be back at work in the morning. You just have to find your niche,” Porter said, adding “Everything was a lot easier just because [Excelsior College] made it a lot easier.”

As a supervisor in a health care facility, Porter works on improving the hospital stay of every patient in his care and appreciated his courses’ focus on the patient experience. “The thing I remember the most is basically how to talk to patients, how to make them feel like they’re the most important thing because they are,” Porter said. Building a relationship of trust and comfort with his patients comes naturally to Porter in his role at the hospital. “You want to make sure they know that

“The thing I remember the most is basically how to talk to patients, how to make them feel like they’re the most important thing because they are.”

they’re taken care of and to let them know: ‘hey, this is what’s going on. This is how it is going. This is what I’m doing.’ Hopefully that eases them and makes the whole experience altogether better,” he said.

Now that he has his degree, he’ll be able to move into different positions at the hospital where he works or even pursue an advanced degree. But, first he planned some time with his family who had been the driving force behind his success, especially his children; Mark Peters, Jared Peters, Jesse Peters, Mia Peters, and Devin Porter. “My family’s very supportive — keep plugging at it, encouraging like, ‘you can do it.’ Letting you know what you’re doing is making a difference and telling me they’re proud of what I’m doing.” ■ — C.A.



“My vacation for years was working on my novel.”



FAVORITE AUTHORS:

E.M. Forster, David Sedaris, Jeannette Walls, Edith Wharton



CURRENT BOOK:

“A Gentleman in Moscow” by Amor Towles



PRIOR DEGREE:

BS in Communications Studies

MIKE HEMBERGER

DONNA TYTKO Explores Various Perspectives as an Author

Donna Tytko always thought that she’d write a book, and, as a student in the Master of Arts in Liberal Studies program at Excelsior College, she finally had the impetus.

For the capstone experience of the program, she chose to pursue a creative thesis. “How could you argue with writing a book as part of your education?” quips Tytko, an avid reader since childhood. The course requirements directed that she incorporate her graduate-level research into the creative thesis and show how her studies influenced the novel. Her research paper explored psychology, education, and leadership, so she brought these themes to her novel “Night Air,” a psychological thriller about a woman named Penny who is haunted by her past.

The book captures situations from the perspectives of various characters. “I wanted the book to be from different people’s points of view. It’s like research [that way]... I wanted all these people’s points of view coming through in the story,” says Tytko.

The novel was essentially completed when she earned her master’s degree in May 2010, but Tytko wasn’t finished with the story. She

ultimately rewrote the novel five times, starting from page 1 each time and working her way through it. “I wasn’t really satisfied with it,” she says. She’d consider whether a character was adding to the story and then decided to eliminate those that didn’t advance the story.

Through the rewrites, Tytko didn’t know how the book would end. Once she did have this elusive piece of the plot, the novel finally came together. In all, it took nine years to bring the novel to completion. After that, she moved on to writing another one. “I spend a lot of time enjoying the act of writing,” says Tytko with a laugh.

She was not going to be one of those people who throw away their first novel, however, since she had put countless hours into perfecting hers. “It was certainly difficult to stop writing it,” says Tytko, who explains that she would write from 8 p.m. to 3 a.m. and then wake at 6 a.m. for her day. “My vacation for years was working on my novel.”

For the second book, Tytko has learned to write outlines for each chapter so that she knows the ending early on and can avoid complete rewrites. This next book is a biography of Hattie Gray, the founder of the famed

Hattie’s Chicken Shack in Saratoga Springs, New York, who was known as much for her restaurant as for her support of neighbors and the community. “I greatly admire her generous spirit,” says Tytko. “I learned about Hattie when I was doing research for my novel. I was looking for someone who lived in the Capital District and was known for their extraordinary kindness. In my book “Night Air,” Penny is given a “hand up” by Hattie.”

When she was learning how to write a novel, Tytko, the associate dean for liberal arts at Siena College in Loudonville, New York, was also learning about herself. “I learned to respect my own intuition and skills,” she says, adding that she put the book out for the public only when she thought it was ready.

“The education I received at Excelsior really did make this novel much richer,” says Tytko. As a graduate student, she incorporated liberal arts concepts into a research paper titled “You Do Better When You Know Better.” These concepts also appear in her novel. “There is so much available to us to make our decisions, so many viewpoints out there.” ■ – M.S.



SUPPORT SYSTEM:
Excelsior's academic advisors



WHEN SHE'S NOT STUDYING:
After-school activities with her children



CURRENT GOAL:
Earning a doctorate



KRIS OUA

ALISON NOONE

Credits the Excelsior MBA for Her Career Advancement

Alison Noone, of Toms River, New Jersey, was already familiar with Excelsior College when she enrolled in the MBA program, having earned a Bachelor of Science in Business in 2010. She chose to pursue another degree at Excelsior because she loved the bachelor's program and the online learning fit right in with her lifestyle.

Noone, the assistant director of student life at Ocean County Community College, enjoyed the experience of earning her bachelor's degree with Excelsior, particularly because of the flexibility to do her coursework around her full-time job and life as a mother of three and the support available from Excelsior 24/7. "If I had a technological issue, I was able to contact someone and get it fixed even at midnight or two in the morning, so when I came to the final decision to get my MBA, there was really no question to come back to Excelsior," she says.

Earning an MBA in 2018 has allowed Noone to move up in her career at Ocean Community College, located on the Jersey Shore. She has been with the college for almost two decades, starting as a student

worker in the Student Life Office and taking on positions of increasing responsibility in the same office. The Student Life Office is an exciting department where no two days are alike, says Noone. Sometimes they coordinate events for the community and some days they coordinate events for other departments. That's part of what makes it so much fun, too. "It helps keep me connected to the campus as a whole and feel like I am part of something bigger than my department alone," she says.

As assistant director, Noone is responsible for keeping students engaged and encouraging them to progress forward with their studies. "I feel like my education has helped me do my job better and provide the best information for my students. I've also been able to create opportunities for myself that I may not have considered previously," she says, and adds she regularly uses business, financial literacy, and accounting skills learned from Excelsior's MBA program when doing such things as balancing club budgets and negotiating contracts.

One thing Noone shares with students is how she overcame hurdles she ran into as a

student. Time management was the biggest challenge, and she gradually learned how to schedule her days so she could fit in school-work. "The master's program is fast paced, it is challenging, it doesn't hold back or care that you have other things going on, just like your job doesn't care that you're going back to school," she says.

Although her title hasn't changed, her responsibilities have changed greatly since earning an MBA, she says. She has been coordinating leadership training programs for students and staff and has also become a certified Gallup Strengths coach. "Probably most importantly, I was an integral part of establishing an on-campus food pantry," says Noone. "I serve as the director of the resource, coordinating volunteers, inventory, donations, and more."

Noone says she wishes she had not waited so long between earning a bachelor's degree and returning for a master's and encourages other adult learners not to wait. She has taken her own advice and is pursuing a Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership, Learning, and Innovation at Wilmington University. ■ —J.K.



SUPPORT SYSTEM:
His wife



IN HIS FREE TIME:
Studies Austrian economics



SECRET TALENT:
Making balloon animals



AARON ALEXANDER Uses His MBA to Succeed in His Civilian Career

After spending 10 years in the nuclear Navy sector, Aaron Alexander, of Saratoga Springs, New York, decided to transition to the civilian sector. To do so, he knew he needed to pursue his higher education. His superior officers told him to “get it done” when it came to his education and to use his GI Bill benefits to go back to school. With their encouragement, he decided to attend Excelsior College and earned his combined Bachelor of Science in Nuclear Engineering Technology and Master of Business Administration in 2019.

Alexander joined the Navy as an advanced engineman but after taking the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) test and scoring high, his superiors recommended he go into the nuclear program. His background in nuclear technology allowed him to find a job in the civilian sector. He works for Global Foundries, a semiconductor manufacturing company, as a module section manager. In this position, he oversees a team of 22 technicians and engineers. He used to work 12–13-hour shifts, four days a week in the engineering department, but his job now

“I kind of want to see where else I can apply my skills and see what fits. I like figuring things out.”

is more manager-oriented. His main role is making sure everyone works together to get the job done. He says, “It’s bringing everything together to kind of accomplish one thing and keep production up.”

Pursuing an MBA with Excelsior helped Alexander as he transitioned into his new position. “I kind of picked up my skill set that I was learning in my MBA course and I became more appealing to the company as a manager,” he says, and adds he applies a lot of what he learned from Excelsior’s conflict management course to his supervisory role. BUS 311 Organizational Behavior also had an impact. “There were chapters in [the book] that weren’t even required reading. I read them anyway because they applied so heavily to what I was doing and leading people and understanding that aspect of the business.”

Alexander believes he is in a field that has a future full of possibilities. He believes

nuclear power is misunderstood because people tend to think of disastrous events like Chernobyl and Three Mile Island. “We’ve come so far with our ability to control nuclear power safely, just in the past 10, 15, 20 years, that it’s got to be a part of our energy future,” he says.

Returning to school has allowed Alexander to thrive in his career and now he tells others, especially servicemembers, to go back to school, too. “Jump in and do it as soon as you can,” he says, adding that his only regret is that he waited longer than he should have to earn his degrees.

Alexander hopes to become a leader in the field one day and may add to his resume by pursuing Project Management Professional certification and taking the Fundamentals of Engineering Exam in the industrial and systems, mechanical, or other disciplines category. He isn’t ruling out going back to school or possibly becoming a teacher in the future either, because he likes to see what’s out there. “I kind of want to see where else I can apply my skills and see what fits. I like figuring things out,” he says. ■ – J.K.

KRIS OUA



AN EARLY
GATHERING
OF ALUMNI

Alumni are an important part of the Excelsior College community. Since the College's inception as the Regents External Degree Program and through name changes, they have supported the institution's goals and worked to strengthen ties among outside communities, students, alumni, and the College. Above, alumni meet in 1978 in New York City.

To gather alumni more formally to discuss Excelsior and its alumni presence, the Alumni Association was formed by the mid-1980s and holds an annual meeting, typically with the newest graduates. ■ —J.K.

Editor's Note: Do you recognize the gathering in this photo? If so, we'd like to hear from you at magazine@excelsior.edu.



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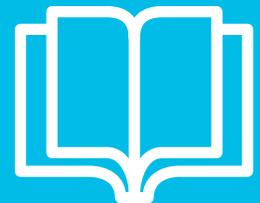
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PUBLISH A
BOOK?**



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