

# EXCELSIOR



COVID  
COPING p.19



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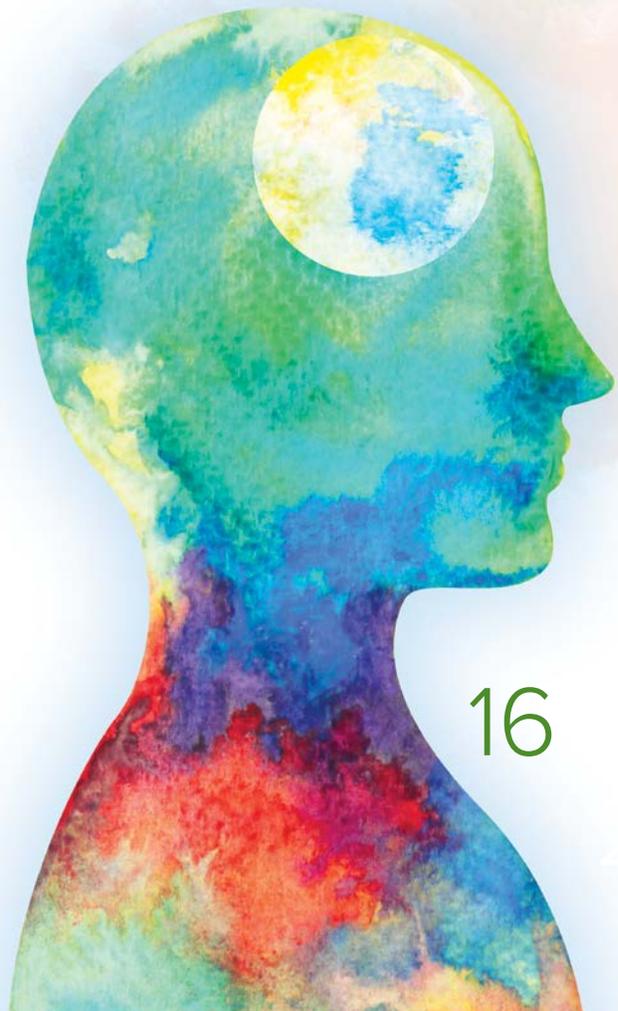
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# EXCELSIOR

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

[EXCELSIOR.EDU/MAGAZINE](http://EXCELSIOR.EDU/MAGAZINE)

**ON THE COVER:** Lakeya Collins, a 2018 associate degree in nursing graduate, takes precautions in the time of COVID-19. PHOTO: PATRICK BIESTMAN / ACUITY PHOTOGRAPHY

## Social Justice at Excelsior College

**E**xcel­sior College will establish a center for social justice in 2021. In some ways, the center will be a new direction for the College, but in others, it is a continuation of our mission and values. After all, Excelsior College was founded on the belief that access to higher education — particularly for those who have been historically underrepresented — is important to individual and societal progress.

Social justice is a central component of our economic, moral, political, and environmental ecosystem. Components of social justice include racial justice; gender justice; economic justice; environmental justice; equity; housing, water, and food security; fair employment practices; and fundamental human rights and respect. How these issues are addressed determines whether people are treated fairly and justly. When one or more are missing, discrimination, oppression, and unfair treatment of people throughout the world increases.

Our focus on social justice is all the more important in light of the polarization in our society and the inaccurate portrayals of social justice as little more than disagreements between special interest groups. Justice is not relative to individuals or groups; it is a foundational element of any society based on moral and ethical principles. In fact, justice requires that we *not* focus on our individual interest, but rather base fairness and equity on our commonalities as human beings.

One helpful way to consider social justice is through a thought experiment introduced by John Rawls in his seminal book, "A Theory of Justice." Rawls argues that the only logical system of justice

is one that treats people equally, regardless of race, gender, or class, showing that if we put aside our own biases that favor us, we will come to the same conclusion about justice as a matter of fairness.

Specifically, Rawls argues that a system of justice based on fairness must include the following. First, each person must have the same basic liberties as everyone else. We must all be free to pursue the lives we want to the same extent as everyone else. Second, social and economic inequalities must satisfy two conditions: There must be fair equality of opportunity, and the greatest benefits resulting from inequalities should benefit the least well-off. In other words, everyone should have the same opportunity to get a job or seek public office as anyone else, and an unequal distribution of wealth and services is justified only if that distribution benefits those who are least well-off.

Although not explicit, the history of Excelsior College subscribes to Rawls' theory of justice. We strive to serve those who have not had the opportunity to benefit from traditional higher education, and we are an equal opportunity educator and employer. We do not discriminate based on race, gender, religion, financial background, or other characteristics.

A center for social justice will build on Excelsior's open-access mission to serve those who have not been well served by traditional higher education. The center will help our students and staff better understand social justice issues, including diversity, equity, inclusion, equality, and liberty for all. This is a natural step in Excelsior's development, and a clear statement of our commitment to the principles of social justice.



A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "David Schejbal". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

DAVID SCHEJBAL, PhD  
PRESIDENT

## First Graduate Research Symposium Highlights Student and Alumni Work

**O**n October 2, 2020, Excelsior College held its inaugural Graduate Research Symposium, during which graduate students presented research in health sciences, business, cybersecurity, nursing, criminal justice, and public service. The goal was to provide graduate students with an avenue to share their research, practice conference and presentation skills, network, and foster interprofessional collaborations.

“The Graduate Research Symposium was a tremendous opportunity for the College to recognize the research achievements of our students,” said Scott Dolan, dean of the School of Graduate Studies. “I was incredibly impressed with the quality of the work and the talent of our students—especially the timeliness of the research and its applicability to real-world organizational and societal issues. The symposium is aligned with one of the key goals we have established for ourselves at the graduate level: to help students assume positions of leadership in their fields.”

Students and alumni were invited to participate in the symposium, and presenters were selected after a review of proposals. Presentations included:

› “Military Veterans Obtaining Post Service Employment” by Matthew Baird, a graduate student in the Master of Science in Management program;

› “Presenting a Pilot of an Educational Internship for Online Nursing Education” co-presented by Jennifer Bastien, a student in the Master of Science in Nursing Education program, who previously earned associate and bachelor’s degrees from Excelsior, and Robin Dewald, a senior faculty program director for Excelsior’s master’s in nursing program;

› “Quantitative Analysis of Self-Efficacy Between Mentored and Non-Mentored Nurse Faculty” by Maureen Walls Sileo, a registered nurse who earned a Master of Science in Nursing Education from Excelsior;

“The Graduate Research Symposium was a tremendous opportunity for the College to recognize the research achievements of our students.” —Scott Dolan, Dean, School of Graduate Studies

› “Revising an Alcohol Withdrawal Protocol to Optimize Outcomes” by Bernadine Claus, a graduate of the Master of Science in Nursing Education program;

› “Assessment of Nurse’s/Caregiver’s Competencies in Donning and Doffing of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in the Era of COVID-19” by Mohamed Jalloh, student in the Master of Science in Nursing Leadership and Administration of Health Care Systems program; and

› “Nursing Implications and Findings from a Portal Activation Study” by Mary Anne Theiss, adjunct instructor in the Master of Science in Nursing Education program.

Students conducted their research using case analysis, website analysis, original research, primary research, and secondary research, and translated research into health care practice on nursing, mentoring, and other topics.

Invited speaker Nelson Tuazon presented “Adopt, Adapt, Abandon: Building a Culture of Inquiry and Discovery.” Tuazon is the vice president and associate chief nursing officer at the University Health System in South Texas and teaches in the School of Nursing at Excelsior. In his presentation, he spoke about learning to adopt, adapt, or abandon practices when creating new programs and projects, particularly in health care settings.

During the symposium, Srikanta Banerjee, PhD, the keynote speaker, spoke about

“Loneliness in the Era of the COVID-19 Pandemic” from his perspective working at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in the area of infectious diseases. His presentation addressed how social isolation can increase mortality rates, especially during times of pandemic. “Social psychology, computer-mediated research—these can be strategies that are used to increase social presence,” Banerjee said. He explained how using emoticons in text messages and video chat can help people feel more connected during this pandemic. Banerjee’s discussion was particularly relevant since the symposium was the first time that Excelsior students shared their research via a virtual conference setting due to COVID-19 social distancing restrictions.

The Ever Upward prize for outstanding presentation at this year’s symposium was awarded to Mohamed Jalloh for his presentation, “Assessment of Nurse’s/Caregiver’s Competencies in Donning and Doffing of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in the Era of COVID-19.” During his presentation, Jalloh, an assistant director of nursing at a continuing care retirement community, addressed the importance of having a constant supply of PPE for nurses and their ability to use them effectively during COVID-19. His research concluded that, when used properly, PPE can improve staff competency, reduce patient mortality rates, and reduce costs associated with COVID-19 infections.

“The presentations were outstanding,” said Michele Paludi, faculty program director for graduate human resources and leadership programs, and cochair for the Graduate Research Symposium. “They have far-reaching implications for several disciplines. It was an exciting opportunity to have collaborative relationships with the School of Graduate Studies and School of Nursing.” Mary Lee Pollard, dean of the School of Nursing, added, “I was so pleased to see graduate students and graduate faculty across all disciplines engaged in sharing information about their scholarly work. I look forward to having a similar event next year.” ■ —J.K.



## Students Access Holistic Support Through Confidential Services and Support Resources

**W**hile pursuing their degrees, Excelsior College students balance multiple priorities and responsibilities. To help students with life's stressors before they can become a barrier to their academic success, the College recently introduced a student assistance program with confidential counseling and a variety of additional support services.

Through a partnership with ComPsych, a provider of employee assistance programs, Excelsior connects students and their household members to confidential support, resources, and information for personal and work-life issues 24 hours a day, seven days

a week. In addition to the student assistance program, ComPsych's GuidanceResources platform includes self-service resources that are available online, so students can access timely, expert information when they need it. The student assistance program and additional support services are offered to all enrolled students at no cost.

"Often, a life stressor drains students' energy, motivation, and time and can keep them from making progress with their degree program," says Jeanne Mannarino, director of student engagement and staff training at Excelsior. "We are hoping that having this resource will encourage students to proactively address stressors and avoid having to withdraw from or fail a course. The services offer such a wide range of support—from finding childcare to help with budgeting and finances—so there's bound to be something of benefit for all students."

By offering the student assistance program and the additional support services, Excelsior can meet the holistic needs of students as they juggle their various responsibilities. Academic advisors will continue to assist with students' academic concerns, while ComPsych resources address students' everyday life challenges.

"Our academic advisors, while very knowledgeable about student success theories and practices, are not licensed mental health counselors or social workers," says Mannarino, who, as part of her job, provides training and support to academic advisors. "We previously offered students referrals to national and community services but wanted to be able to connect students with a more personalized support system."

Academic advisors have tracked the types of concerns students talk about, and the partnership with ComPsych helps to ensure that students receive the individualized

support they need to address a variety of nonacademic challenges. ComPsych's trained clinicians and experts can assist students with concerns that fall outside the scope of the academic advisor's role, including such complicated and serious ones as caring for an ill loved one, food insecurity, homelessness, and mental health.

ComPsych, based in Chicago, has clinicians located worldwide, so this partnership enables Excelsior's geographically dispersed, diverse adult students to receive information about resources local to them. ComPsych also has experience working with military and veteran populations and understands the unique needs of these students, especially those who have recently separated from the military or are returning from deployment.

Students can find information about contacting ComPsych GuidanceResources through a link in the MyExcelsior student portal, and academic advisors and instructional faculty can also direct students to the resources in MyExcelsior when a student mentions having a life challenge or asks for assistance. Also important, when students access the services via phone, they speak directly with a counseling professional who will listen to their concerns and guide them to the appropriate services. In addition, ComPsych's online portal offers self-service for vital information, tools, and support, including articles, podcasts, videos, slide-shows, on-demand training, and "Ask the Expert" personal responses to questions.

"The College selected ComPsych as the provider of our student assistance program due to its vast array of services," says Kathy Moran, the College's ombudsperson. "They not only provide individual and family counseling, but also offer GuidanceResources that address issues such as wellness, relationships, work and education, financial and legal matters, lifestyle, and more. Students can find information on the ComPsych website ranging from 'How to Eat Healthy on a Budget' to 'Time Management Tools and Principles.' I am certain that these services will equip our students with the resources they need to be successful in their academic, personal, and professional lives."

## THE GUIDANCERESOURCES SERVICES INCLUDE:

### › **Student Assistance Program for Confidential Counseling:**

The student assistance program provides short-term counseling services for students and their household members to help them handle concerns constructively, before they become major issues. Students and their household members can call anytime about concerns such as marital, relationship, and family problems; stress, anxiety, and depression; grief and loss, job pressures, and substance abuse. Each person has access to three face-to-face sessions per issue, per year.

### › **Work-Life Solutions:**

For students who find that they have too much to do, and too little time to get it all done, work-life specialists can help. They can do the research for students and provide qualified referrals and customized resources for child and elder care, moving, pet care, college planning, home repair, buying a car, planning an event, selling a house, and more.

### › **Legal Support:**

Students have an attorney "on call" whenever they have questions about legal matters. If students require representation, they can be referred to a qualified attorney for a free 30-minute consultation and a 25 percent reduction in customary legal fees.

### › **Financial Information:**

Everyone has financial questions. With this benefit, students can get answers to their questions about budgeting, debt management, tax issues, and other money concerns from on-staff certified public accountants, certified financial planners, and other financial experts.

## EXCELSIOR BEGINS A COMMON READ PROGRAM

In summer 2000, Excelsior College held its first Common Read program, a community-wide shared reading experience. Students, alumni, faculty, and staff were invited to participate in this experience designed to stimulate discussion, encourage different perspectives, and build community.

"When you read books, they bring you to different places, they change you by opening up different experiences and thoughts," says Cathy Germano, director of learning services at Excelsior College. "That's what educates you." Germano was a member of a committee comprising staff members from across the College who planned the first Common Read.

For the initial selection, the committee selected "Educated" by Tara Westover. For the next Common Read, planned for early 2021, staff members are planning to survey members of the Excelsior community for their preferred book from a list of options. The selection will be announced in December, and information will be posted on the College's website at [www.excelsior.edu/about/diversity/](http://www.excelsior.edu/about/diversity/).

The idea behind the Common Read for Excelsior is that by reading together, participants build connections and strengthen the College community.

"The Common Read program is a great way to foster conversations among all members of the Excelsior College community," says Catherine Seaver, interim dean of the School of Undergraduate Studies. Seaver initiated the planning for the inaugural Common Read. "Our first book read was a wonderful success and I enjoyed the lively and thoughtful discussions," she says. "I look forward to the next book and hope that even more members of our community will join us."

Common Read programs are popular at higher education institutions, K-12 schools, and across communities at the local, city, and state level. The initiative promotes literacy while engaging an entire community in a common reading experience. ■ – M.S.

■ – M.S.

## Noncredit Offerings Fulfill Changing Workforce Needs

**E**xcel­sior College is partnering with ed2go, a Cengage company and a leading provider of online adult continuing education and career training programs, to provide learners with access to fully online, noncredit courses to gain additional marketable work­force skills.

By taking a noncredit career training or professional skills training course, individuals can demonstrate practical competencies or specialized knowledge to advance their careers. The career training courses are offered in topics that meet current and emerging workforce demands and are designed to prepare learners for a new career, career advancement, or industry certification in today’s most in-demand fields such as health care, technology, and business. The professional skills training courses give learners a convenient way to explore their interests and prepare to take the next step in their personal or professional lives. Both types of courses include options that are instructor-led or self-paced, and some can be completed in as little as three months.

The career training and professional skills training courses can supplement what current students are learning in their degree programs to help them further stand out in their chosen industry.

The courses also support the needs of new online learners. Developments throughout 2020, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting changes to how people live, work, and learn, have led to growth in the online education market. New or potential online learners include recent college graduates seeking to enhance their resumes, current or prospective college students trying build on their academic experience, furloughed or laid-off workers planning to change careers, and employed individuals working from home.

“We are excited to add new opportunities for adult learners to gain skills and alternative credentials, such as certificates, through more than 1,000 online continuing education fundamental and career training courses.

There are a variety of high-demand subjects that align with our current 40 degree programs across six areas of study—business, health sciences, liberal arts, nursing, public service, and technology—to help students work toward career advancement,” says Lisa R. Braverman, Excelsior College’s vice provost for academic and faculty affairs. “During COVID-19, our partnership with ed2go is even more important because it is advancing individuals’ contribution to the workforce and providing relevant education to meet the changing job landscape.”

Nationwide data reports growth and interest in alternative or microcredential educational programs, which is especially true during times of economic stress. Excelsior’s training courses respond to this need by giving learners maximum flexibility, critical upskilling opportunities, and new credentialing options.

“There is growing need for continuing education options that support learners in reskilling and advancement throughout their lifelong career journey,” said Cory Eyler, vice president and general manager for ed2go. “We are proud to partner with Excelsior to help close this gap for today’s learners and empower them with the knowledge and capabilities they need to advance in their careers and ultimately improve their lives.”

Excelsior College’s target audience are those who already possess a degree or who wish to advance, change, or find new jobs through completion of relevant workforce-related courses over the short term.

These training courses require a small investment from the student when compared to traditional degree programs and can have long-term benefits such as greater income or career change opportunities. Each course with ed2go yields a certificate of completion that learners can show to prospective employers as evidence of acquiring specific skills and competencies. According to Braverman, the acquisition of skills and competencies can lead to better job placement and career advancement, in both the short and long term.

“We are excited to add new opportunities for adult learners to gain skills and alternative credentials, such as certificates, through more than 1,000 online continuing education fundamental and career training courses.”

—Lisa R. Braverman, Vice Provost for Academic and Faculty Affairs

### Courses Designed for Moving Ahead

Excelsior College offers more than 1,000 career training and professional skills training courses to prepare individuals to meet their career and professional development goals. Here are some examples of the trainings available:

#### CAREER TRAINING COURSES

- Mastering Project Management
- CompTIA Security Plus
- Freight Broker
- Certified Medical Administrative Assistant
- Certified Medical Billing and Coding Specialist

#### PROFESSIONAL SKILLS TRAINING COURSES

- Homeschool Success
- Computer Skills in the Workplace
- Start Your Own Small Business
- Genealogy Basics
- Keys to Effective Communication

■ —M.S.

# 2019–2020 GRADUATES AT A GLANCE

## 32

Thirty-two percent of graduates reported being a member of a minority group.

## 1

This year's Commencement was held on July 10, 2020, and marked the first virtual Commencement in the College's nearly 50-year history. Excelsior produced a video which aired at 3 p.m. and included words of encouragement to the Class of 2020 from then President James N. Baldwin, Provost John Caron, faculty members, and fellow class members.

## 28

Twenty-eight percent of graduates are members of the U.S. military.

## 42

Graduates of the Class of 2020 earned 42 dual bachelor's-master's degrees in business, health sciences, nursing, and technology programs. The most dual degrees were awarded in nursing, with six BS in Nursing to MS in Nursing Education, seven BS in Nursing to MS in Nursing Informatics, and eight BS in Nursing to MS in Nursing Leadership and Administration of Health Care Systems.

## 1,037

Out of 4,997 total graduates, 1,037 of them are from New York State; 123 are from the state's Capital Region, the home of Excelsior College.

## 100

Excelsior's Class of 2020 includes 100 students from outside the United States, the most being from Canada (20), followed by Ecuador (19).



As part of the Commencement celebration, graduates shared photos and posts on social media.

# Rising Above

## EXCELSIOR COLLEGE LAUNCHES ELEVATE, THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY CAMPAIGN

**A**s Excelsior looks to celebrate its 50th anniversary in 2021, the College honors that milestone in a way that fulfills its promise of putting students first. The College has launched a major fundraising effort, ELEVATE: The Campaign for Student Scholarships. The campaign is dedicated entirely to providing more financial support to Excelsior students—thus lifting them up and supporting the success of the College’s mission.

“We can think of no better way to honor our mission than to ensure that more students than ever before have the financial support they need to take advantage of what Excelsior College offers,” said Helen Benjamin, chair of the board of trustees. Benjamin joins president David Schejbal, former president James N. Baldwin, several other trustees, and Excelsior staff on the campaign committee.

### THE COST OF GETTING AHEAD

In researching the feasibility of a campaign dedicated to funding scholarships, the campaign committee evaluated the significant investment that students make to earn their degrees. One undergraduate course costs about \$1,500, while a graduate-level course is about \$2,000. During the average three years to completion, a student will spend about \$15,000.

Of course, many undergraduate students are eligible for financial aid, and most of the 49 percent of Excelsior students who are veterans or active military servicemembers receive a tuition benefit. Students affiliated with the College’s academic, association, and corporate partners also receive tuition benefits. But every year, there is unmet financial need among students—and who knows how many adults are deterred entirely from

pursuing their degree because of financial concerns. Although Excelsior was able to give scholarships to 499 students in 2019–20, totaling \$209,531, there were still students with unmet need.

### LEADING BY EXAMPLE

The campaign was jump-started by the board of trustees, the College’s governing body comprising talented and experienced leaders from across the United States. These individuals volunteer their time to steward Excelsior because they believe so strongly in its mission and model—which was innovative from the start and has proven just how relevant its online education model is to the future of higher education.

The ELEVATE campaign seeks to raise \$750,000 for student scholarships. This is a far higher goal than any other fundraising

“This scholarship not only helped me see my future more clearly, but also helped lessen the burden of financial stress during already stressful times. I hope you’re able to continue giving this scholarship to help more students in the future.”

— BROOKLIN (RUTHERFORD) GILBERT OF  
CAPON BRIDGE, WEST VIRGINIA

effort at Excelsior—but then, the College has never reached a 50-year milestone before and has so much to celebrate. Other colleges have been imperiled, first by trends in higher education and then by the COVID-19 pandemic, but Excelsior has continued to capitalize on its skills in distance learning and is stronger than ever.

To show their confidence in Excelsior and their commitment to the ELEVATE campaign, the trustees have already pledged more than \$100,000 in leadership gifts.

### PAYING IT FORWARD PAYS DIVIDENDS

Scholarships assist, or elevate, students in several ways. Not only does a scholarship improve a student’s financial situation, but also it boosts their confidence and resolve, thus increasing their chances of completing their degree. Scholarships have helped Excelsior students to cross the finish line in their course work to achieve degree completion and graduate.

Students have expressed that receiving a scholarship means more than the money; it shows them that someone believes in them and wants them to succeed, and it also makes them feel more connected to the College.

Student Joshua Lawson of Columbus, Ohio, a father raising two young children with autism and working full-time, expressed it best in his thank-you letter:

“This scholarship has shown me that someone out there is watching. It makes me feel like a part of the Excelsior community and makes me feel recognized for the hardships of attending school. I am not sure that I have all the words for really expressing how valuable this is to me. All I can say is thank you.”

He went on to add, “I appreciate the aid, as well as the message that comes with it, and I will strive to use this scholarship as motivation to try my best as I continue my schooling at Excelsior, as well as ensure that your investment is not wasted.”

Student Keiry Vargas of Bronx, New York, has worked in human resources for more than a decade but, despite excellent performance and professional development, was unable to advance. She decided to earn the degree she needed through Excelsior so that she could secure a position that better compensates her for her experience and education. In her scholarship thank-you letter, she said:

“It has not always been easy to continue my education and be there for my kids, but I am determined more than ever to get the degree I’ve always dreamed of. Thanks to my donors, I am able to fulfill this goal of achieving my degree and making my daughters proud.”

Vargas is taking her final course this fall and says that, because she has had such a great experience at the College, she is now thinking of continuing on for her master’s degree from Excelsior. She has also referred a handful of people to Excelsior, three of whom have already enrolled.

### LOOKING FORWARD, AIMING UPWARD

The ELEVATE campaign was announced to the College community in September 2020 and will run concurrently with Excelsior’s 50th anniversary celebration through June 2022. Alumni, students, and the entire college community are invited to share success stories and memories.

Members of the Excelsior College community can connect on social media with #ElevatedbyExcelsior and have the opportunity to pledge support to student scholarships at [excelsior.edu/elevate](http://excelsior.edu/elevate). ■ – S.B.G.



## Scholarships Help Students Overcome Obstacles

Military spouse Leah Jackson of Tucson, Arizona, was single-parenting her children while her husband was deployed, caring for her seriously ill mother, and working full-time as a licensed practical nurse – but she refused to give up on her commitment to going back to school.

She took two classes per term (and maintained As in both) on her quest to earn her degree and move one step closer to her dream of becoming a registered nurse. Then she incurred some expenses with her mother’s care and wasn’t sure how she was going to pay for the next term.

“I was at a loss for words when I heard that I would be receiving a scholarship,” she said in her thank-you letter. “To say this is an answered prayer is an understatement. I cannot express the burden that you have lifted off me and my family with your generous gift. Thank you so very much.”

Jackson and her family have since been deployed to a NATO base in Germany, but she has continued her studies through Excelsior. Fortunately, her mother recovered and is in remission, and she and her two boys, ages 7 and 11, do their schooling remotely.

“The flexibility of online learning and the financial support of the scholarship allowed me to continue working on my degree despite moving to a new country and dealing with the pandemic,” said Jackson, who is now only the Capstone course away from completing her bachelor’s in health care management. ■ – S.B.G.

## Alumni Receive Awards for Achievements

Three alumni were honored for their outstanding achievements during the Alumni Annual Meeting on July 9, 2020. The meeting was held virtually and open to all alumni, including the newest graduates.

As part of the awards recognition during the meeting, the three alumni—Kaylin Dawson, Kimberly Haley, and Brady McNulty—accepted their awards via video and spoke about their careers and accomplishments. Dawson, the recipient of the Carrie B. Lenburg Award, is a sexual assault nurse coordinator and has worked to provide education for better care of the sexual assault patient and child abuse patient. “My commitment to nursing education in the field of nursing has just begun... I am ready to see what the next steps for my future will bring,” she said.

Kimberly Haley, the recipient of the C. Wayne Williams Award, helps veterans transition into civilian life and is a strong proponent of giving back to the community. “Community involvement allows us to allow our future children—our grandchildren, in my case—understand the importance of helping others and emphasizing that and pairing [it with] good citizenship for years to come...,” said Haley. “I look forward to encouraging others to provide public service and to helping others in the future.”

The recipient of the Alumni Achievement Award, Brady McNulty, found encouragement in words his mother used to say, as well as in his family members. Now he hopes to instill the same kind of dedication he showed in pursuing his degree in his children. “My hope is that by pushing myself everyday to be a better person, to be more useful to humanity, they [my children] will be inspired to push themselves further,” he said.

Read more about the recipients at right.

**KAYLIN DAWSON**

Carrie B. Lenburg Award



Kaylin Dawson, of Cohoes, New York, is the recipient the Carrie B. Lenburg Award presented to a nurse who demonstrates a commitment to nursing education as well as academic and professional accomplishments in the field of nursing. Dawson works at Albany Medical Center as the sexual assault nurse coordinator. She is nationally certified in the adult sexual assault patient and is certified by the New York State Department of Health in the adult/adolescent sexual assault patient.

She is a member of the Albany Sexual Assault Response Team, the New York State Justice Center Task Force, Albany County Child Fatality Review Team, the Albany County Multi-Disciplinary Team, Multi-Disciplinary Policy and Planning Committee, and the Albany County Safe Harbor Task Force, and currently on the task force working to revise the New York State Sexual Offense Evidence Collection Kit. Dawson has attended specialized training for the care of the forensic patient, including courses on adult and pediatric sexual assault, human trafficking, child abuse, forensic investigations, and trial preparation.

Dawson earned a Bachelor of Science in Nursing from Excelsior College in 2012 and a Master of Science in Nursing Education from Excelsior in 2020. Previously, she earned an associate degree from Hudson Valley Community College.

**KIMBERLY HALEY**

C. Wayne Williams Award



Kimberly Haley is this year’s recipient of the C. Wayne Williams Award presented in recognition of outstanding public service and community involvement by a graduate. Haley, of Oneida, New York, is a disabled veterans’ outreach program specialist with Veterans’ Services, assisting veterans throughout Oneida and Madison Counties. She served in the U.S. Army, active-duty and reserve components, from 1982 to 1998 as a medic and licensed practical nurse.

She is a member of Oneida American Legion Post # 169 and promotes the legion’s community service programs and advocates for veterans and their family members. She also volunteers with local veterans organizations such as Clear Path for Veterans, Central New York Veterans Outreach Center, and Feed Our Vets. She has been awarded the Army Service Ribbon, Good Conduct Medal, and Achievement Medal carrying a first oakleaf cluster.

Haley is also a registered yoga instructor who teaches a style of mindful resilience yoga specifically for veterans. The style is in line with the ideas of the Veterans Yoga Project, an organization dedicated to improving the health and well-being of military veterans.

Haley earned a Bachelor of Science in Liberal Arts from Excelsior College in 2006. She is a graduate of the National Veterans’ Training Institute, University of Denver, Colorado, where she obtained skills in labor and employment, and case management.

**BRADY MCNULTY**

Alumni Achievement Award



Brady McNulty of Roseburg, Oregon, is the recipient of the Alumni Achievement Award, which is presented to a graduate whose achievements may serve as a role model to inspire other graduates and students. McNulty is a pharmacist, cartoonist, and community volunteer. He is a board-certified geriatric pharmacist who provides medication therapy management as well as other services.

McNulty is a veteran of the U.S. Navy nuclear power program and is a member of the national staff of the Coast Guard Auxiliary and a representative of the Recreational Boating Safety program. He is also an assistant editor and cartoonist for the Coast Guard Auxiliary's quarterly publication, the Navigator Express. His cartoons have appeared in various magazines and Oregon newspapers, as well as in publications of the Coast Guard Auxiliary. McNulty is a member of the Most Venerable Order of the Hospital of St. John of Jerusalem and a fellow of the Royal Society of Arts. He has served on the boards of Saving Grace Pet Adoption Center and the Douglas County Celtic Society. He has served in numerous leadership roles as a Freemason.

In addition to a Bachelor of Science in Nuclear Engineering Technology from Excelsior College in 2011, McNulty earned an Associate of Science in Chemistry, an Associate of Science in Biology, and an Associate of Arts in Pre-Pharmacy, all from Del Mar College in 2010, and a Doctor of Pharmacy from Texas A&M University in 2014.

■ –J.K.

Welcome to  
Excelsior Connects

GET STARTED

New Networking Hub Offers Ways for  
Alumni and Students to Connect

Alumni and students can now meet for networking and mentoring through a new platform. Excelsior Connects, found online at [www.excelsiorconnects.org](http://www.excelsiorconnects.org), provides opportunities for alumni and students to interact with each other and the College. After registering, participants have access to a news feed, information on upcoming webinars, and job postings. They can also register to volunteer as a mentor for current students or recent graduates or browse a directory to find a mentor.

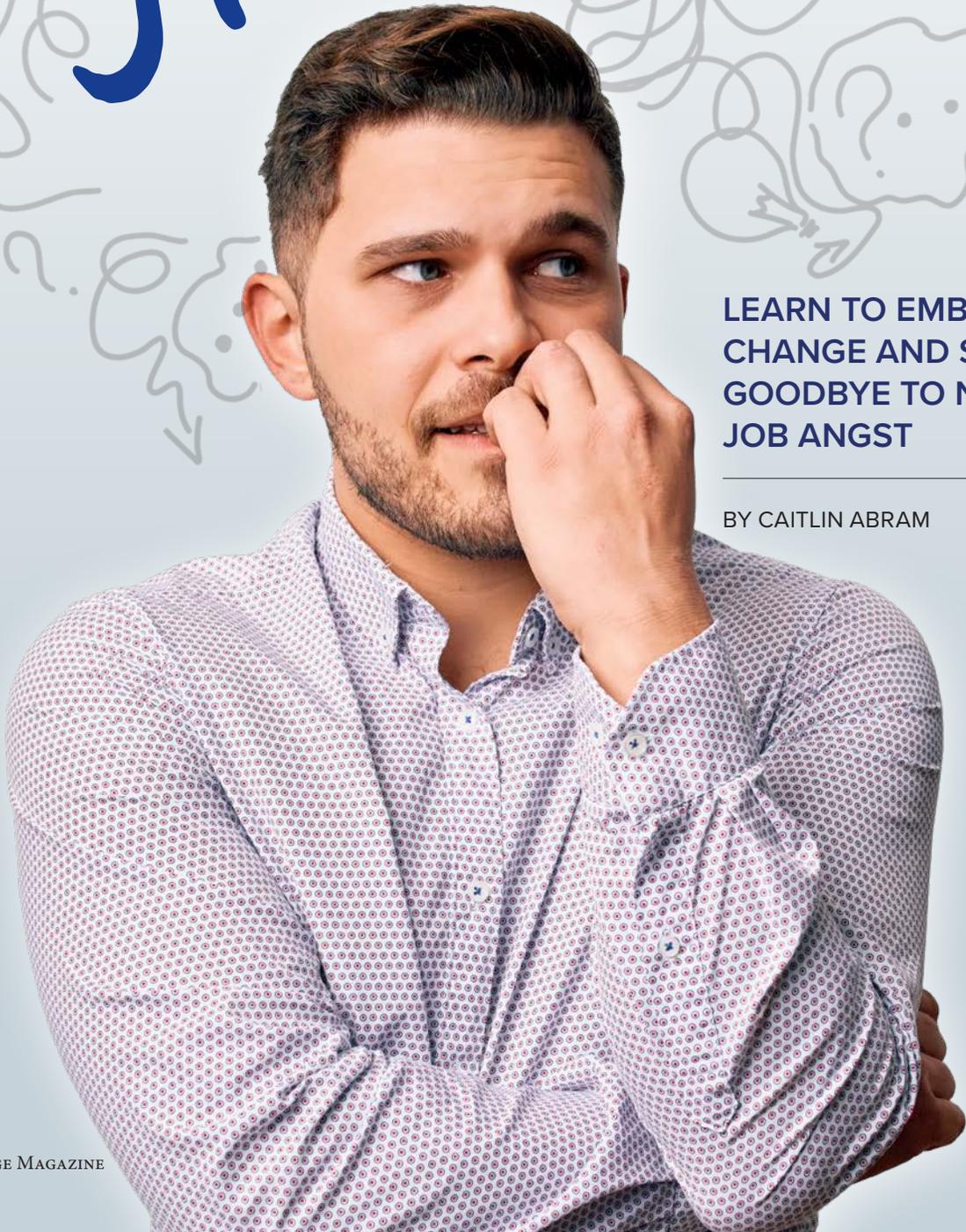
Excelsior Connects launched in late November, and efforts are underway to encourage alumni and students to join the online community. The platform encourages pop-up engagement so that participants can email and engage with one another, make virtual meet and greets with contacts, and hold group conversations. Groups based on career fields and specific interests, such as military students and alumni, already exist.

Excelsior Connects gives alumni and students a way to get or give help to others when they need it, according to Kane Tomlin, president of the Excelsior College Alumni Association.

“Excelsior Connects is a way for me to give back to the College by being available to help alumni and students with mentoring, networking, and connecting our quality application pool with open positions in fields where I routinely get asked for candidates from my network,” says Tomlin. “As a student, alumnus, and faculty member of the College, I see value in maintaining a community with lifelong learners and people ascending in their careers for my own personal and professional benefits as well as for the benefit of the College family as a whole. I also think that our collective crowd-sourced content of articles, webinars, and other tips will provide long-term value to all stakeholders on Excelsior.”

Alumni and current students can expect the career, directory, and events sides of the platform to expand as new members join. The career side will have a link into the Excelsior job board with Career Network, an enhanced network directory providing connections to other alumni with location information (where available). The career features also include connections to member-hosted and Excelsior College events. ■ – M.S.

# NEW JOB JITTERS



LEARN TO EMBRACE  
CHANGE AND SAY  
GOODBYE TO NEW  
JOB ANGST

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BY CAITLIN ABRAM



**Y**our phone rings.

It's the hiring manager at the company you interviewed with last week for that great new job!

You let the phone ring twice (best to seem not too desperate), sit up a little straighter, and prep your very best "business voice."

You got the job!

Finally!

Money, happiness, and world domination are all within your reach!

Suddenly, the soundtrack of your life shifts into a minor key, the bright shiny cartoon sun that had just moments ago been beaming above you begins to dim, and that new job grin starts to narrow.

Sure, you got the job, but now you actually have to do it.

New job anxiety is common. It can take the form of anything from mild jitters to full-blown panic. What if you end up hating your position or your boss? What if you fooled everyone into thinking you were right for the job? What if you fail so badly that you end up destitute and broken, swiping your imaginary office ID at tree stumps in a jobless, shame-fueled fugue state?!

First of all, take a deep breath and relax. There is a high probability that none of the above will actually happen. Remember that you were chosen specifically from a pool of applicants as the best candidate based on your stellar skills, flawless resume, and sparkling personality. Your new company already believes in you! Now, you just have to do the same.

Taming those nerves is easier said than done. Significant change, in any aspect of our lives, is frequently accompanied by a healthy dose of discomfort. That's especially true today when the job market, deeply affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, has seen more people than usual searching for their next job or their new career. Whether you're making a lateral move, stepping up into a promotion, or completely switching careers, here are a few tips to help turn anxiety into optimism and help you regain that new job glow.

Talk it out. If you're feeling stressed, don't keep it to yourself. Tammy Spenziero, director of career services at Excelsior College, coaches that the first step to relief could be simply to tell people how you are feeling. "Career changes can certainly create both excitement and sadness. We are not robots. We are human and therefore feel and have emotions—this is normal! So, feel, express, share, and don't be afraid to be human!" she says.

Think a little differently. Hays, a global recruiting company based in London, England, recommends adopting a "growth mindset" about your new job. This means, instead of focusing on the negative, scary, and uncertain aspects of your career transition, work on thinking about how much these new challenges will help you grow and improve your skills and your resume. Remind yourself that this new job is a journey—that you won't know everything your first day or even your first month. Talk yourself up instead of talking yourself down, and you'll be surprised how quickly your attitude changes.

Remember this feeling won't last forever. It's important to understand that this anxiety is only temporary. It's hard being the "new kid,"

but remind yourself that everyone has been that kid before you. In a few weeks, more likely than not, you will have found your routine, maybe found an office buddy or two, and found that you've completely forgotten how nervous you were. Starting a new job is a momentous occasion, but it's not the only thing that matters. Remember that it's only change, and, as with other changes in your life, you have the strength within you to adapt and thrive.

"... So, feel, express, share, and don't be afraid to be human!"

—Tammy Spenziero, Director of Career Services

First prepare, and then self-care. When you're feeling nervous, a little preparation can be a big help in providing stability. The employment search engine Indeed recommends preparing a list of thoughtful questions to ask on your first day. If you commute to work, plan out your driving route, and preselect a first-day outfit that makes you feel your best. If you work from home, take time to set up a workspace where you can feel your calmest, most confident self. It's also beneficial to take time and unwind after your first day. Whether you order your favorite food, head outside for a hike, or indulge in quiet time with a good book, a bit of self-care will help you decompress, celebrate your first day, and be ready to take on the days to come.

Stay connected. Spenziero suggests that connecting with others who share your career is a good way to start feeling a sense of investment and community in your new position: "Join LinkedIn; find groups, associations, and memberships in your career area; and connect with professionals in the field. Seek mentors—yes, more than one! Talk to others, be realistic, and seek advice and help when needed."

Now, remember how excited you were when you accepted your new job? That's the feeling you should be carrying with you as you take this next big step. And, if you're still working toward your next big career break, Spenziero coaches that persistence and a positive attitude go a long way. She adds that job seekers should adopt a practical approach and align their job searches with organizations that are still hiring. According to Spenziero, "You will need to compromise and make changes, but this resiliency will set you up for long-term success."

Most important, Spenziero reminds us: "Fear of the unknown is normal. We all have special gifts to share, and none of us is perfect. Be proud of all you have contributed, and know that life happens. Keep going!" ■

Caitlin Abram recently started a new job at Excelsior College as the web content manager. She was only a little bit nervous.



## Rick Hernandez

Military Education Representative

Richard “Rick” Hernandez has been a military education representative at Fort Hood, Texas, for more than 10 years. A graduate of Excelsior College, Hernandez earned a Bachelor of Science in Liberal Arts in 2006 and an MBA in 2017. With his unique perspective as a veteran who earned his bachelor’s degree while in the service, he provides assistance and encouragement to soldiers who wish to further their education. PHOTO: COURTESY OF RICK HERNANDEZ



**What led you to your position as a military education representative?** When I retired from the Army, I knew that I wanted to be involved in education. While in the Army, I understood the importance of an education and I encouraged soldiers to seek it. When an opportunity developed, I applied for a temporary position with Excelsior with duties at Fort Hood, Texas. That was in December 2007. This title has changed several times, but I still provide unofficial reviews, help with course selection, give educational advice; conduct education fairs; and assist students with enrollment procedures.

**What do you enjoy the most about your job as a military education representative?** I enjoy working with military personnel, family members, and veterans to achieve their educational goals and to help them with their careers and personal growth. It is exciting to see their enthusiasm during the process. Seeing their satisfaction as well as the excitement of their family and friends is rewarding for me, especially during graduation.

**What drew you to the military?** I volunteered for military service in 1974, at a time when the Army was not a good place to be. The Vietnam War was still going on and many Americans opposed our country's involvement. My parents and siblings were also opposed to me volunteering. However, I believe I understood that I needed to do something better for myself. Not coming from a military family or with any education intentions, I entered the Army as a reconnaissance specialist shortly after high school. It took me some time to understand the discipline needed as well as the many personal sacrifices for myself and family that came with being in the Army. As I look back on my decision for military service, I thank those who served before me and helped me along my 30-year journey.

**What inspires you about the military students you work with?** I see myself in them. I try to explain to them the work needed for a good education and how it will help them in the future. I also see the push back from some of the older soldiers and those who do not fully understand how education would benefit them. There rests my real challenge: convincing military leaders how education would benefit them in their future. I must make sure that my educational relationship with the students is professional but, more important, current with their needs and that of our country.

**As an alumnus of Excelsior College, what advice do you give to current students?** For myself, it [being an Excelsior graduate] allows me to connect with other Excelsior graduates, especially military persons. I enjoy discussing ideas about how to best highlight our experience and quality of the coursework at Excelsior. I also like to enlighten others about the process of how the College was able to use my experience from the military and transfer it to college credit. The people I talk to are amazed at how much credit Excelsior accepts. For me, this is what makes the school truly military friendly!

**How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected, if at all, your ability to help students?** Before the COVID-19 pandemic, many students could come and visit me in my office to discuss their educational needs. Many of their questions involved answering with visual effects or assistance from one of the military counselors. Now, this is something that I must be able to articulate over the phone or by email. I am still able to provide them with the same quality advice without being physically present although it requires me to be patient because it is time consuming. I must make sure they fully understand the process.

**What motivates you?** I would say that I motivate myself through my children. I want to set a good example for others. I grew up in a family in which education was not as important as working. However, my mother would tell me that I needed to work harder at school, but I did not take it to heart. While in the military, I knew a couple of soldiers who had associate degrees. From them, I learned the importance of an education. In the military it was difficult to earn a degree because, during my time, most enlisted soldiers did not have degrees and the leadership did not encourage you. However, I was set on completing my bachelor's degree. Once I completed my bachelor's degree, I wanted more. My three grown children have traditional bachelor's degrees.

**What's the best advice you've ever been given?** I have a few good pieces of advice.

My mother would say that we should be respectful of others as best that we can. Always say thank you and try to let go of an unfriendly feeling toward others. For me, that means to be kind to others and never be a fair-weather friend.

My mentor told me this: Knowledge is vital to success and well-being, so never stop growing. To do this you must keep on learning from others and for yourself. For me, that means pursuing education and being involved in the community.

I learned this from a Vietnam veteran: He would tell me that you can only change what is your responsibility, so don't wait for someone to improve your situation. While in the military, many soldiers would ask where was the best place to be stationed. I would always respond with, "Wherever I am at is the best place." What I meant by that is that it was my obligation to make my next duty station as good, if not better, than where I came from. ■ —J.K.

# *Emotional* Connection

HOW EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE HELPS US TO UNDERSTAND  
OURSELVES AND RELATE BETTER TO OTHERS

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BY JENNA KERWIN





**H**ave you ever compromised with a family member to bring a resolution to an argument? Are you a manager who has had to deal with employees being in poor moods and having all-around bad days? When facilitating a group discussion, do you try to make sure everyone's thoughts and ideas are heard equally? If you have been in any of these or similar situations, you've most likely used emotional intelligence, the ability to understand, use, and manage your own emotions in positive ways; communicate effectively; empathize with others; and overcome challenges.

In its simplest form, emotional intelligence is having the awareness that emotions can influence behavior and positively or negatively have an impact on other people.

The concept of emotional intelligence, often shortened to EI and also known as emotional quotient or EQ, was created by researchers Peter Salovey and John D. Mayer in 1990 and later popularized by psychologist Daniel Goleman through his 1995 book, "Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More than IQ." Over the years, studies have concluded that emotional intelligence is necessary in the workplace, at home, and at school. Today, doctors continue to stress the importance of emotional intelligence for maintaining healthy relationships with others.

According to Goleman, there are five basic components of EI: self-awareness, self-regulation, social skills, empathy, and motivation. PositivePsychology.com identifies self-awareness as the capacity to recognize and understand one's actions and moods as well as the emotions of others. (A big part of that is being able to identify emotions in the first place.) Self-regulation involves how we deal with emotions, including our coping mechanisms and how we manage conflict and difficult situations. The component of social skills is pretty straight-forward: It's how well we interact with other people. Remembering that interaction involves good listening and verbal and non-verbal skills is important. Empathy, of course, refers to our ability to understand and relate to how other people are feeling. Finally, motivation includes being internally driven (as opposed to externally driven by rewards such as money) to meet personal needs and goals, as well as being action-oriented.

So, what does this all mean? Why is emotional intelligence important? I posed these questions to some colleagues at Excelsior College and we all seemed to agree that emotional intelligence is an intrinsic part to who we are as human beings. "EQ is very much about how we can understand others and making sure that others understand our perspective and

can appreciate us just as much as we appreciate ourselves and appreciate others," says V. Blue Lemay, faculty program director of Excelsior's humanities programs. Khamel Abdulai, director of training and talent management in the Human Resources unit, takes it a step further, saying EQ can also be seen as the alignment between the way we perceive ourselves and the way others perceive us.

Our personal perception and others' perception of ourselves aren't the only reasons emotional intelligence is important. In their 2019 article, "Improving Emotional Intelligence," authors Jeanne Segal, Melinda Smith, Lawrence Robinson, and Jennifer Shubin break down the benefits and conclude EQ affects our performance at work and school, our physical and mental health, our relationships, and our social intelligence.

Having high emotional intelligence can help us deal with complex issues in the workplace as well as help us to be successful leaders. "EQ is actually amazing in that it can really propel people forward in an organization or really help people become the best leaders possible," says Lemay. She adds that being knowledgeable in technical or industrial skills is important, but without EQ, we wouldn't be leading to the best of our abilities. Mark Howe, vice president of human resources at Excelsior, says, "I've been able to tell if someone has high EQ when they're able to make decisions that they can accept that don't always benefit them — in fact, might hurt them — but they understand the greater impact."

Emotional intelligence is a crucial part of many professions. In health care, for instance, EQ is evident in the interaction between medical professionals and patients. In the McGill Journal of Medicine article "Emotional Intelligence: Use in Medical Education and Practice," author Jimmy Bejjani argues that being emotionally aware leads to making rational decisions and taking advantage of new opportunities. "Physicians care for themselves through self-awareness and reflection, which appears to be one of the most important things to provide good care to others. By being more sensitive to their own and their patients' feelings and emotions, EI physicians use supportive behavior and provide psychological benefits," writes Bejjani.

Lisa Rapple, faculty program director of undergraduate health care management, referenced her own clinical experiences in critical care, emergency medicine, and several other acute care areas when considering the significance of emotional intelligence. She says that with today's technology, sometimes it's hard for physicians to connect personally to patients, but that human interaction — the emotional intelligence aspect — is a necessary component to health care. Anna Zendell, faculty program director of graduate health sciences programs, agreed, saying, "To have EI you have to be able to hear and see other people in a very real way."

As Bejjani points out, though, unless we are caring for ourselves, we cannot care for each other. Therefore, having a high

emotional quotient is critical for our own health. For instance, if you can't manage your emotions, you probably can't manage stress either.

A high emotional quotient allows us to better express how we feel and to understand how others are feeling, leading to improved communication at work and at home. As a by-product, being emotionally intelligent connects you to the world around you. Lemay explains, "Emotional intelligence is really about the strategy, being aware of myself, being aware of the strategies that I can use at any moment." She uses her real-life working relationship with Rapple to emphasize her point, saying the two are different in their work strategies, but being able to listen and understand each other balances them out. Zendell agrees, saying, "Self [awareness] and awareness of others, and that depth of awareness for others, is really the core—it's essential to EI." Abdulai adds to this thought by relating emotional intelligence to his experience in HR. "In HR, our primary function is one of service, so the extent that we are seen as approachable, empathetic, and for people to sort of understand where [other] people are coming from, I think that's a very important attribute for our work," he says.

EQ also has an important part to play in education. Lemay, Rapple, and Zendell have woven EQ principles into many of their courses at Excelsior. Interpersonal communication, conflict management, leadership, team building, and cultural sensitivity are themes found across many health sciences and humanities courses. In HUM 321 Medical Humanities, for example, students learn about the softer side of medicine. "That medical humanities course is really to infuse those professionals with an understanding of how important the human part of the medical establishment is," says Lemay. Rapple adds, "We're teaching students in health sciences [that] they can be clinicians, they can be leaders, and if [EQ] is not part of what we're helping them to understand or evaluate in their own selves, then we're doing them a disservice."

That brought up the question, Can emotional intelligence be taught? As Abdulai deftly points out, "People are careful to say that it can be learned and not say that it can be taught, because the whole key thing is that a lot of how you acquire it is through self-motivation." In short, you have to want to improve your emotional intelligence, and self-improvement leads to better relationships. "It's a skill worth honing if you want to progress and you want to be successful in the workplace and in home life," says Rapple.

An easy way to assess your emotional intelligence is by evaluating your own performance and comparing it to the opinions of your peers, according to Lauren Landry, who wrote the article "Why Emotional Intelligence Is Important in Leadership" for Harvard Business School Online. "Through this process, you'll gain insights into your own behavior and discover how you're perceived in the organization," wrote Landry.

## SEVEN TIPS TO BOOST YOUR EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE

- 1. Be present.** When you are truly "in the moment," you are more able to notice and respond to other peoples' emotions. You can notice their body language and changes in mood more readily. If you notice a change in a person's behavior, you can then alter your way of communicating.
- 2. Listen.** It might seem easy, but listening to others requires a lot of skill. Pay attention to the words that are spoken to you. Repeat what you've heard back to the person, letting them know you've understood them, and even ask for confirmation on what you think they meant. Then give your response.
- 3. Respond, don't react.** Instead of subconsciously reacting purely due to emotions, take a moment to pause and think over the situation. After you have recognized your emotions, you are able to respond in a more emotionally intelligent way.
- 4. Take responsibility for yourself.** Remember that how you act is your responsibility; no one is controlling you. Your emotions and behavior are under your control so remember to always take responsibility for how you feel and behave.
- 5. Practice empathy.** Empathy is the ability to put yourself into someone else's position and relate to their situation. It involves being able to feel what the other person is feeling. Identifying and recognizing emotions is a good way to improve one's empathy. Ask yourself questions such as, What is the reason for this emotion?
- 6. Seek feedback from others.** A good way to grow in your emotional intelligence is to ask others how they think you're doing. Understanding their perception of you can help you work on different areas.
- 7. It's a lifelong process.** You won't get better at emotional intelligence overnight; you'll be practicing and fine-tuning it as your life experiences unfold.

By being aware of our emotional intelligence and taking steps to improve it, we can improve our relationships and our success in life. In a CareerBuilder survey, 71 percent of employers valued EQ over IQ, citing that employees with high EQ are the employees who can best deal with conflict and pressure. Thus, being able to understand our own emotions and those of other people can benefit not only ourselves, but also the world around us. By understanding and improving our emotional intelligence or emotional quotient, we can better connect with our fellow humans. "What gives me hope is the idea that we now recognize that we're a collective species and part of this is not just our physical survival, but our ability to connect on an emotional level as well," says Abdulai. ■

Jenna Kerwin is a writer/editor at Excelsior College and was inspired to take the emotional intelligence training offered to employees.

# COVID COPING



## ALUMNI LEAD AND CARRY ON THROUGH WORKPLACE CHALLENGES CREATED BY COVID-19

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BY JENNA KERWIN

**F**or more than half a year, the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has changed how we live and how we work. Alumni Jonathan Green, Alison Noone, Timothy Leaks, Lakeya Collins, and Daniel McCoy adapted quickly to address unprecedented challenges and meet the needs of those they serve.





## COVID COPING

# JONATHAN GREEN'S LEADERSHIP HELPS HOSPITAL STAFF CARE FOR PATIENTS DURING THE PANDEMIC

University Hospital in Newark, New Jersey, was one of the hospitals hardest hit by patients with COVID-19 at the height of the pandemic in spring 2020. Three-time Excelsior College graduate Jonathan Green is the executive director of University Hospital's emergency department, and since March, his job has been to make sure his staff have

everything they need so they can take care of patients.

In early 2020, the hospital developed organizational protocols to receive patients and do travel screening for the virus, which at that time, had not yet arrived in the United States. By March, they had erected tents outside the emergency department to triage patients and

identify those with symptoms. Hospitals in New York City, located eight miles east of Newark, were dealing with the pandemic a week or two ahead, so Green and his staff were able to prepare. "Patients who had respiratory symptoms were quickly evaluated by the triage nurse. Those with stable vital signs were seen by a physician or nurse practitioner in a

large tent outside the emergency department to assess how they were doing,” says Green, adding that if the patient was stable, they could be discharged without ever coming into the hospital. But as the virus spread quickly, staff could not stop the influx of patients and people had to be admitted to the intensive care unit.

At the peak of the pandemic, Green says the emergency department saw 140 to 150 people with symptoms per day and 75 percent of them tested positive for the virus. The hospital received assistance from the U.S. Department of Defense, and a U.S. Army Reserve task force helped to augment the medical staff.



One of the many difficulties Green and his staff faced during the height of the pandemic, in the spring, was reassuring people with no symptoms to still seek medical attention for what was ailing them.

Hospitals in northern New Jersey openly communicated with each other, sharing best practices, helping each other coordinate moving patients to field hospitals, and lending needed equipment. For example, physician teams from University Hospital worked with infectious disease experts at Rutgers University and across the country to learn as much about COVID-19 as possible. With the aid of other hospitals and local and state government, University Hospital was able to supply staff with respirators, gowns, masks, hospital beds, plexiglass, plastic bed sheets, and everything else needed to care for patients. With these supplies, Green was able to make sure his staff had the materials they needed to stay safe and encouraged them to follow safety protocols, such as maintaining social distancing and washing their hands.

One of the many difficulties Green and his staff faced during the height of the pandemic, in the spring, was reassuring people with no symptoms to still seek medical attention for what was ailing them. “People with heart attacks or strokes or other really serious medical issues were so scared to come here,” he says. Ultimately, the hospital discovered a way to help Green combat this problem. The hospital hosted community outreach events and used social media to encourage people to seek help. The news media also helped with reminding people about the importance of seeing a doctor. University Hospital implemented virus testing and designated units in the hospital where Green and his staff would care strictly for patients with COVID-19 to keep them separate from patients who did not have COVID-19.

Despite precautions, Green and several of his colleagues ended up contracting the virus. This was a difficult time for Green, who wanted to be there for his staff during this time when the ER was seeing many patients. Green was fortunate to have only mild symptoms, though, and was able to return to work relatively quickly. One of the reasons he wanted to return to work as soon as possible was because it was hard to see many of his staff having a difficult time interacting with patients who were so sick with COVID-19. “That was a source of stress, and some of them were really



Top: Lt. Col. Bryan R. O'Bannon, an Army Reserve nurse, left, and Jonathan Green, executive director of University Hospital's emergency department inside a tent outside the hospital. PHOTOS (FROM LEFT) COURTESY OF EDWIN TORRES/NJ GOVERNOR'S OFFICE, NJ SPOTLIGHT, AND UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL

distraught over it,” says Green. University Hospital sought the help of two mental health experts from the U.S. Army Reserve to support medical staff during this challenging time.

In September, the number of patients the University Hospital emergency department staff saw with the virus varied each day. Under Green's direction, staff are still following safety protocols and have adapted to the new normal. They adhere to the masking policy, have adjusted how food is delivered, and have decided to conduct a combination of virtual and in-person meetings for administrative work. Green's main goal remains to support his staff—the front-line workers caring for the patients. “I take care of the people who take care of the patients,” he says.





## COVID COPING

# ALISON NOONE USES TECHNOLOGY TO KEEP STUDENTS ENGAGED FROM A DISTANCE

Two-time Excelsior graduate Alison Noone is the assistant director of student life at Ocean County Community College on the Jersey Shore. She has experienced firsthand the toll the COVID-19 pandemic has had on institutions of higher learning. Still, she and her staff have taken successful steps to adjust to the new norm, including developing

a mobile device app that helps students keep in contact with each other and the community college.

Noone has been with Ocean County Community College for almost two decades, starting as a student worker in the Student Life Office and then taking on positions of increasing responsibility. She is currently in charge of keeping

students engaged and encouraging them to progress forward with their studies.

Since the COVID-19 outbreak, Ocean County Community College has gone 100 percent remote. Noone can appreciate that it might be difficult for many students to transition to online-only learning. “I feel for the students who didn’t want to take classes online.

Since the COVID-19 outbreak, Ocean County Community College has gone 100 percent remote. Noone can appreciate that it might be difficult for many students to transition to online-only learning.

⬅️ Since the COVID-19 outbreak, two-time Excelsior graduate Alison Noone has been working hard to help the students of Ocean County Community College transition to a virtual learning experience. PHOTO: KRIS QUA

I've taken classes online and I've taken classes as a student traditionally, face to face, and it is a transition. If you're forced into it, I understand that it's hard to accept and it's a hard concept," she says.

The plans for offering all classes, except for certain biology labs, remotely will continue at least through the spring 2021 semester. So, student engagement will also take place online. Students engage with the college virtually, via Canvas for courses, and through an app that the Student Life Office developed in conjunction with the communications company Ready Education.

Normally the app is just a supportive tool, but now that everything is virtual, it has become like a lifeline for students. "Whenever something big [happens] or

big announcement will come out, we will have a spike of 1,000 sign-ups onto the app a day — we've had a flurry of posts and questions," Noone says. Students have come to embrace the app's functionality that allows them to communicate with each other and the college.

Noone says they have been able to use the app to follow when and how many students check into the app throughout the day. With information like this, they have conducted trivia contests, set up virtual clubs, and even held movie nights where students could watch a movie on their computers or smart devices and participate in a corresponding chat with others on the side of the screen. With all the creative ways Noone's department has used the app, Ready Education recognized them for their best practices.

The extracurricular leadership program that Noone runs for students has also changed to a more virtual experience. Normally a three-part series with public speakers, Noone has worked to provide the program's courses online with recorded presentations and links to videos from her Student Life colleagues. The program does not count toward college credit, but it is a great resume booster, says Noone.

The Student Life Office works entirely remote, but Noone visits the campus regularly to run the college's food pantry. The pantry technically isn't open during this time to collect donations, so Noone has been partnering with a local food bank to provide prepared food boxes to students in need. Students sign up in advance to reserve a food box and then come to the campus to pick it up. The food boxes are placed directly in the students' car trunks to minimize social contact. For students who are not able to travel to the campus, Noone personally mails them gift cards the college has purchased from a local grocery store so they can get the supplies they need.

Remaining virtual appears to be the norm for the remainder of 2020 and Noone is committed to ensuring students have the tools and methods they need to meet their educational needs. "I want students at Ocean [County Community College] to succeed and believe they can, despite all the challenges they must overcome," she says.

⬇️ Alison Noone visits the campus regularly to run the college's food pantry, which provides prepared food boxes to students in need. PHOTO: COURTESY OF ALISON NOONE





## COVID COPING

# TIMOTHY LEAKS MAINTAINS A TIGHT SHIP TO KEEP SERVICEMEMBERS SAFE AND FED

Feeding 300 servicemembers per meal during a pandemic might seem like a straightforward task, but it is not as easy as it sounds.

Timothy Leaks, the dining facility manager for the 3d U.S. Infantry Regiment's (The Old Guard) facility in Arlington, Virginia, is charged with this task every day. However, thanks to

guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the state, he makes sure his staff continue feeding customers while staying safe.

"Since COVID-19 happened, we had to basically modify and kind of restructure the way we do business here," says Leaks. Prior to the pandemic, servicemembers were permitted to eat in the

cafeteria, but now the place runs like many other restaurants around the United States by offering only carry-out and pre-packaged meals. The changes are necessary for the cafeteria to remain functional. Leaks says closing the cafeteria is not an option; it is the only facility in the area that can feed the servicemembers. So, Leaks and his staff must make

sure their facility is completely clean or it is not allowed to open for service.

Leaks, a 2019 graduate with a Bachelor of Science in Liberal Arts, is enrolled in Excelsior College's Master of Science in Criminal Justice program. He and his staff have been following CDC protocols, maintaining social distancing, wearing masks and shields, and wearing gloves at all times. It's up to Leaks to monitor his staff and ensure they are staying safe. "I make sure we keep our distance, make sure we wash our hands like we're supposed to...I walk around and make sure everybody's doing what they're supposed to," says Leaks. Sometimes maintaining social distancing when preparing food close together is hard. For example, it is typically uncomfortable for staff when the temperature in the kitchen can reach upward to 120 degrees Fahrenheit. Now, with adding the necessary safety measures due to the pandemic, moving around the hot kitchen has become even less pleasant.

He and his staff have been following CDC protocols, maintaining social distancing, wearing masks and shields, and wearing gloves at all times. It's up to Leaks to monitor his staff and ensure they are staying safe.

To help ease pressure on the kitchen staff and to further prevent contamination, Leaks organized staff into a morning shift and an afternoon shift so they could come into work and leave without interacting with each other. Setting up shifts this way has helped minimize the risk of spreading the COVID-19 virus. Unfortunately, when staff have gotten sick, work has become difficult because there are usually only 13 people assigned per shift. So, when a few people have gotten sick and needed to



quarantine, their absence made working more stressful for the staff.

Still, Leaks and his team have pushed through and have managed to keep feeding the hungry servicemembers who come through the cafeteria doors. Anyone who comes into the cafeteria has their temperature checked and must wear a mask at all times. Adhering to these guidelines is critical so that Leaks can properly manage the operation. Leaks and his staff not only follow safety guidelines, but also receive updates on the virus from medical staff and briefings on sanitation procedures.

Leaks believes the new safety procedures will be in place well beyond the next few months. "Even when COVID-19 goes away, these are things I could see happening for the perceived future," he says. That's okay with him because he thinks people in addition to his staff should have been taking simple safety precautions, like washing their hands correctly, all along. The contagion factor of the virus is something personal to Leaks; he has a high-risk spouse and a young child at home so he knows how important it is to keep safety protocols in place. In fact, as soon as Leaks returns home from work, he goes right to the garage to change his clothes, wash up, and wipe down his car. When his family is involved, he doesn't want to take any chances.

Alumnus and current student Timothy Leaks oversees that the dining facility at the 3d U.S. Infantry Regiment in Arlington, Virginia, maintains safety protocols, like serving only pre-packaged meals to servicemembers. PHOTOS: SGT. GABRIEL SILVA, U.S. ARMY

And, Leaks is thankful for his supportive family and also a behavioral therapist with whom he can talk when things get too stressful. He often worries about customers being exposed to COVID-19 and is concerned about the lack of knowledge surrounding the virus. Despite these concerns, Leaks maintains order for his staff and provides them with the information and supplies they need to do their job well. And if his staff are also stressed and worried, they have opportunities to contact professional services that the facility has supplied. As a 20-year veteran, Leaks is used to talking with someone and is glad there are providers available, offering support to frontline workers like him.

With Leaks' oversight of the dining facility, servicemembers in the Arlington area are guaranteed a meal — or three — each day. By adhering to the rules, Leaks keeps his staff and customers safe. As a result, by also following his personal protocols and maintaining a sound mind, he is better prepared to lead his team so that they can provide food and a sense of normalcy during such a critical time.



## LAKEYA COLLINS TAKES EXTRA MEASURES TO CARE FOR NURSING HOME RESIDENTS

According to a study published in USA Today, residents of nursing homes account for nearly 40 percent of the nation's COVID-19 death toll. Amazingly, the nursing home where Lakeya Collins works saw zero cases of the virus until September 2020, in part because of the dedication Collins had to maintaining the residents' safety.

Collins, a 2018 graduate who earned an associate degree in nursing, has been working to help maintain the low virus infection rate at The Place at Dean's Bridge, a skilled nursing facility in Augusta, Georgia. As of mid-September, the nursing home had 16 confirmed cases, but for over six months before that, the nursing home had zero cases. This is a remarkable feat since in Richmond County, where Augusta is located, there were approximately 785 cases of COVID-19 by late June and the number of people diagnosed with COVID had increased by 8.4 percent since then. On September 5, there were 280,000 cases in Georgia; 6,634 of those were in Richmond County.

The Place at Dean's Bridge initially managed to keep infection rates at zero through the dedicated work of employees. At the onset of the virus's spread, Collins joined a special COVID-19 task-force to help implement and maintain safety procedures so that residents at the facility remained safe from infection. The facility has continued to follow the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) guidelines and has maintained strict social distancing rules to avoid contamination between staff.

🕒 **Alumna Lakeya Collins has been following CDC guidelines to keep residents at The Place at Dean's Bridge safe, but she also tries to keep them positive by playing music, buying them snacks, and reading scripture.** PHOTO: PATRICK BIESTMAN/ACUITY PHOTOGRAPHY

Residents are tested twice a week for the virus to keep tabs on its spread.

As a member of the task force, Collins is in charge of ensuring residents' vital signs are checked but says they can assess only those residents who have had a negative COVID-19 test. She also takes extra steps to look after the patients' emotional well-being. Since visitors aren't allowed, so that the facility can maintain social distancing, Collins has taken it upon herself to make sure her patients have contact with their loved ones. By lending them her personal cell phone, they can make FaceTime calls with family members. She also tries to dissuade residents from watching COVID-19-related news because she doesn't want them to get upset from the negative information. Keeping positive with the residents is difficult, but Collins tries to add some happiness into everyone's day. "I might go buy them chicken nuggets — just something to keep them going, to put a smile on their faces," Collins says. She also plays music and reads scripture to many of the residents, which keeps them looking on the bright side.

Admittedly, Collins was nervous and even paranoid in the earlier months of the pandemic, constantly checking her temperature and making sure not to come in contact with others. Seeing people on the local and national news on ventilators and in intensive care units was hard, so it made her work stressful. Over time, she says she has gotten used to it. "It's like everything else in nursing; you become accustomed to it. You do what you're supposed to do," she says. Now that several residents are infected, Collins makes extra sure she maintains proper safety measures, including washing her hands before going home. Although she is taking precautions, she

Since visitors aren't allowed, so that the facility can maintain social distancing, Collins has taken it upon herself to make sure her patients have contact with their loved ones.

doesn't want to inadvertently spread the virus to her 10-year-old son. "That's my biggest fear, but we do our best to make sure going through our daily lives is safe," she says.

Collins feels she's done a good job caring for the residents and works hard to follow the CDC and her facility's guidelines. During this pandemic, she wants people to understand what really goes on in hospitals and facilities such as The Place at Dean's Bridge to keep people safe, and to pay attention to the virus. She says, "I just want people to take it [COVID-19] more seriously so we can get past this part of the numbers increasing, we can get a vaccine, and people can go on with their lives at a safe space in the midst of it."





## COVID COPING

# ELECTED OFFICIAL DANIEL MCCOY MAINTAINS CONTACT WITH THE PUBLIC TO KEEP PEOPLE SAFE

As county executive, 2009 alumnus Daniel McCoy is leading Albany County in northeastern New York state through the COVID-19 pandemic. His job of providing people with the facts and letting them know what resources are available through the Office of the County Executive has proven difficult during this time of social distancing. However,

in spite of the challenges, he has been able to keep in touch with the public.

McCoy is no stranger to COVID-19 and knows how it can affect people. He underwent an antibody test in May that revealed he had coronavirus antibodies, meaning he had previously contracted the virus. Doctors estimate McCoy probably had it sometime during winter

2019–2020. In an article for the Times Union [Albany, New York] published on August 3, 2020, he said, “It was scary because I didn’t know what I was dealing with at the time, but I knew I was really sick. It doesn’t mean I can’t get it again. It just means I had it once and got through it. So I am cautious.”

← Albany County Executive Dan McCoy speaks at his daily press conference to discuss COVID-19 cases in the county on May 12, 2020, in Albany, N.Y. PHOTO: COURTESY OF PAUL BUCKOWSKI/TIMES UNION

His cautiousness is helping to keep others safe and informed. Since March, McCoy has been holding daily briefings to provide safety information to the public. During these briefings, which are shown on Facebook, posted on the office's webpage, and covered by local media, McCoy regularly gives updates and conveys information about social distancing, wearing a mask, good hand hygiene, and keeping germs to yourself by coughing into your elbow. "We're trying to be proactive. I'm not trying to scare anyone. We're just trying to say, it's here, it's been here, [and] we need to stay calm, but you need to be prepared," McCoy said.

To help with issues related to staying safe, the executive office also began providing videos on arts and crafts projects and other activities to do with children, as well as giving tips on maintaining mental health. McCoy directed the Albany County Department of Mental Health to establish a COVID-19 support line for people in the community who are experiencing stress, anxiety, or depression to call seven days a week.

COVID-19 has brought many trying days, and McCoy says March 28 was a particularly dark day. He had to announce the first death from the virus in Albany County. "For me as county executive, it hits you hard. It's important to remember that each and every death represents a family or loved ones who just lost someone extremely important to them," he says. March 28 was also difficult because McCoy and his staff realized that the pandemic was just beginning, and there was a tough road ahead.

That tough road ahead is something that keeps McCoy up at night.

As of September 12, 2020, there have been 2,859 cases and 134 deaths from COVID-19 in Albany County. Although any number is a bad number, Albany



County's infection rate is much lower than other metropolitan areas in the state. For instance, New York City has reported 242,000 cases, Erie County (Buffalo area) has reported 10,444, Monroe County (Rochester area) has reported 5,649, and Onondaga County (Syracuse area) has reported 4,023. Keeping Albany County's numbers comparatively low has been at the forefront of McCoy's mission.

"My job as a leader has been to provide that leadership the community needs, inform members of what is happening, and give them the assistance they require." – Daniel McCoy

"My job as a leader has been to provide that leadership the community needs, inform members of what is happening, and give them the assistance they require," says McCoy. In February, he worked closely with the National Guard to help deliver boxes of food to people in quarantine. Being a National Guard member himself, McCoy has used his past military experiences to inform his approach to leadership during this pandemic. He says you need to act quickly in times of crisis, something he learned while enlisted.

With McCoy's leadership, Albany County took steps to ensure health equity. Albany County became the first county in New York to establish mobile

↑ Daniel McCoy, wearing the black mask in the middle, joins Cohoes Mayor Bill Keeler and children who participated in Albany County's Summer Fun in Cohoes recreation program. PHOTO: OFFICE OF THE ALBANY COUNTY EXECUTIVE

testing sites for people who were unable to travel to get tested for the virus (and the initiative expanded to neighboring counties). He also partnered with the Albany Police Athletic League, which builds partnerships among youth, police, and the community through collaborative programs, and AT&T to launch an Instagram challenge that encouraged teens to post videos and photos that showed how they were staying safe.

Keeping everyone safe has not been easy; following a large party to celebrate July 4, Albany County saw an uptick in the number of COVID-19 cases. This caused McCoy to use time during his daily COVID-19 briefings to encourage the public to follow safety precautions. And, during this critical time, Albany County offices, including McCoy's, never closed. McCoy says he wants to make sure he is available to answer questions he has received from the public either on the county website or on Facebook.

For McCoy, staying in touch with county residents is the best way to keep people safe. He will continue his daily briefings and constant social media updates to keep people informed about new health and safety information and work as hard as he can to keep Albany County's COVID-19 infection rates relatively low. ■



**CURRENT JOB:**  
Chief nursing executive



**RESPONSIBILITIES:**  
Nursing strategic plans, quality outcomes, and caregiver wellness



**GIVING BACK TO EXCELSIOR:**  
Alumni Leadership Council (2014–2017),  
Trustee (since January 2020)



KRIS OUA

JENNIFER GENTRY

## Leads Her Organization to Its Fourth Magnet Recognition

Jennifer Gentry recently sent an email to Excelsior College that started like this: “Today marks the greatest achievement of my professional career.”

Gentry, who earned three nursing degrees from Excelsior, is the chief nursing executive at Providence Portland Medical Center in Portland, Oregon. She was writing to share that she had led the organization to its fourth consecutive magnet recognition, the gold standard of nursing excellence.

The Magnet Recognition Program was developed by the American Nurses Credentialing Center (ANCC) to recognize health care organizations that provide nursing excellence. Organizations seeking magnet status must submit qualitative and quantitative evidence of patient care and outcomes in a written document that addresses dozens of standards. If a sufficiently high score on the written document is achieved, the next step is a site visit for a thorough assessment.

Gentry had joined Providence Portland Medical Center in October 2017, at a time when it was critical to strengthen the nursing infrastructure in preparation for submitting the magnet application. In her experience as

a chief nurse, Gentry had not led an organization through the magnet recognition process, and she relied on her well-honed leadership and communication skills to ensure the hospital made the needed improvements to meet benchmarks for magnet recognition. “It really takes a lot of vision and hospital-wide coordination across many different departments,” she says.

Drawing from her more than 20 years of nursing experience, she also empowered her team. “I focused on transparency and making sure the team understood the why behind what they were doing,” says Gentry. She knew she did not have all the answers; she made sure that processes were in place and she was clear about the vision for what they were trying to accomplish. The nursing team weighed in on what worked for them as they improved internal procedures and practices in preparation of completing their magnet document. “My education proved as relevant today as it was when I went through the program,” Gentry wrote in her email.

Ultimately, the organization had 90 days to complete its written document and more than 80 standards to write in that time.

Gentry quickly made the decisions needed to put the organization on track. She spearheaded the rebuilding of shared governance, a professional practice model, and a nursing leadership model. After a highly coordinated effort, the magnet designation document was completed and submitted on time.

The challenges continued, however. The site visit was scheduled for March 2020, but Providence Portland Medical Center saw its first patient with COVID-19 in late February and experienced an increase in patients with the virus five days before the visit. As a result, the site visit was moved to June. The teams used the time to prepare and train on their professional practice model, which they applied to patient care situations by focusing on patient care and their own safety.

The three-day site visit with four appraisers occurred in a most creative way: by putting an iPad on a stand that was head height, dressing it with scrubs and a nametag, and escorting the surveyors through their visit.

“We were among the first hospitals to do a virtual site visit,” says Gentry. The site visit went smoothly, and the final report included no opportunities for improvement. ■ – M.S.



**INTRODUCTION TO EXCELSIOR:**

A visit to a Navy college office



**SOURCE OF INSPIRATION:**

Her family, her kids



**GREATEST ACCOMPLISHMENTS:**

Serving her country in the Navy, meeting her husband, earning her master's degree



ALANA SPARROW

DOROTHY JIMENEZ

Makes Giving Back to the U.S. Navy Part of Her Transition Plan

In December 2019, Dorothy Jimenez was making a life change. She had separated from the U.S. Navy on November 30 after a 20 plus-year career and less than a month later moved from Virginia to Florida with her husband and children. It was a time of change.

“My transition was like going into uncharted territory, but with all the tools I learned and with all the connections I had with Excelsior College and with the companies that support military members—Wounded Warriors, etc.—and staying connected with mentors helped me transition,” says Jimenez, petty officer first class, retired.

Jimenez has earned three degrees from Excelsior, all while serving in the Navy. She has always been someone focused on pursuing her dreams and moving toward her goals.

With her retirement from the service and her family’s relocation to Florida, the past year has been one of transition to the civilian world. Jimenez spent the first six months after settling in Florida volunteering and giving back to the Navy. She was a case worker for the Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society (NMCR), a nonprofit organization that

partners with the Navy and Marine Corps to provide financial, educational, and other assistance to servicemembers, their eligible family members, and survivors. “There was a time in my career NMCR helped my family,” says Jimenez. “Volunteering was a two-way street. When I dedicated my time, I was able to make new friends, expand my network, and boost social skills.”

She was also able to be a part of something she believed in. “Every time I went to work, I enjoyed meaningful conversation, support, and witnessed genuine compassion toward active-duty and retired military,” she says. “Being able to connect with our community and contribute to a cause that I cared about encouraged me to use my skills learned through Excelsior College in a productive way.”

At the Navy-Marine Corps Relief Society, Jimenez assisted servicemembers and their families with meeting their urgent financial needs. The volunteer role took on added importance during the COVID-19 pandemic. She helped families to pay their bills and learn better ways to make it through the pandemic and hard times. “It was what I needed,” says

Jimenez. “I needed to be of service and give back, and I’m still finding ways of being of service and to give back.”

She’s continuing to give back while working as a cybersecurity engineer for Logistic Services International Inc., a company that provides training and technical support services to the U.S. government, foreign militaries, and the defense industry. Jimenez joined the company in July 2020.

Her position is close to the role she had in the Navy as a cyber defense operations supervisor for the Navy Cyber Defense Operations Command, and she’s able to apply her military experience. In addition, the MPA she earned from Excelsior in 2018 complements her position and builds on the other degrees she earned from the College. “Everything I’ve learned from Excelsior completes this job at this point,” says Jimenez.

As Jimenez tells it, she is gradually getting back to the civilian world. Her resiliency stems from meeting life’s challenges and serving in the Navy. “I am able to stay motivated, have self-direction, and set high goals for myself and achieve them because of my military experience,” she says. ■ –M.S.



MIKE HEMBERGER

EXCELSIOR  
COMMUNITY  
REMEMBERS  
U.S. REP.  
JOHN LEWIS

**W**hen U.S. Rep. John Lewis died on July 17, 2020, our thoughts turned to 2010, the year Excelsior College awarded him an honorary degree at Commencement.

In his remarks to the graduates and their guests, the great civil rights leader said he was taught to never, ever give up—or give in. Lewis shared that, “...Dr. King and Rosa

Parks, and many others inspired me to get in the way, to get in trouble. It was good trouble, necessary trouble.” He went on to congratulate the graduates “...for never, ever giving up, but for keeping the faith and keeping your eyes on the prize.”

His words ring as true today as when they were spoken in July 2010. ■ — M.S.

To view the video of John Lewis giving his remarks, visit [Excelsior College on Facebook](#).



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