

EXCELSIOR

OUR EXPANDING FAMILY OF ALUMNI

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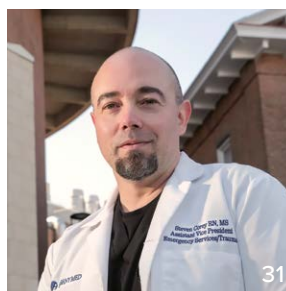
As dean of the School of Undergraduate Studies, Catherine Seaver leads with empathy for faculty and students because she has been both an online instructor and an online learner.

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EXCELSIOR

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ON THE COVER: Kayla Stiens, a graduate from the Class of 2021, celebrates earning a Bachelor of Professional Studies, her second degree from Excelsior College.
PHOTO: COURTESY OF KAYLA STIENS

There's Much to Celebrate in This 50th Anniversary Year

Excelstor College was established in 1971 as the Regents External Degree Program. It was a unique and highly innovative program designed to address the needs of students underrepresented in higher education. Students then were primarily adults who had gone to college but had not finished degrees. This year, we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Regents External Degree Program and the institution into which it has evolved, Excelsior College. Our commitment to serve adult, nontraditional, and underrepresented students remains as strong as ever.

This year, despite the pandemic, we celebrated our third-largest graduating class, with 5,840 graduates in associate, baccalaureate, and master's programs. Our graduation ceremony was remote and festive, and the pride of graduates shone through social media pages. As our family of alumni continues to grow, we encourage our graduates to remain engaged in the Excelsior community, to return for more learning, and to support those who follow in their footsteps.

The 2021–2022 academic year will be a busy one. An LPN to Bachelor of Science in Nursing program, two new master's programs, and two graduate certificates will begin in September, and students are already enrolling in them. A timely MS in Human

Resource Management with an Emphasis in Diversity and Technology will help students leverage the strengths of diverse and distributed workforces, and a MS in Organizational Leadership with an Emphasis in Technology and Data Analytics will teach students how to harness the power of data to make strategic business decisions. We overhauled our MBA program so that students can take one concentration or layer on additional ones, and the first cohort of students have completed our groundbreaking Graduate Certificate in Cannabis Control. In addition, work is already underway for two more master's programs that are targeted to launch in 2022, along with an array of undergraduate and graduate certificates. We are expanding on our academic offerings to meet the needs of students and prepare them for career growth and opportunities in emerging and expanding fields.

August 1 marked my one-year anniversary as Excelsior's fourth president. I am extremely proud of our faculty and staff and their dedication to student success, and I am humbled by our students' abilities to overcome personal challenges and to succeed in these very challenging times. The Excelsior community is vibrant, engaged, and supportive, and it is an honor to be part of it.



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

DAVID SCHEJBAL, PhD
PRESIDENT

Excelsior Welcomes New Members to Board of Trustees

In January 2021, two new members joined the Excelsior Board of Trustees: Charlene Dukes, president emerita of Prince George's Community College and Gretchen Evans, a retired Texas command sergeant major and author/motivational speaker. In July, Mark Bowman, the newly elected president of the Alumni Association, joined the board as an ex-officio member.



Charlene Dukes was previously the first female president of Prince George's Community College. Dukes has held membership in a variety of professional organizations and served as chair of several others. She serves as chair of the board of the Meyer Foundation, secretary of the Greater Washington Community Foundation, member of the CareFirst Inc. Board of Directors, and immediate past convener of the Presidents' Round Table. She serves as a mentor for the Aspen Rising Presidents Fellowship Program, and was appointed in July 2020 by the county executive to serve as co-chair of Prince George's Forward, a taskforce charged with the post-COVID transformation of Prince George's County.

Dukes is the recipient of many awards and recognitions, including the 2020 Catalyst Award from the Prince George's County Chapter of Jack and Jill of America Inc., the 2016 Washingtonian of the Year, the 100 most powerful women in the metropolitan area in the 2013, 2015, and 2017 Washingtonian, the 2014 recipient of the Dr. Reginald Wilson Leadership Diversity Leadership Award, the Living Legacy Award presented by the Association for the Study of African Life and

History (ASALAH), and the 2008 Distinguished Alumnus Award from Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

Dukes has an EdD in Administrative and Policy Studies from the University of Pittsburgh, an MA in Education from the University of Pittsburgh, and a BS in Secondary Education from the Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

Gretchen Evans serves veterans as a board member of several organizations and volunteers with the Guide Dog Foundation and America's Vetdogs.

Evans entered the U.S. Army in September 1979 and was assigned as an intelligence analyst for commander in chief, Europe. Following her time with the Counterintelligence Agent Program at Fort Huachuca, she studied German and Italian at the Defense Language Institute in Monterey, California. After graduation, she was assigned to the 66th Military Intelligence Group, Field Office Vicenza, Italy. She was directly involved in the pursuit and subsequent release of General Dozier from his kidnappers.



Evans joined a black operations unit and attended Basic Airborne and Advance Airborne training at Fort Benning, Georgia, and later oversaw all training for the counterintelligence agents and interrogators of the 519th Military Intelligence Battalion, Fort Hood, Texas.

She has earned many medals and awards, including the Combat Action Badge, the Bronze Star, the Presidential Unit Citation Medal, and Global War on Terrorism ribbons, 6 Meritorious Service Medals, and other

awards. She was wounded in Afghanistan by a mortar round blast, which resulted in a traumatic brain injury, total hearing loss, and other wounds. Evans was awarded the Saginaw Valley State University Veteran Alumni of the Year in 2016 and was inducted into the U.S. Army Women's Hall of Fame in March 2021.

Evans earned a BA in Sociology from Saginaw Valley State University.



Mark Bowman works for NASA as the Soyuz spacecraft systems and crew operations lead, responsible for maintaining engineering knowledge of Russian spacecraft and launch vehicles to ensure the safety of U.S. astronauts during Soyuz flight operations. He serves on the NASA engineering team that is evaluating parachute systems on the Boeing and Space-X crewed vehicles. He is responsible for all voice communication with the astronauts in space.

Bowman's career has included positions as NASA's deputy director of human space flight programs in Russia and as an attaché at the U.S. Embassy in Russia. Prior to that, he spent nearly 20 years developing hardware for medical research and crew health support aboard the space shuttle Mir Station and the International Space Station. He spent more than six hours weightless in nearly 20 flights aboard NASA's zero-G research aircraft.

The 2014 recipient of the Alumni Achievement Award, Bowman earned a BS in Liberal Arts from Excelsior College in 2000. He also earned a MS in Technical Management from Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. He speaks fluent Spanish and Russian. ■ —J.K.



New Graduate Programs Prepare Leaders for Today's Evolving Workplace

Excelsior's portfolio of business programs now includes two additional master's degree programs and two more graduate-level certificates. All four programs were developed to train and educate leaders for jobs in today's economy as well as for an ever-evolving work environment.

"The pace of technological change is expected to accelerate over the next five years, with cloud computing, big data, and e-commerce continuing to dramatically change the nature of work," says Scott Dolan, dean of the School of Graduate Studies. "Skilled technologists who have expertise in those areas may need to broaden leadership skills in problem solving, collaboration, and communication. In the reverse, business-focused leaders may need to strengthen foundational knowledge to understand how to reach people with technology and data backgrounds."

"There is a significant opportunity to train and educate leaders for the jobs of the new economy, an economy that operates at the intersection of technology, data, and human innovation."

—Scott Dolan
Dean, School of Graduate Studies

To equip leaders with the knowledge and skills to excel in the changing workplace, the School of Graduate Studies team developed the degree programs Master of Science in Organizational Leadership with an Emphasis in Technology and Data Analytics and Master of Science in Human Resource Management

with an Emphasis in Diversity and Technology, as well as a Graduate Certificate in Data Analytics and a Graduate Certificate in Distributed Workforce Management.

› The 30-credit Master of Science in Organizational Leadership with an Emphasis in Technology and Data Analytics was developed for practitioners who want to be leaders within today's data-driven economy and solve the most complex organizational challenges. Graduates will leave this program prepared to make critical, data-informed decisions that will assist organizations to remain effective in an ever-changing economy.

› The 30-credit Master of Science in Human Resource Management with an Emphasis in Diversity and Technology was developed for professionals who, as senior leaders, want to contribute to the success of organizations by improving the performance,

motivation, satisfaction, health, and well-being of distributed staff. This degree program focuses on engaging and retaining employees to drive organizational performance and value for the organization's stakeholders.

› The three-course Graduate Certificate in Data Analytics equips leaders with the valuable skill set of collecting, analyzing, and visually representing data to improve organizational decision making as well as with the technical skills to carry out data analysis and the leadership skills to implement insights gleaned from data analysis. Students who complete this certificate can apply 9 credits toward the Master of Science in Organizational Leadership with an Emphasis in Technology and Data Analytics.

› The three-course Graduate Certificate in Distributed Workforce Management provides leaders who want to excel in senior-level human resources positions with the strategic leadership skills necessary to promote collaboration and strong communication among distributed teams and to solve complex organizational challenges associated with employees working in a distributed mode. Students who complete this certificate program can apply 9 credits toward the Master of Science in Human Resource Management with an Emphasis in Diversity and Technology.

"There is a significant opportunity to train and educate leaders for the jobs of the new economy, an economy that operates at the intersection of technology, data, and human innovation," says Dolan. "We are excited to be able to launch two new master's degree programs aligned with these trends. And because the change is so rapid, we know that the window of opportunity for individuals to reskill and upskill is short. Leaders need to stay current, so in line with this approach, we have also developed two shorter duration certificates which are embedded in the degree programs." ■ —M.S.



Excelsior Ranked a Best College for ROI

OnlineU, which ranks online colleges so students can make the best choice in choosing their higher education, recently recognized Excelsior College as No. 1 for best online associate degrees and No. 3 for best online bachelor's degrees.

The designations are part of OnlineU's list of 2021 Best Online Colleges for Return on Investment, which ranks schools by graduates' salaries and debt payments for 10 years after graduation, accounting for standard salary growth and interest on debt payments. OnlineU's rankings are the first to be based on the median salary and mean debt numbers found in the U.S. Department of Education's College Scorecard.

Each year, OnlineU manually researches more than 40,000 online tuition rates for degree programs. More than 22,000 students are matched with schools annually, a testament to how beneficial this data is in providing people with the knowledge necessary in making informed educational choices. With the new 2021 Best Colleges for Return on Investment rankings, students can now

see which college will benefit them the most financially, and Excelsior is at the top of that list.

Excelsior helps students save money and time on their education by accepting previously earned college credit and awarding credit for military training, workplace training, and certain professional certifications. Of the students enrolling in the 2019–2020 academic year, 93.5 percent transferred in college credits prior to enrollment or within three weeks after enrolling. Those pursuing a bachelor's degree transferred in an average of 69.37 credits, which amounts to more than half the number of degree credits required for a bachelor's degree.

David Schejbal, president of Excelsior College, stated, "We are honored to be recognized by OnlineU for best college return on investment. This ranking is significant for Excelsior College, our students, and our graduates as we strive for a strong return on investment and low student debt. Many of our students balance full-time work and personal responsibilities while pursuing a degree, and we recognize the sacrifices and investments they make." ■ —J.K.

Provost's Team Moves the College Toward a Strong Future

To set Excelsior College apart among its peer institutions and to enhance students' learning experience, three highly experienced individuals have joined the College to create a robust Provost's Office under the leadership of John Caron.

Caron's arrival at Excelsior as provost and vice president of academic affairs in July 2019 coincided with retirements of vice provost positions. He decided to take the opportunity to build what he calls a dream team of external professionals from the educational community to diversify Excelsior's executive leadership. To accomplish his goal, Caron brought aboard Lisa Braverman, Heather Chakiris, and Breanne "Bre" Simkin.

Braverman is the vice provost for academic and faculty support and comes from Fairleigh Dickinson University where she was the dean of the Petrocelli School of Continuing Education. She is no stranger to helping adult learners reach their educational goals, and she brings experience building bilingual courses specifically targeted to Latinx students with some credit, no degree. One of the initiatives in Excelsior's strategic plan is to grow enrollment and increase the diversity of our students to reflect national demographics. One of the ways to do this is by expanding opportunities to make Excelsior an attractive option for Latinx students.

"As the College community commits to more diverse and socially just environments and educational practices, I am spearheading with Dean Seaver the creation of new, more inclusive degree pathways for Latinx adults that will ensure higher levels of community, equity, and success for this student demographic, with elements such as bilingual instruction and multiculturally sensitive student service models," says Braverman. "I am proud to be part of the Excelsior community and deeply appreciate the vision of its collaborative and supportive leadership who are committed to a new, exciting future."

As the associate vice president for student success, Chakiris provides leadership and guidance on several strategic priorities,

including rapid virtual and in-time service for students. She works collaboratively with the vice provost, the associate vice president for enrollment management, the schools, and other key College partners, to create a seamless student experience. Chakiris comes from UCLA Extension and prior to that, Penn State World Campus. She led the creation of the student co-curricular experience at Penn State World Campus, which many other institutions have since tried to emulate. She then brought her expertise to UCLA, where she worked toward the same goals as the chief student experience officer.

"My passion for the last 20 years has been developing support structures that help online adult learners succeed in reaching their educational goals despite everything that life throws at them that makes them want to give up," says Chakiris. "I feel fortunate to be working with the talented provost team who share the same passion and drive to create an extraordinary student experience and to cultivate a culture of extraordinary service that distinguishes Excelsior as the gold standard in online education."

Simkin, the associate vice president for enrollment management, previously worked at Lindenwood University in Missouri, where she was the associate vice president for enrollment management. Lindenwood University is a four-year nonprofit institution, with programs that span from baccalaureate to doctoral as well as with professional and continuing education opportunities. Simkin's knowledge is steeped in financial aid and registrar work, and she is responsible for the development of data-driven strategies to increase student enrollment, while working collaboratively with various stakeholders to ensure positive enrollment growth. "Serving the underserved has been a large part of my professional career and motivates me in the work we do within Enrollment Management," she says. "It is wonderfully fulfilling to know that we are helping change the course of a student's future. I look forward to establishing new enrollment opportunities that will take Excelsior into the next 50 years."



↑ The academic leadership team includes John Caron, provost and vice president of academic affairs; Lisa Braverman, vice provost for academic and faculty support; Heather Chakiris, associate vice president for student success; Breanne Simkin, associate vice president for enrollment management; Scott Dolan, dean of the School of Graduate Studies; Mary Lee Pollard, dean of the School of Nursing; Catherine Seaver, dean of the School of Undergraduate Studies; and Lifang Shih, special assistant to the provost focusing on curriculum design and innovation.

As a priority project, the new team is rolling out an enrollment management strategy that includes recruiting, enrolling, retaining, and graduating students while maintaining a successful fiscal and academic plan. Part of Caron's strategy is encouraging the growth of new programs to attract students. The academic world is constantly changing, and Excelsior needs to keep up with it, as well as with the growing needs of the corporate world.

“Part of our growth strategy needs to include offering new programs again; it’s been several years since the College launched new programs,” says Caron, and explains that the deans have been working on developing degree programs and micro certificates designed to meet the needs of learners and employers.

In June, four graduate-level programs, the Master of Science in Organizational Leadership with an Emphasis in Technology and Data Analytics, Master of Science in Human Resource Management with an Emphasis in Diversity and Technology, Graduate Certificate in Data Analytics, and Graduate Certificate in Distributed Workforce Management, opened for enrollment. That same month, the LPN to Bachelor of Science in Nursing program opened for enrollment. Programs in mechanical engineering technology, renewable energy, and sustainability management are in development for launch in the Fall 2022 trimester. Planning is also underway on a bilingual learning experience for Latinx students. In addition, the Associate Degree in Nursing program’s revised curriculum was introduced to new students enrolling as of January 1, 2021.

Provost Caron is ready for the provost’s team, including the vice provost, associate vice presidents, deans, and special assistant to the provost focusing on curriculum design and innovation, to be ambassadors for Excelsior College when they present and speak at conferences, serve on panels, write blogs, and “essentially elevate the brand awareness and reputation of the College on a national level.” The alignment of the leadership for academic and faculty support, student success, and enrollment management within the Provost’s Office will help solidify Excelsior’s position in the educational community going forward. He adds that with the new experience and knowledge on board, Excelsior will be able to find ways to do what no other college and institution is doing.

Says Caron, “You’ve got to have firepower, you’ve got to have talent. To do that, you’ve got to have people who don’t let anything get in their way. And can think out of the box. And these leaders are it.” ■ – J.K.

Excelsior Places First in National Cyber League Competition

Team Excelsior earned first place in the National Cyber League (NCL) spring competition, a cybersecurity competition with offensive and defensive puzzle-based and capture-the-flag games.

Excelsior’s National Cybersecurity Student Association Chapter participates annually in the NCL, a virtual training that prepares high school and college students for potential real-world cybersecurity situations. Alumni within one year of graduating and students acting in a fellowship role are also allowed to participate in the competition. Participants join in the preseason, individual, and team games at the level of their choosing, giving them opportunities to be successful and expand their skills. The number of Excelsior students participating in the NCL has steadily increased each season since 2017, and teams participate in both the spring season, held from March until May, and the fall season, which starts in October and ends in November.

Under the guidance of master’s in cybersecurity graduate Weylin Leavitt, 28 Excelsior students and alumni participated in the individual, preseason, and team games this past spring. For the team games, Excelsior created four teams led by captains Leavitt; Todd Krebsbach, a master’s in cybersecurity graduate; Stephanie Barnes, a master’s in cybersecurity student; and Steven Meredith, a Bachelor of Professional Studies in Technology Management student. Each team collaborated, trained, and spent countless hours competing in the challenges, which resulted in Excelsior College’s team, the r00ts, placing No. 1 among the Top 100 schools in the NCL and placing No. 2 in the NCL team games.

“Not only has the NCL expanded my technical skills through its challenges and continues to with new and current cyber tools and tactics, but it has taught me invaluable leadership skills,” says Leavitt,



“My military training and opportunities have had a strong influence on these skills, but through Excelsior and NCI support, I have been able to hone and practice those skills and teamwork in the virtual/cyber realm. I would not trade these lessons and experiences for anything.”

— Weylin Leavitt, Team Captain

who has progressed from casual player to team captain and fellow at the National Cybersecurity Institute at Excelsior College (NCI). “My military training and opportunities have had a strong influence on these skills, but through Excelsior and NCI support, I have been able to hone and practice those skills and teamwork in the virtual/cyber realm. I would not trade these lessons and experiences for anything.”

Students who participate in the NCL competition gain cybersecurity experience, prepare for the workplace, and increase their skill levels in preparation for more competitions down the road. They also apply what they learn in the bachelor’s and master’s programs in cybersecurity, which prepare students to prevent, detect, counter, and recover from cyber incidents. ■ – J.K.

Mentorship Program Links Alumni with Students, Creating Valuable Connections

Last summer, students and alumni participated in a pilot of a mentorship program designed to allow students to build first-hand career knowledge and connections, as well as to network. Although the mentorship experience does not guarantee a job, it increases avenues and the potential for students to reach career goals.

Interested students and alumni filled out intake forms or answered questions over the phone to develop a profile that the mentorship program committee used to form matches. Mentees and mentors were matched using algorithms built on mutual areas of interest, including career and program areas, and other preferences sourced from their profiles.

During the pilot program, mentors were

board for students to test ideas, and enable students to expand their networks. This particular pilot program enabled us to engage with our alumni in new ways. Who better to provide advice to our existing students than our alumni who have translated their Excelsior degree into successful careers themselves.”

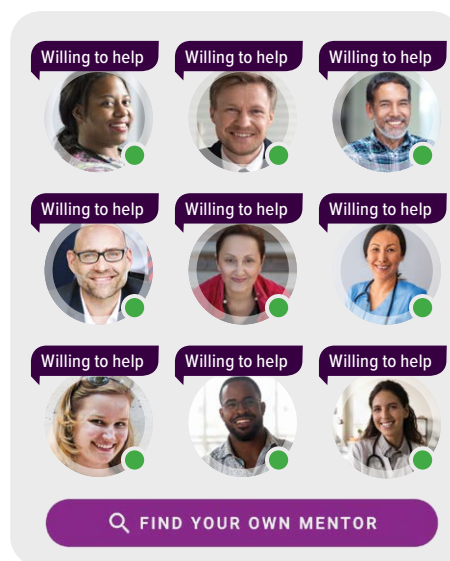
“Mentors play an important role in the academic and professional growth of students... Engaging with a mentor can help increase their confidence, align their expectations with the realities of life and work, and further their growth and development...No student should go without the critical human connection and opportunities that mentorship provides,” says Spenziero.

One mentor who has played such an important role in a student’s life is U.S. Navy veteran and retired teacher Thomas Snee, who graduated in 1998 from Regents College with a bachelor’s degree in liberal arts. He volunteered to participate in the mentorship program with several goals in mind. He wanted to share his background, maintain regular contact with his student mentee, and help ensure the student’s success. Snee was paired with Ashley Gammon, a loan officer who was in the final months of the Bachelor of Science in Liberal Arts program. She earned her degree in November 2020.

“I suggested she take the futuristic view in the value of her Excelsior degree—how and where it will lead in the future, short- or long-term. In short, giving assurances that time spent on the numerous papers, in ‘meetings,’ and other factors enhances her persona as a person,” said Snee.

Snee and Gammon kept in close contact, sharing emails and frequently talking on the phone. Gammon recalls the relationship as being very beneficial and friendly, saying she enjoyed having the opportunity to bounce ideas off Snee and having his wisdom and guidance available.

“While there is quite the age difference between us, he gave me such great insight and wisdom,” says Gammon. “I loved [that] I had someone who was so intelligent and a published author to look over my resume and



↑ Through Excelsior Connects, alumni can find mentors or register to offer mentoring. Participants are able to send introductions to connect, network within their fields or industries, and ask or answer specific questions.

give gentle guidance on it. I gained a friend. We now email all the time and talk on the phone about once a month.”

The pilot of the mentorship program completed successfully with most of the mentees and mentors having positive reviews. The committee plans to continue the three-month model of the program, which is open and running for anyone interested. The committee has also incorporated Excelsior Connects, the alumni engagement platform, to allow mentees and mentors to seamlessly correspond during the mentorship experience.

“We have witnessed Excelsior alumni open doors to expanded job opportunities and new professional pursuits for each other and for current students through mentoring,” says Jamie Hicks-Furgang, executive director of development and alumni engagement. “Now, with Excelsior Connects as our platform, we are increasing opportunities for more formal mentorship and even greater connection among the alumni and student body...These types of connections are incredibly valuable for career and personal growth and are also personally rewarding for both alumni and students alike.” ■ — J.K.

“No student should go without the critical human connection and opportunities that mentorship provides.”

— Tammy Spenziero
Director, Career Readiness Center

expected to share knowledge about an industry, discuss experiences they have faced and overcome, serve as a career guide (but not help the student find employment), and give direction as a trusted individual. Though not required, mentees could log their mentoring experiences by keeping a journal and they could periodically check in with Tammy Spenziero, the director of the Career Readiness Center. Spenziero worked with Scott Dolan, dean of the School of Graduate Studies, and representatives from Alumni Engagement to develop and now lead the mentorship program.

Dolan remarked about the success of the program, saying, “Our students often come to us with the goal of advancing or changing their careers, and mentorship can play an important role in career development. Mentors provide valuable advice, help students develop their skills, act as a sounding



New Degree Program Prepares LPNs and LVNs for Career Advancement

The newly added LPN to Bachelor of Science in Nursing program offers licensed practical nurses and licensed vocational nurses a pathway to career advancement.

By enrolling in this program, LPNs and LVNs can earn both an Associate in Applied Science and a Bachelor of Science in Nursing in less time than it would take to complete each degree program separately.

After earning the associate degree in nursing, students are eligible to sit for the NCLEX-RN, become licensed, and begin their professional nursing practice before conferral of the bachelor's degree. With the opportunity to become RNs midway through the program, students will be able to take advantage of different employment opportunities and take on the new role of a professional nurse while earning their bachelor's in nursing. They can

With the opportunity to become RNs midway through the program, students will be able to take advantage of different employment opportunities and take on the new role of a professional nurse while earning their bachelor's.

also gain a significant increase in wages that comes with RN licensure.

Registered nursing is one of the fastest-growing occupations, according to Bureau of Labor Statistics' projections through 2029. The RN workforce is expected to grow from 3 million in 2019 to 3.3 million in 2029 due to an aging population, nurse retirements, health care reform, and other factors.

The LPN to Bachelor of Science in Nursing program provides LPNs and LVNs with the clinical skills and practice experiences they

need to grow their nursing careers and expand their role in the delivery of quality patient care. All courses are online, except for two hybrid courses in which students engage in online course activities and complete a live clinical experience. This structure makes the program a good fit with the work schedules of LPNs and LVNs who are looking to balance the pursuit of a degree with their professional and personal responsibilities.

In the combined degree program, students earn an Associate in Applied Science in Nursing after completing all associate degree requirements and proceed seamlessly to the bachelor's nursing component. They must have an active RN license to complete the bachelor's degree requirements.

"In many instances, employers have expressed a preference to hire baccalaureate-prepared nurses or nurses who are enrolled in a baccalaureate program, and Excelsior's LPN to Bachelor of Science in Nursing program expands career opportunities for LPNs and LVNs," says Mary Lee Pollard, dean of the School of Nursing. ■ — M.S.

Alumni Receive Awards for Achievements

Four alumni were honored for their outstanding achievements on July 8, during the Alumni Association Annual Meeting hosted by the Alumni Leadership Council. The meeting was held online to allow the broadest possible participation by Excelsior alumni.

The alumni award recipients, Lloyd Conway, Cynthia Wanek, Scott Meier, and Gregg Smith, accepted their awards virtually.

Lloyd Conway was selected as the recipient of the Alumni Achievement Award, which recognizes outstanding academic, professional, personal, and community contributions that are representative of our graduates. “Being chosen for this honor gives me a feeling of connectedness to the community of like-minded souls whose academic pilgrimage brought them to Excelsior...Our journeys would not have been possible without Excelsior, and I am sure that all of us are as grateful as I am for our alma mater,” he says about the Alumni Achievement Award.

This Carrie B. Lenburg Award is presented to an outstanding nursing graduate in recognition of the accomplishments and vision of Dr. Carrie Lenburg, coordinator of the Regents College Nursing Program from 1973 to 1990. The award is presented to a nurse who demonstrates a commitment to nursing education as well as to academic and professional accomplishments in the field of nursing. This year’s recipient, Cynthia Wanek, is a lifelong learner and credits her achievements to living by the motto “Ever Upward.”

Scott Meier was selected as the recipient of the C. Wayne Williams Award, which is named after the College’s first president and presented in recognition of outstanding public service and community involvement by a graduate. Meier believes that the legacy we leave is greater defined by those we help rather than by what we’ve acquired. “They [Excelsior College] took all my various experiences and validated them, and in turn, valued me,” he says. “I’m forever grateful for Excelsior College and the alumni that keep

the school’s mission of supporting adult learners at the heart of their culture.”

Alumni Service Award recipient Gregg Smith has been giving back to Excelsior for many years, in a variety of ways, including his longstanding service as member of faculty from 1983 to present and the establishment of the Gregg and Lisa Smith Technology Scholarship Fund. The Alumni Service Award recognizes outstanding service to Excelsior College, including efforts in advocacy, recruitment, or outreach and service as a role model to others in helping the College achieve its overarching goals.

Reflecting on his contributions, Smith says, “It all counts. The key is to start, succeed with that first goal, and then build on it to the next. It’s not a sprint, it’s a marathon.”

Read more about the recipients:

Lloyd Conway: Alumni Achievement Award

Lloyd Conway, of Lansing, Michigan, is from an Army family dating back to the American Revolution and is the first in his family to graduate college. Conway’s Excelsior degree made him eligible for the MI Civil Service test (on which he scored in the 100th percentile) and a 20-year career in public service that would have been otherwise denied. Conway has been selected for many honors and awards and has dedicated his life’s work to the improvement of his community. Conway’s post-Excelsior career has included being an adjunct college instructor in a nontraditional degree-completion program. His commitment to nontraditional education continues to be a driving force in his life and career. In addition to a Bachelor of Arts from Excelsior, Conway earned a MAT from Wayne State University.

Cynthia Wanek: Carrie B. Lenburg Award

While some announce retirement at age 62, Cynthia Wanek, of Crete, Nebraska, announced her new position at a Magnet status medical center. Wanek enrolled at Excelsior on the phone from a cancer treatment hospital while supporting her father. After his passing, her mother’s lifelong heart condition required more of her time and Wanek took over most of her parents’ affairs. She persevered against the odds as

a nontraditional student to become a nurse. Her goal was a nursing job at her local critical access hospital, and she was ultimately hired in a small hospital. Wanek holds advanced licenses and finds meaning in direct, bedside patient care. She prides herself in giving comfort, hope, and courage through the end of life. A graduate of Excelsior with an associate degree in nursing, she earned a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Nebraska.

J. Scott Meier: C. Wayne Williams Award

From his first job delivering newspapers to working in agriculture while growing up and later in the food service industry, to his career in the Navy and all that has followed, Scott Meier, of Austin, Texas, has been in roles where he has served others. He is a steadfast volunteer through civic involvement, churches, community theater, fundraisers for cancer, and youth coaching. Meier did not plan his life around serving but understood the value that was modeled in the small community in which he was raised and instilled in him at a young age. Meier is involved in many activities outside of his professional position to advance the capabilities of the Department of Veterans Affairs and other federal departments. Meier earned a Bachelor of Science in Nuclear Engineering Technology from Excelsior and a Master of Business Administration from University of Missouri.

Gregg Smith: Alumni Service Award

Gregg Smith, from Idaho Falls, Idaho, has been affiliated with Excelsior since 1983 when he secured a six-figure grant to start development of technology degree programs at Regents External Degrees Program (now Excelsior College). Smith is an active member of several advisory boards, including New Jersey Institute of Technology, Hudson Valley Community College, and National Program on Non-Collegiate Sponsored Instruction. He also founded a nonprofit organization that conducts several charitable events in the community and has raised more than \$150,000 per year. A graduate of Excelsior with a Bachelor of Science, Smith encourages students and alumni to give back to the College in any way that they can. ■ — J.K.

2020–2021 GRADUATES AT A GLANCE



5,840

There are 5,840 graduates, and 5,754 graduates are from the United States; the most graduates—1,168—come from New York followed by 504 from Texas.



28

Twenty-eight students earned more than one degree during the academic year.



74

This year's oldest graduate is a 74-year-old male from Carencro, Louisiana, who earned a Bachelor of Science in Liberal Arts.



86

Excelsior's Class of 2021 includes 86 students from outside the United States, the most being from Canada (17), followed by the United Kingdom (13).

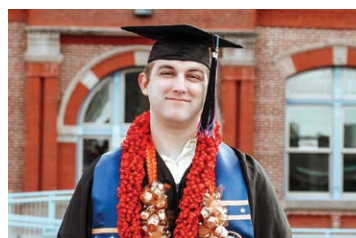
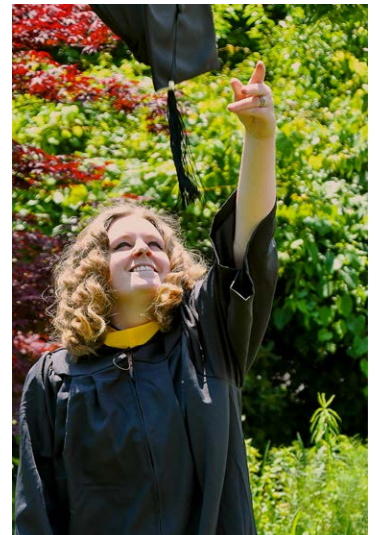


36

The average age of the Class of 2021 is 36.

29

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



“In These Unprecedented Times...”



RETHINKING THE WORK-AT-HOME LIFE, ONE YEAR LATER

BY CAITLIN ABRAM

More than a full year into the pandemic, the deluge of content touting the best ways to create a home office, offering Zoom-ready makeup tutorials, and the many, many, articles containing the words “self-care” have slowed to a trickle as the world has reached the final stage of its collective mourning for normal life: Acceptance.

By now, when it comes to working from home, you probably fall into one of three different categories:



YOU ARE THRIVING! Management will have to rip the sweatpants from your cold, dead body.



YOU HATE IT! You're not your best professional self at home and pine for the structure and camaraderie of in-office life.



YOU VACILLATE WILDLY! You both revel in the lack of commute and curse the all but obliterated lines between personal and professional time as well as the circus of partners, children, and pets you have to battle to get any actual work done.

No matter how you feel about working from home, chances are you may not be going back to the office any time soon and many organizations are re-evaluating their need for physical office space even after the working world resumes business as usual. After what feels like a lifetime of settling into “office 2.0,” most workers have realized that the daily grind hasn’t changed, it’s just moved in with them. Let’s revisit some of the most repeated remote work tips from the early days of the pandemic and examine if they still hold true or, with a little perspective, if we’ve learned better.

TURN “SELF-CARE” INSIDE OUT

First, let’s reflect on what the majority of these early content pieces failed to mention and acknowledge—the true luck and privilege of having gainful employment with the ability to work from home during an era when so many others have not and do not. This gap highlights a tremendous inequality. A June 2020 Stanford University survey reports that higher paid, white collar workers were able to easily transition to a remote work environment while lower paid workers in industries like agriculture or hospitality, or those who lack adequate internet and a suitable home environment, were being left behind.

This past year has been one of difficulty and instability for a large percentage of the world and mutual aid societies have become a new way for people to help and connect. Mutual aid groups help communities share support and resources to care for each other in times of need. Working from home, and the pandemic in general, has kept many people in their communities during the day. Try becoming a more active part of your own. Everyone has something valuable to give, so find out where the most need in your hometown is and find out how you can help. Afterall, sometimes caring for others is the best care for yourself.

THE PANTS PARADOX

When offices first went remote, one of the most common pieces of advice concerned our pants. To maintain some mental semblance of normality, countless tips advised workers to continue to dress as if one was still going into the office. While this advice may have been followed at first, the sartorial mullet familiar to most Zoom-equipped workers consisting of business from the waist up and party from the waist down has, by now, become a well-worn cultural meme. As work dress norms relaxed, corporate leadership was left wondering whether a dress code was outdated and even necessary when working remotely.

Of course, what you wear all comes down to personal preference and the industry in which you work. The last year, though, has proved that productivity and “professionalism” isn’t necessarily as tied to what we wear as we thought. What’s most important is your intention starting the day and the act of getting dressed in a way that makes you feel “ready for work,” whether that’s putting on a freshly pressed shirt or changing from your night pajama pants into your day pajama pants. Studies from Scientific American and the Harvard Business Review confirm that what we wear does affect our mood and even our posture. If you’ve found yourself sporting the same old hoodie for too

We asked some of our colleagues at Excelsior College who are working from home what they’ve learned about themselves, how they like to work, and what advice they would travel back in time to give their 2020 selves. Here are some of the comments we received:

“I love working from home, and I like the improved collaboration!”

“Work-life balance is only as good as you make it.”

“Designated space is important.”

“Take a break.”

“Buy a really, really good desk chair.”

“If working at home for the long haul, it’s important to have a plan!”

“I’ve gotten in touch with my self-motivation.”

“Pay attention to food.”

“Enjoy the flexibility.”

“Find a work buddy if you can and meet up a few times a week.”

many days in a row, consider changing up your wardrobe. You might be surprised at how different you feel.

TIPPING THE “WORK-LIFE BALANCE”

Mercer, an HR consulting firm, conducted eight surveys between April and October of 2020 and found that nearly 90 percent of the more than 300 U.S. employers surveyed reported that productivity was consistent with or above pre-pandemic rates. This is, of course, great news for businesses and shows employees have a remarkable ability to adapt, but boiling down the past years’ experience to “productivity data” is only looking at half the story.

As much as the workforce was urged to find a healthy work-life balance during the pandemic, the phrase itself betrays the paradox when you have to work where you live. A Society for Human Resource Management study notes that nearly 70 percent of professionals who transitioned to working from home during the pandemic report working on the weekends and 45 percent report working more hours during the week than before. The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) calls this extra work “hidden overtime” in its September 2020 report on the remote workforce.

The pandemic has made people recognize that work-life balance just looks different now and that’s going to have to be okay. Traditional office life confined people of very different personalities and preferences into “one size fits all” ways of working, dressing, and living. One of the positives of leaving that behind has been finding new opportunities for flexibility, introspection, and discovering that left to your own devices, you’re actually morning person, or you get hungry for lunch at 3 p.m., or that you’d rather take more breaks during the day and work later into the evening. Needless to say, that despite everything that’s happened, we’ve kept learning! ■

Caitlin Abram is the web content manager at Excelsior College and loves working from home in her small, windowless “productivity cave.”



Catherine Seaver

Dean of the School of Undergraduate Studies

Catherine Seaver began her career with Excelsior College in July 2019 as associate dean of business, science, and technology. In December 2020, she became dean of the School of Undergraduate Studies.

Seaver has extensive experience in higher education. Prior to Excelsior, she was vice president of academic and student affairs at Greenfield Community College in Greenfield, Massachusetts. For 14 years, she worked at Manchester Community College in Manchester, Connecticut, as director of the business, engineering, and technology division; interim associate dean of student affairs; and department chair of engineering and technology.

Seaver earned a PhD in leadership with a specialization in education from the University of the Cumberlands. She also has an MS in educational technology from Eastern Connecticut State University and an MS in computer and information systems from the University of Phoenix. PHOTO: MIKE HEMBERGER



What do you enjoy most about Excelsior College? At the core is the mission of the school and how it drives what we do and how we do it. It lets us give students opportunities for higher education and degree completion that they wouldn't get elsewhere. Our mission and the CARES credo [guiding principles for employees: Each Excelsior employee is Compassionate, Agile, Respectful, and committed to Excellence and Service] empower faculty and staff to do what they can to help students be successful, advocate for them, and support them in ways not found elsewhere.

I also enjoy the people I work with. Not only are they passionate about their work and supporting students, they are good, nice, and fun people. I felt at home so quickly when I came to Excelsior. And as we have continued to work during the [COVID-19] pandemic, everyone has been so wonderful and supportive of each other.

How would you describe your leadership style? Foremost is trust. I hope that people trust that I have their backs, that I am looking out for their well-being, and that I want them to be successful. And it is important that I trust those around me.

I try to remove barriers for people so they can do their jobs. It is important to me that others feel comfortable around me and there is open communication. Also, I am an optimist, and I think that is important when leading others. This doesn't mean that I don't see challenges and obstacles, and that I don't recognize failures; it means that I look for ways to get around obstacles and overcome challenges. And if someone or something isn't working, then we should find a way to fix things.

How is online education changing? How are you preparing Excelsior College to meet those challenges? I have been involved in online education since the very beginning, being one of the first to teach online at a community college in 2002. At the beginning, we tried to do what we do in

the physical classroom. Now we know that the way we learn online is different, so the way we design our online courses needs to be different.

It is also great to see growing acceptance of online education. I've always found that both teaching online and being an online student are challenging, rewarding, and have the potential for deeper learning than in the physical classroom. If you think about it, students can go to a classroom, sit in a chair, daydream, or fall asleep—but they get credit for attending. You can't fake your participation in an online class. If you aren't participating, it is obvious. It is not unusual for students to say that they had to work a lot harder in an online class.

One of the challenges we face at Excelsior is from competition. The pandemic has forced many schools that were not embracing distance learning to open their minds. Now that they have overcome hesitancy to teach online, many will continue offering at least some of their courses online. We need to make sure that our courses continue to be dynamic and engaging. We have the advantage of having been teaching online all along, and we need to make sure that students know about our experience.

In my role as dean, I need to make sure that our faculty and staff have the resources they need to continue to update our existing courses and develop new programs and courses to meet the needs of our students.

What skills can students expect to gain in Excelsior's undergraduate programs?

We design our curriculum to provide students with the skills they need to meet their goals and be successful in their careers. We do this by providing not only the subject matter skills such as accounting, engineering, health science, etc., but also by being aware of other skills that employers are looking for and including those in the curriculum. We know that employers are looking for graduates who can think critically, be creative, solve problems, communicate, and work as part of a team. We build these components

into our courses and include them in our general education and career competencies, which are also addressed in the courses. We also focus on outcome assessment to monitor how well we are doing this—how do we know that students are learning what we want them to learn.

How did your own college education affect you?

I had a nontraditional start to my college education. I graduated from high school at age 16 and went to a community college for a semester. At that time, I thought I wanted to be an accountant, so I focused on accounting courses. When I transferred to Miami University of Ohio, I decided I wanted to be a veterinarian. I learned in those science and biology courses that I am not good at memorizing things. By the end of my sophomore year, it was obvious that I had to change majors due to poor grades in the science and biology courses. My grades were good in math and physics, so I changed to manufacturing engineering technology. That degree has served me well and it gave me the start I needed. My subsequent degrees were all online or hybrid, which was what got me to where I am now. My experience in online master's and doctorate courses gave me our student's perspective, which has been invaluable. I was a single parent with a full-time job, staying up late after the kids went to bed so I could participate in online discussions and write papers. I was the parent at soccer games sneaking in a few minutes of studying before an exam. I appreciate the challenges of our students because I have been there myself.

I thought that college was a required part of education just like high school for most of my childhood. I am aware of the advantages this gave me and have always tried to be particularly supportive of first-generation students who do not have the support and encouragement of their family as I did. As a college, we have to make sure that we have the support systems and services in place to help our students be successful no matter their story. ■ —J.K.



CLAIMING HISTORY



ER PLACE IN TORY

MILITARY MEMORIAL
PAYS TRIBUTE TO
WOMEN WHO SERVED

BY DANA YANULAVICH



It was the soldier's first time overseas, nearly 5,000 miles from their home in Arkansas. They arrived in Casablanca during the height of World War II, traveling through Tunisia, eventually landing in Italy at Anzio Beach three days after the big invasion. With only a canteen and a K-rations, they headed out to connect with their unit, sleeping overnight in an open field rolled in a borrowed blanket. Their wartime experience included service in France and Germany and a trek through the treacherous Brenner Pass in the Alps to reconnect with their unit to return home. In recognition of their exceptional valor in combat, this heroic soldier was awarded the bronze star. This soldier was a woman.

History is very much alive at the Military Women's Memorial. The story noted above is of Captain Lina Stratton Garrett, an Army nurse, and it is just one example of the experiences preserved at the memorial. While not all the narratives are full of derring-do, each account represents the important and varied contributions made by the nearly 3 million women who have served. As Phyllis Wilson, president of the memorial explains, "We have a very simple mission: We honor and tell the stories of the women who have defended this nation."

Wilson not only leads the Memorial and its supporting non-profit organization, the Women in Military Service for America Memorial Foundation Inc. (WIMSA), but also is among those registered. She began her Army career as a Military Intelligence German linguist voice intercept operator, and subsequently served in several mobilizations, including Operation Desert Shield/Operation Desert Storm and Operation Enduring Freedom. She also deployed to Iraq twice as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom. After 37 years of service, Wilson retired as a chief warrant officer five and was inducted into the Army Women's Foundation Hall of Fame in 2017.

THE MEMORIAL TAKES SHAPE

The dedication of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in 1983 caught the attention of women veterans who questioned why there wasn't a similar tribute to their service. Although the Vietnam memorial includes a bronze statue in honor of nurses who served during that time, there was no recognition for women's service in World War II or the Korean War. Women veterans approached former Ohio Rep. Mary Rose Oakar, who initiated hearings for a national women veterans' memorial. In 1986, President Ronald Reagan signed a bill that authorized the establishment of the memorial.

The Military Women's Memorial opened in 1997 to great fanfare with 40,000 dignitaries, politicians, celebrities, service-women, and veterans in attendance. Participants included Vice President Al Gore, Supreme Court Associate Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, and celebrities like actress Loretta Swit, who

had played Margaret "Hot Lips" Houlihan in the Korean War-themed TV series "M*A*S*H."

Yet the concept of women in the military has not always been met with such glitz and glamor. It was initially illegal for women to serve, although they did in fact make contributions during the Revolutionary and Civil Wars, sometimes even disguising themselves as men. It wasn't until the Army Nurse Corps was established in 1901 and soon followed by the Navy Nurse Corps in 1908, that women had an official military role. Women were permitted to enlist in the military for the first

"We have a very simple mission: We honor and tell the stories of the women who have defended this nation."

— PHYLLIS WILSON
PRESIDENT, MILITARY WOMEN'S MEMORIAL

time during World War I but were only allowed to serve for the duration of the war plus six months. Simply put, a military career wasn't an option for women as it was for men. Permanent status for women in the U.S. Armed Forces did not occur until passage of the Women's Armed Services Integration Act in 1948. Although announced in 2013, it wasn't until 2016 that all military jobs became available to women, including direct combat roles.

IMPORTANCE OF A DEDICATED WOMEN'S MEMORIAL

Without a doubt, all those who defend the nation are important, so why is a separate memorial needed for women?

"You know I wondered that myself, because for 37 years I was a soldier and I didn't think we needed our own until recently, and I can now tell you I have four sons and a daughter-in-law who serve in the military. And women's paths run parallel, but they do not run the same. As an example, men could serve in the Revolutionary War as soldiers, but women had to disguise themselves to fight on the battlefield," explains Wilson.

Located at the gateway of Arlington National Cemetery, the Military Women's Memorial incorporates the historic



Hemicycle, an impressive granite retaining wall dedicated in 1932 and originally intended as the ceremonial entrance to the cemetery but never fully developed. Architects, including one whose mother as a World War II Army nurse, added a skylight arc of glass tablets etched with quotations by and about military women. As the sun passes overhead, these quotes are reflected on the exhibit gallery below. Four stairwells lead to the upper terrace, breaching the original wall and symbolizing women breaking through barriers in the military. The Court of Valor features a reflecting pool with a 200-jet fountain, representing the sound of women's voices.

The centerpiece of the memorial is its registry where visitors can access an interactive computer database containing names, service specifics, awards, decorations, and photographs of servicewomen who have registered. Wilson explains, "The heart of the memorial is the database, where we ask every woman who has ever served in or with the military to claim her place and tell her story."

Those eligible to register their service are members of the U.S. Armed Forces—active duty, veteran, reserve, or guard. Other groups that qualify include U.S. Public Health Service Commissioned Corps, National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration Commissioned Corps, Coast Guard Auxiliary, and the Civil Air Patrol. Another category others can register in is "also served," which includes those who served overseas

↑ As president of the Military Women's Memorial, Excelsior graduate Phyllis Wilson leads efforts to gather and preserve the stories of women who have served and defended the United States. PHOTO: KAREN SAYRE

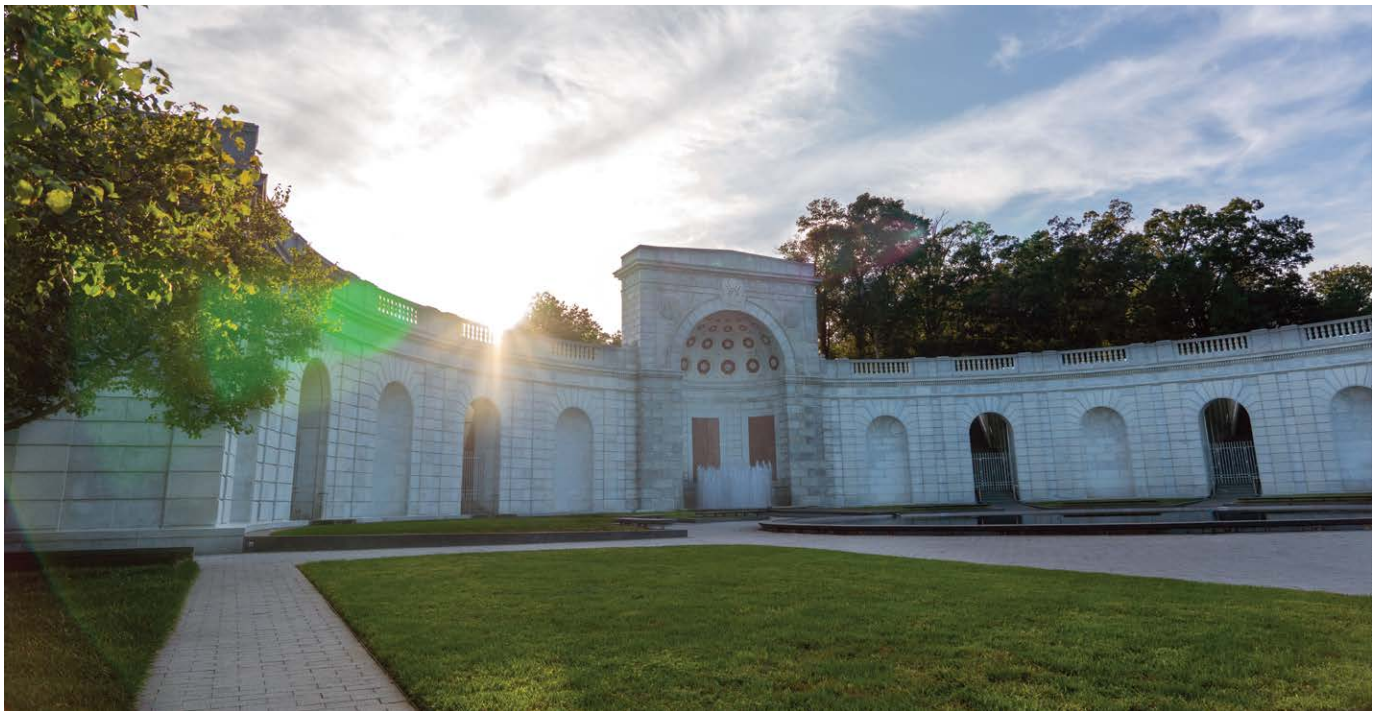
during conflicts in direct support of the Armed Forces in organizations such as the Red Cross, USO, and Special Services. U.S. Public Health Service Cadet Nurse Corps members are included in a special Honor Roll of Cadet Nurses.

Wilson notes, "Honestly when the memorial opened in '97 who would have known that just four short years later 9/11 was going to happen. And a really huge number of women have joined the military post-9/11 and are still serving; many of those women don't even know there's such a place where they should be telling their stories."

VISITING THE MEMORIAL

While the registry is the heart of the Military Women's Memorial, there is much more to see and appreciate at the site. Chronologically themed areas encompass women's military history beginning in the 18th and 19th centuries, and cover both world wars, service in Korea and Vietnam as well as present-day conflicts such as Iraq, Afghanistan, and the global war on terror. Admission is free, but due to COVID-19 restrictions,





⬆️⬆️ The stories maintained at the Military Women's Memorial are both bitter and sweet, and encompass women's military history from the 18th and 19th centuries, both world wars, the Korean and Vietnam Wars, and present-day conflicts such as Iraq, Afghanistan, and the global war on terror.

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF MILITARY WOMEN'S MEMORIAL



it is recommended that visitors secure a ticket through the Eventbrite link on the memorial's website.

"We have a large collection of uniforms, boots, diaries, letters, photos—you name it, we have it," Wilson explains, and adds, "We have the largest collection of military women artifacts and memorabilia in the world."

There are unique items included in the collection that are reflective of the depth of women's military history. For example, there is a cane that belonged to Dr. Mary Edwards Walker, who volunteered as a surgeon during the Civil War. She was captured and served time as a prisoner of war. The only woman

"...a really huge number of women have joined the military post-9/11 and are still serving; many of those women don't even know there's such a place where they should be telling their stories."

— PHYLLIS WILSON
PRESIDENT, MILITARY WOMEN'S MEMORIAL

to be awarded the Medal of Honor, Walker refused to return it when the honor was rescinded during a period of confusion about eligibility for the medal. Wilson notes that Walker wore the medal every day when she appeared on Capitol Hill in support of the suffrage movement and took it with her to her grave. President Carter reinstated her medal in 1977. “I think about these kinds of artifacts and imagine the stoicism, the tenacity of a woman who was certainly far ahead of her time, yet she knew she had the skills and the ability to serve her nation,” Wilson says.

In addition to its permanent displays, the memorial also hosts special exhibits. Currently featured is “The Color of Freedom,” an exhibit that honors diversity. A sampling of the exhibit is available online and educational resources are offered for download so that educators can integrate the information into their curricula.

The memorial also has collected nearly 2,000 oral histories and maintains a world-class research library. Wilson notes, “Many PhD students that are working on women’s studies and, in particular, a focus on military, tell us that 40–50 percent of the citations from their dissertation comes from our research library.” The recent COVID-19 lockdowns have given rise to nearly 20 self-published memoirs by female veterans, copies that can only be found with the writers’ families or in the memorial’s library.

Recently, the Military Women’s Memorial underwent a rebranding campaign, adding a new logo, redesigning the website, and offering online registration capabilities. The website allows users to sample the exhibits, helping visitors plan their in-person experience. Anyone can create an account to explore the registry or to submit information on their service or that of someone they know. The nonprofit WIMSA Foundation supports the memorial through fundraising and acquisition of grants. No direct federal monies support the memorial, although one-time congressional appropriations have helped in recent years with needed structural repairs.

REGISTRATION HAS ITS PERKS: EXCELSIOR PARTNERSHIP

The advantages of registering with the Military Women’s Memorial are many. By laying claim to a spot in history, a servicewoman’s story will be preserved and can be accessed by family, friends, or researchers. But not only are there benefits for posterity, but also for the registrants themselves. The Military Women’s Memorial and Excelsior College have formed a partnership, offering discounted tuition and fees to those who register their service. In addition to members, the partnership includes their spouses and significant others and memorial employees.

Wilson, a three-time Excelsior graduate, initiated the relationship. She recalls how the inspiration to pursue a partnership came to her. “For very special events here at the memorial, including our Color of Freedom exhibit, we pull out purple. And I’m an Excelsior grad, so I knew the color purple and I thought our staff here and certainly our members could benefit from a partnership with an educational opportunity.”

Wilson’s Excelsior roots run deep. She earned a BS in Liberal Arts in 1988, a BS in Nursing in 2010, and a Master of Public Administration in June 2021. To say that education is important to her would be an understatement—in addition to her Excelsior degrees, she has three associate degrees and a master’s degree in management.

A college credential is an important addition to a service-member’s resume, she asserts, especially when competing for a promotion. “It shows that you’re willing to work pretty doggone hard and probably give up a lot of additional family time to be a better soldier, a better servicemember. The military prizes people who take time for self-improvement, and higher education is a great way to demonstrate that you’re trying to be the best possible employee, whether in uniform or out of uniform.”

SISTERHOOD OF STORIES: CAMPAIGN SEEKS REGISTRANTS

The memorial has launched an ambitious campaign for 2021. With only 10 percent of eligible women currently included, plans are underway to obtain 100,000 new entries. The details that registrants add would further bring women’s military history alive and create a valuable resource for the future.

The stories maintained in the Military Women’s Memorial that Wilson share are both bitter and sweet, but it is important that all be preserved as a testament to those who served. Included in an exhibit are artifacts from Corporal Jessica Ellis, an Army medic twice deployed to Iraq. She was killed on Mother’s Day during her second tour when the vehicle she was riding in was hit by an EFP (explosively formed penetrator). On the other end of the spectrum is an account of a Vietnam War nurse, who excitedly opened a care package from home containing her favorite stateside treat—Twinkies. Unfortunately, the jungle environment led to the snack cake being infested with ants. Her ever-resourceful sisters in arms suggested she freeze the treat to dispel the ants, a story which the servicewoman included in the registry as one of her most memorable wartime experiences.

Wilson explains, “You totally connect with these women and their stories, and I thought that’s really what it’s about—that sisterhood.” ■

Dana Yanulavich is a freelance writer and former senior editor at Excelsior College.

LEARNING TO TRUST, TRUSTING TO LEARN

A woman in a purple graduation gown and cap stands on the palm of a large white hand. She is holding a purple book. The background is a bright blue sky with stylized white clouds. To the left, there is a stack of books in various colors (green, grey, red, teal, yellow). The hand she is standing on is wearing a dark blue sleeve with an orange cuff.

TRUST BETWEEN
STUDENTS AND
INSTRUCTORS IN THE
ONLINE CLASSROOM
BOOSTS LEARNERS'
CONFIDENCE,
PARTICIPATION, AND
OVERALL ACADEMIC
EXPERIENCE

BY LISA RAPPLE

Every instructor hopes to build a vibrant learning community in their online classroom where learners are successful in meeting their learning goals. One vital ingredient for such a learning community is trust among learners and trust in the instructor.

Risk and uncertainty are inherent in the online classroom environment. When learners trust their instructor, they are more willing to take risks and overcome uncertainty to contribute ideas and actively collaborate with confidence. They are also more willing to trust the instructor to guide the learning process as the knowledge expert. Research shows that when learners have a trusting relationship with the instructor, they are more cooperative, motivated, and enthusiastic; they welcome instructor feedback; and they help one another, all leading to a sense of community and satisfaction with their learning experience.

Little research has been done in the online classroom to understand the potential benefits of a particular form of trust known as “epistemic trust.” Epistemic trust exists in fiduciary relationships, those in which one person justifiably places confidence and trust in someone else and seeks that person’s help or advice in some matter. It is a special kind of trust akin to the relationship one has with their physician or financial advisor when making personal medical or financial high-risk decisions. The relationship between the online instructor and learner is also fiduciary in nature, and therefore warrants a closer examination. If the instructor can build an epistemic trust relationship with learners, the learners will trust in the instructor as the knowledge expert who can guide them in the learning process. They will trust that the instructor is acting in good faith for their best benefit and will feel confident that the instructor can guide them in their pursuit of new knowledge.

But online classrooms are made up of learners who are strangers to one another, and most times the instructor is a stranger as well. This, along with other barriers within the online space, makes relationship building a challenge. How, if at all, can the instructor build a relationship of trust with the learners within a timeframe of a few weeks? If the instructor successfully builds trusting relationships with the learners, can the instructor and learners achieve an epistemic trust relationship to fully realize the positive implications for online learners? These are the questions that I hoped to answer through an in-depth research study of online classrooms in the health sciences and nursing programs at Excelsior College.

To study the impact of epistemic trust in the online classroom, I questioned 800 learners in 48 fully online classrooms at Excelsior to measure their level of trust in their instructor. Additionally, the learners assessed interactions with their instructor and reported their observations of the instructor’s actions within the online classroom. Based on this

data, I selected several classrooms where the instructors had achieved a high level of epistemic trust with the learners. In these classrooms, I observed the activities and interactions of the instructor and learners, and conducted detailed interviews with the learners and faculty. The study found that the highly trusted instructors consistently adapted their behaviors in three critical areas: how they manage the classroom, how they communicate with learners, and how they are present in the online classroom.

Learners described progressing through several stages of trust, from an early decision to trust the instructor, to trusting that the instructor is fair and reliable, to feeling a personal connection with the instructor, to the final stage of trusting the instructor as the knowledge expert. Each progressive level of trust builds onto the next. These levels are labeled in scholarly literature as swift trust, competence trust, benevolence trust, and epistemic trust.

INSTRUCTOR INTERACTIONS BUILD EPISTEMIC TRUST

The initial research data revealed that, overall, the instructors at Excelsior College were able to build epistemic trust relationships with the learners in their online classrooms. On the Epistemic Trust Scale, with 42 being a perfect score, the average

The trusted instructors were highly active and enthusiastic early in the course, which opened the opportunity for learners to take the first steps toward deciding to trust their instructor.

LEVELS OF TRUST

We encounter various levels of trust in our everyday relationships with others. Each level of trust is distinct from the others. As interactions increase, trust can grow and move from one level to the next, building on another. However, only fiduciary-type relationships can become epistemic, where a person is willing to be guided by another person's expertise.

SWIFT TRUST

The mailperson who brings your mail (you don't know the mailperson well, but they were hired by an authority, and circumstances force you to decide to trust them until they give you cause to decide otherwise).

COMPETENCE-BASED TRUST

The daycare center where you leave your child or pet (you have regular interactions and conversations with staff, so you come to believe they are competent, fair, and reliable).

BENEVOLENCE-BASED TRUST

Your best friend or a family member (you can count on them to do what's best for you beyond their own needs or wants; they will "go the extra mile" for you).

EPISTEMIC TRUST

Your personal lawyer or doctor helping you make a legal or medical decision (to achieve this level of trust, you must already believe the expert is competent and looking out for your best interest; however, it also requires that you give over authority to that expert to guide you in something important that has personal consequences and risk). In the case of the online classroom, the learner is giving over epistemic authority to the instructor as the knowledge expert to guide them in their learning process.

for the 102 instructors was 37.99. The instructors showed a consistent method in how they manage the classrooms, communicate with learners, and present themselves regularly in the classroom. This speaks to the quality of expectations and guidance given to the instructors by the College. When comparing the epistemic trust scores with the classroom management style and the interpersonal communication style of these instructors, it was revealed that both caused a significant positive impact on the trust relationship. Responsiveness and consistent presence had a lesser positive impact on the trust relationship.

Once the importance of the instructors' actions in building epistemic trust was established, the inquiry then focused on these questions: How did these highly trusted online instructors build an epistemic trust relationship with their learners? How did the learners describe their learning experience with their trusted faculty?

From the research interviews and classroom observations, I was able to construct a trajectory of the learners' trusting responses to actions by the instructor that cumulatively led to an epistemic trust relationship. The actions that built trust began at the start of the courses. The trusted instructors were highly active and enthusiastic early in the course, which opened the opportunity for learners to take the first steps toward deciding to trust their instructor. (Swift trust)

The learners explained that early interactions with the instructor made an impact. Learners commented on their experiences, saying "The instructor's initial communications to the class influenced my trust," "The first few weeks lay the groundwork for a working relationship," and "My instructor was very welcoming from the first day." The instructor's demeanor also made a difference, as indicated by a student saying, "I wanted to participate because [the] instructor was excited about teaching the course material."

IMPORTANCE OF RESPONSIVENESS AND CONSISTENCY

As the course continued, learners gauged the instructor's presence in the classroom not by frequency or extent of time in the online classroom, but by the instructor's immediate responsiveness to inquiries and the instructor's transparency about their activities and interactions in the classroom, such as when things would be graded and being consistent in their participation in discussions or projects. Through these actions, the learners believed the instructor to be available. Learners said the instructors were "quick with responses, timely, prompt to address questions and concerns." One learner explained, "My professor kept his word and stayed consistent with grading and expectations. This added to the trust."

One instructor stressed the importance of creating a presence: "My feeling is, they don't see you face-to-face, and they

One of the ways that instructors made personal connections with the learners was by sharing personal and professional stories, and giving examples from their own life experiences, particularly during collaborative activities such as classroom discussions.

don't hear your voice. So, you just must be as strong of a presence as possible in the classroom. That really helps them connect to you and perhaps be invested more. They know someone's out there paying attention to what they are doing." The learners also said repeatedly that they believed the instructors to be fair and consistent in "word and deed." (Competence trust)

IMPORTANCE OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION

One of the ways that instructors made personal connections with the learners was by sharing personal and professional stories, and giving examples from their own life experiences, particularly during collaborative activities such as classroom discussions. The instructors were viewed by the learners as mentors and role models. The instructors were helpful with both technical and content issues. They gave constructive praise and caring messages to individual learners to encourage their participation. Most importantly, they provided one-on-one assistance to struggling learners. Through all these actions

by the instructor, the learner came to believe the instructor cared about their individual success. (Benevolence trust) "My professor believed in everyone no matter their strengths and weaknesses," said one student. Another learner commented, "My professor sent me personal messages of encouragement when I seemed to be struggling."

IMPORTANCE OF CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT

The most impactful influencer for building trust was the instructors' classroom management style, which was more formal and structured. This strengthened the trust relationship and reinforced the learners' belief that the instructor is reliable and cares about their success. Classroom management included managing classroom conduct, aiding learners to meet deadlines, and encouraging learners who struggle with deadlines. Learners explained, "The instructor promoted an environment of collegiality among the class" and "The professor was excellent with communication and keeping us up-to-date."

The instructors also provided guidance to improve quality of work and guided learners to think more deeply on complex topics. This served to move collaborative discussions to more sophisticated levels. One instructor explained it this way: "I'm trying to help learners transform their thinking, to really use those analytical skills." The learners believed the instructors offered ideas that furthered their knowledge and improved their learning experience. They described it as "the instructor turned on the light bulb" and "the professor was good at stretching my mind." Another learner explained, "It is extremely important to have trust in your professor that you are getting the tools and information you need to be successful." (Epistemic trust)

This study showed that the instructors who are best at building epistemic trust relationships with learners adapted their actions in the classroom in three distinct ways: their communication was personable and engaging, their classroom management was structured and deliberate, and their classroom presence was responsive and consistent. In response to the trusting relationship with their instructor, the adult learners trusted the instructors for their intellectual value and content expertise. And as a result, the trusted instructors expertly guided them through the learning process to a successful learning experience and outcome. This research opens the door to more investigations of how trusting relationships improve the learning experience and support the success of online learners. ■

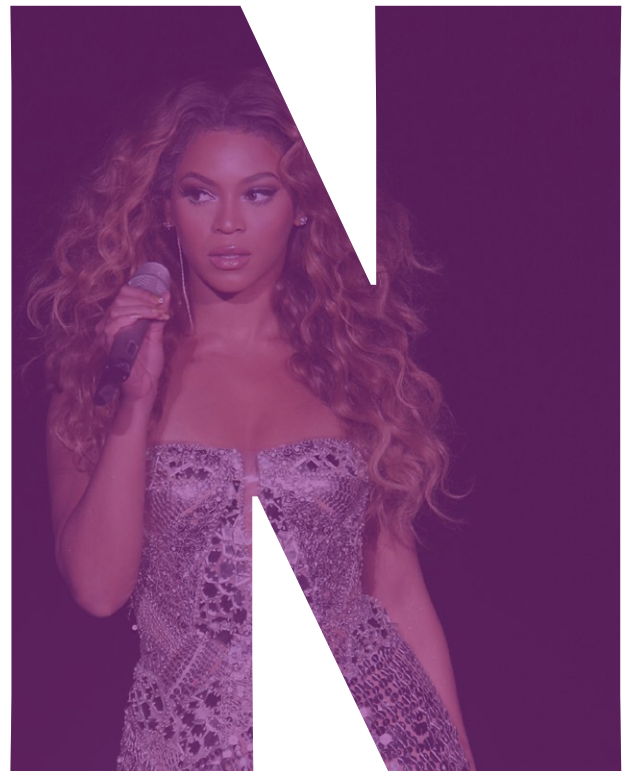
Lisa Rapple is the faculty program director for health sciences programs in the School of Undergraduate Studies at Excelsior College. She recently earned her PhD in Curriculum and Instructional Design from the University at Albany. She researched the impact of epistemic trust in the online classroom for her dissertation titled "Epistemic Trust in Online Higher Education: A Mixed Method Phenomenological Research Study." The dissertation can be read in its entirety at Proquest.com by using search words epistemic trust + rapple.



AS EXCELSIOR COLLEGE CELEBRATES 50 YEARS OF HELPING ADULT STUDENTS ACCOMPLISH THEIR EDUCATIONAL GOALS, LET'S TRAVEL BACK IN TIME TO COMPARE LIFE IN 1971 VERSUS IN 2021

BY JENNA KERWIN

In 1971, Nixon was president and the Vietnam War was in its 16th year. It was also the year the New York State Board of Regents founded the Regents External Degree Program, what we know today as Excelsior College. The Regents External Degree Program changed the landscape of higher education with its innovative approach to enabling students earn degrees through credit aggregation and exam completion. In the 50 years since, Excelsior has continued its generous credit acceptance policies, awarding of credit, and exam options; added fully online degree and certificate programs; and recently began offering professional skills training. Excelsior's focus on providing educational opportunities hasn't changed over time, but many other things have!



AVERAGE HOURLY EARNINGS

1971 \$7.10

2021 \$29.81



vs.



**COST OF RAISING A CHILD
TO 18 YEARS OLD**

1971 \$80–\$150,000

2021 Upward to \$245,000

**AVERAGE
GASOLINE PRICE**

1971 \$0.33

2021 \$2.44



AVERAGE PRICE OF A MOVIE TICKET

1971 \$1.65
2021 \$9.26

AVERAGE ANNUAL COST OF PRIVATE COLLEGE UNDERGRADUATE TUITION

1971 \$2,930
2021 \$35,801
At Excelsior: \$12,240

MOST POPULAR BACHELOR'S DEGREE

1971 Education
2021 Business

STARBUCKS LOCATIONS WORLDWIDE

1971
1
First founded in Washington

2021
32,000+
Locations in 83 countries



MOST POPULAR CARS

1971

Chrysler New Yorker, Lincoln Continental, and Ford Thunderbird

2021

Expected to be Kia Seltos, Toyota RAV4, and Lexus IS

HIGHEST PAYING JOBS

1971 Physicians and surgeons at \$25,000 per year, followed by managers and administrators at \$12,597 per year

2021 Physicians and surgeons at \$208,000 per year, followed by IT jobs like big data engineers at \$159,135 per year and information systems security managers at \$149,454 per year



2021

1971





1971

The Baltimore Colts beat the Dallas Cowboys 16–13 in Super Bowl V

2021

The Tampa Bay Buccaneers beat the Kansas City Chiefs 31–9 in Super Bowl LV




PER CAPITA INCOME

| | |
|-------------|----------|
| 1971 | \$4,491 |
| 2021 | \$54,200 |

ADULTS WITH A BACHELOR'S DEGREE

| | |
|-------------|--------|
| 1971 | 11.4 % |
| 2021 | 36 % |






STRESS RELIEVER:
Painting



REASON FOR MBA:
To rebuild her HR career after moving from India to the United States



VOLUNTEER TIME:
Board Member of Utsab Inc.
Medical Reserve Corps in Schenectady and Albany Counties



KRIS OUA

LOPA CHAKRABORTY Navigates the Changing Role of HR

The COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting impact on the workplace brought challenges to all levels of an organization. As an HR professional, Lopa Chakraborty addresses those challenges directly as a partner to the leadership team and a coach in decision making.

Chakraborty, the human resources manager at the University Center for Academic and Workforce Development within the Research Foundation for the State University of New York, has been working in HR for more than 15 years. In her current role, her responsibilities include recruitment, performance management, learning and development, and employee relations.

She is also an interpreter of regulations, seeker of information, booster of employee morale, and proponent of employee engagement.

“There are so many little things we need to think about, so that’s what makes being in charge of implementing policies and procedures so interesting,” says Chakraborty, of Niskayuna, New York. A planner by nature and by necessity in her career, she has to think of every possible scenario before the

implementation of a policy, procedure, or decision that affects the workforce.

Except that now, in a world with COVID-19, regulations and guidance change quickly, which makes it difficult to plan for how to do things. Her mantra these days is “Don’t get too comfortable with change because as soon as you get comfortable, it will change again.”

To navigate these changes, she leans on the skills she acquired while earning an MBA from Excelsior College in 2018. “An MBA is not only a degree,” says Chakraborty. “It’s like a tool kit or toolbox; it has the different tools you need.” For example, she draws on her knowledge and experience with operations management. “If a manager comes to you asking for help, how can you frame [the guidance] in a way that makes sense in a data-driven way?”

Chakraborty joined the Research Foundation as an HR specialist in 2018, and she was recently promoted to HR manager, which is her current position. The MBA, she says, has opened doors to career growth. Formerly a lead recruiter for Excelsior College, Chakraborty pursued and earned her MBA while working for the College.

The MBA gives her confidence that she leans on when she is involved in decision making. “It just helps you make your case stronger,” she says. “You are not just saying it—you have read about it, researched it, you know what you are talking about.”

She also has the self-awareness and confidence to know she is learning every day. For more than a year, Chakraborty has been helping people adjust to and thrive at working from home while she too was working from her home office—with a spouse also working at home and a son spending some of his first year of college learning from home. She has addressed challenges that come with working remotely, including maintaining employee morale and engagement.

In thinking back on what she and others have gone through during the pandemic, Chakraborty says what she has learned is patience. She has also learned to temper expectations for the future. “If the last year has taught us anything, it’s to not look too far ahead.” Still, she can and does make plans, such as for helping colleagues transition back to the workplace. She just makes sure those plans come with a contingency plan. ■ —M.S.



FIRST CAREER:
Restaurant industry



FAVORITE PART ABOUT EXCELSIOR:
Interacting with peers on discussion boards



PERSONAL INTERESTS:
“The Walking Dead” television show
and “Star Wars”

MIKE HEMBERGER



STEVEN COREY

Moves from Entry-Level to Nursing Leadership

Nursing was not at the forefront of Steven Corey’s mind when he began looking for a career. It wasn’t until the Scotia, New York, native got a job as a patient care technician with Albany Medical Center in 2007 that he realized he wanted to stay in the world of health care.

He earned his associate degree in nursing from Maria College a year later, in 2008. After a few years in trauma nursing, Corey was promoted to a patient care coordinator. This new clinical leadership role carried a lot of responsibility, but Corey was ready for it. “I loved the work. Being a leader in a department full of incredible talent inspired me,” he says.

By 2013, Corey had been covering night shifts in the Emergency Department for some time and was ready to apply for the position of nightshift assistant nurse manager. As it turned out, he was declined for the role due to lack of education. Corey then learned of Albany Medical Center’s partnership with Excelsior College and decided to take the plunge into online learning so he could advance his career. “The process of enrollment and setting up a course schedule

was surprisingly easy. So, I jumped right in. Excelsior offered eight-week courses, which allowed me to expedite my effort,” he says and adds that working with his Excelsior academic advisor and the education team at Albany Medical Center was a smooth process.

It didn’t take long for Corey to master navigating Excelsior’s online courses. In less than a year after enrolling, Corey earned a Bachelor of Science in Nursing in 2014 and decided to pursue a master’s degree with Excelsior. He earned a Master of Science in Nursing Leadership and Administration of Health Care Systems in 2017 and soon found himself on a path to nursing leadership.

After earning a master’s degree, Corey first became a nurse manager for the medical ICU and, as he puts it, he “had a blast.” He enjoyed his relationships with his coworkers and spent a little under two years gaining experience as a manager and doing administrative work. In January 2019, the chief nursing officer asked Corey to return to the Emergency Department to become the interim assistant vice president of emergency services, trauma, and mental health. He was appointed to the position in October 2019.

As an assistant vice president, Corey has a challenging job. Problems are on a larger scale, he says, noting that looking after several different units, instead of just one, makes things more complicated. It’s also what makes things so interesting. “It [a problem that arises] changes the thinking a little bit, it changes the strategy a little bit, and it challenges you to research and learn every single day... And whether it’s budget-related, policy-related, or regulation-related, I’m learning something new every day,” says Corey. He also points out that his job involves a lot of self-discovery, saying he learns about himself and his capabilities with each new opportunity.

Corey says being in leadership has caused him to be a better mentor to the nurses and nursing leaders. “It’s about building the next group of leaders and promoting your team,” he says. The changing times of health care make it an exciting time to be on a nursing team, making on-the-spot decisions and trying to problem-solve issues not previously encountered. “It’s just a cool place to be,” says Corey. ■ – J.K.



“Keeping a Tradition Alive” by Len Tantillo, 2011, Oil on Canvas, Collection of Excelsior College, 24 x 40 in.

HONORING THE PAST, CELEBRATING THE PRESENT

In honor of Excelsior College's 40th anniversary in 2011, Excelsior President John F. Ebersole commissioned artist Len Tantillo to create a commemorative work. The painting, “Keeping a Tradition Alive,” shows traveling educators in the 19th century, an historical nod to how Excelsior College brings educational opportunities to students. The painting pays homage to those who pursue learning as well as to those who provide the education. Tantillo's research on the lyceum movement, an early form of organized adult education in the United States, influenced his concept and led to a direct connection with Excelsior as an online institution. When asked what he hoped people would take away from his work, Tantillo said: “The idea, at the most ground level, that people's desire to learn is universal and timeless. If the desire is strong enough, you'll make time to do it.” ■ – M.S.

To view Len Tantillo talking about his creative process for this painting, visit Excelsior College on Facebook.



50

YEARS

In honor of our 50th anniversary, we are committed to **nearly doubling our support for students with financial need.** We are halfway through our two-year campaign to raise \$750,000.

JOIN ELEVATE: THE CAMPAIGN FOR STUDENT SCHOLARSHIPS

EXCELSIOR.EDU / ELEVATE

ELEVATE@EXCELSIOR.EDU



“As the College celebrates this 50th anniversary milestone, we are reaching forward, redefining, and continuing to find ways to best support student success. We are also reflecting on our roots and encourage each of you to do the same. As you move forward, draw from your inner strength and success here at Excelsior.”

—PRESIDENT DAVID SCHEJBAL
FROM PRESIDENT’S ADDRESS AT COMMENCEMENT 2021