

EXCELSIOR



The duality of drones:
higher ed looks beyond the
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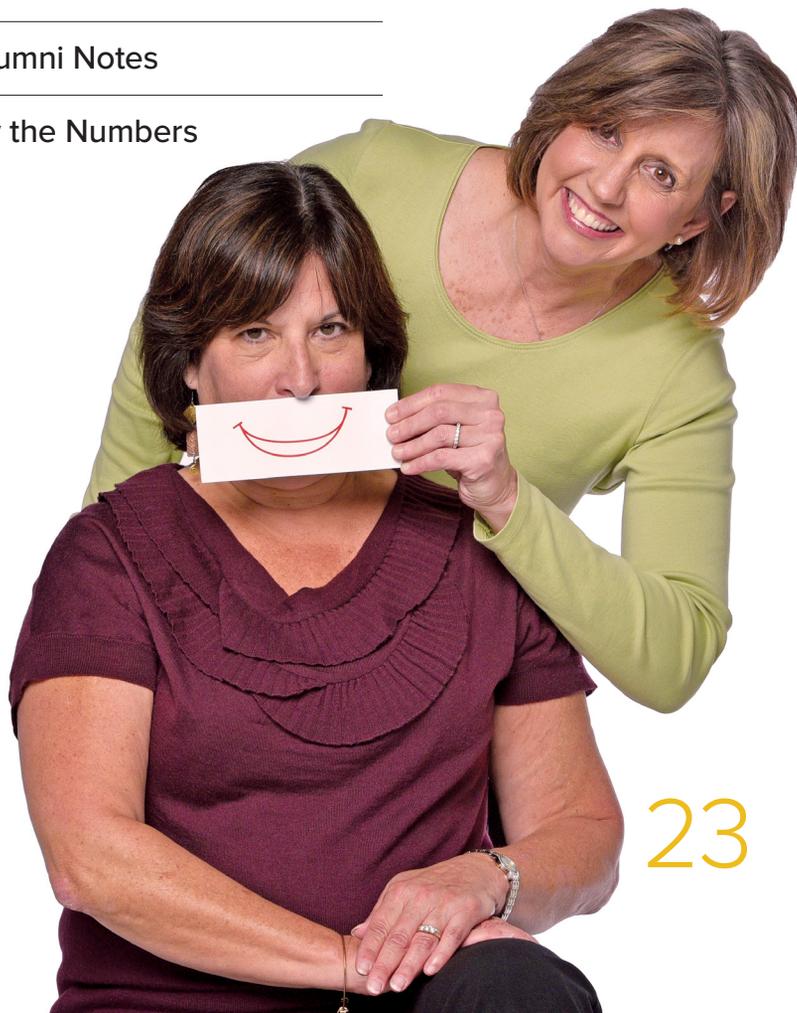
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EXCELSIOR

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WWW.EXCELSIOR.EDU/MAGAZINE

ON THE COVER: Drones may become increasingly more common. What role can education play in policy, technology, and implementation?



An Enduring Impact

Since I became president of Excelsior College, more than 50,000 students have earned degrees from our institution. I have a chance to meet many of our newest alumni each July, when hundreds gather in Albany, New York, for Commencement. Education's transformative power is never expressed more clearly than through the smile on a graduate's face as they march across the stage, waving to a spouse, child, or loved one in the crowd.

One graduate has left a more lasting impression, though, than Ron Miller. Now Ron isn't like most graduates. When he graduated at 46 in December 2013 with an associate degree in liberal arts, he made no plans to attend graduation. And that's because Ron is paralyzed from the nose down as a result of Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), Lou Gehrig's disease, making travel impossible.

In a nursing home since 2005, Ron communicates through eye-gaze technology, which allows him to type messages on a computer monitor via eye movement alone. It was through this remarkable equipment that he was able to complete his degree requirements.

Two years ago, I and other College staff and trustees traveled to Ron's bedside to present his Excelsior diploma. His achievement was celebrated by friends, family, and staff. Ron's congressman offered a keynote address. It ended as a day none of us would ever forget.

Soon after, Ron re-enrolled to pursue his bachelor's degree.

Alas, ALS is a cruel disease. Ron's eyesight is deteriorating, presenting an additional obstacle to degree completion.

When I spoke with Ron in January he assured me he remains undeterred and will press on. He also thanked the College for the support he's received and noted how important it is to understand the needs of all learners.

Now this is something I take to heart. For 45 years, Excelsior has enabled student success by putting students first, by breaking down barriers and allowing—inspiring—our students to realize their full potential.

In this spirit, I'm proud to announce the Ron Miller Nursing Scholarship Endowment Fund for students in the associate degree in nursing program. These are among our neediest students, many of whom are struggling to make ends meet while pursuing the noblest of professions, as Ron can attest.

The first gift to this fund was given by the chair of our Board of Trustees, retired Brig. Gen. Jerry Neff and his wife, Judy. I gave soon after. I encourage you, too, to support this fund. Learn more by visiting RonMiller.excelsior.edu. Together we can make a difference not only in Ron's life but in many others as well.

Ever upward,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John F. Ebersole". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "J" and "E".

JOHN F. EBERSOLE, LPD
PRESIDENT



KRIS QUA

College Receives \$2.9 Million Grant to Assess Student Readiness Skills

If you knew the indicators of college success, wouldn't you want to find out whether students had these strengths, and if not, help them to further develop them? That's exactly what staff at Excelsior are doing, backed by a \$2.9 million grant to assess student skills and target resources and services where they will help students the most.

The grant from the U.S. Department of Education's Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education's First in the World (FITW) Program will be used to develop the Diagnostic Assessment and Achievement of College Skills (DAACS) tool, an open-source assessment for colleges and universities. The grant is the largest award in Excelsior's history. Excelsior was among 300 institutions that applied for grants from the FIPSE program, and one of the 17 institutions that received awards.

The idea for DAACS grew out of early discussions several years ago about promoting student success and has become part of the College's strategic push to increase student

success, retention, and persistence. It's known that the sooner students earn college credits, the more successful they will be, according to Jason Bryer, the project director. By using DAACS, Excelsior will assess the reading, writing, and math skills of incoming students as well as non-academic factors that affect student success, such as academic self-regulation, grit, math anxiety, and test anxiety. Assessments of both academic and non-academic skills provide students with a more complete picture of their abilities and give institutions a starting point for offering support tailored to students' needs.

"DAACS will evaluate the skills of incoming students to inform them and the institution of their readiness for college-level work," says Bryer. "With these data, DAACS will substantially increase the efficacy of our predictive models, allowing Excelsior—and eventually all institutions—to more accurately identify at-risk students and provide targeted outreach."

At Excelsior, detailed data will inform academic advisement and be integrated into

"With these data, DAACS will substantially increase the efficacy of our predictive models..."

—Jason Bryer, project director

the predictive analytics within the Student Success Center (see page 5). Excelsior will use some of the funding to add a reading comprehension section to the Online Writing Lab and enhance the Student Online Success Guide, a student readiness website offering learning resources, self-assessment tools, and study strategies.

Excelsior is partnering with Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, and the University at Albany on the development of DAACS. Upon the tool's completion, Excelsior and Western Governors University will pilot studies on its effectiveness. At the end of the two-year period of development and piloting, DAACS will be freely available for use by any individual or institution. ■



College Delivers Pizza Hut Education Partnership

Excelsior has partnered with Pizza Hut, the world’s largest pizza company, to offer continuing education opportunities to its employees and their immediate family members. In addition to reduced tuition and fees for all Pizza Hut employees, the Life Unboxed EDU program awards college credits for on-the-job management-level training courses (up to 69 credit hours for area coaches and up to 53 credit hours for restaurant general managers) toward a degree program.

Ninety-nine Pizza Hut employees are enrolled in the program, and over 70 more

▲ In a promotional video for LifeUnboxed EDU, Pizza Hut CEO David Gibbs discusses how employees can unlock their potential through education.

are in the application process. The pizza giant operates more than 15,600 restaurants in over 90 countries and employs 300,000 people.

The College has more than 100 corporate and association partnerships that offer educational opportunities to employees. More information about the Life Unboxed EDU program with Pizza Hut is available at lifeunboxed.excelsior.edu. ■

OWL Continues to Soar with Writing Module

Excelsior College recently completed development of a module on argumentative writing for the Online Writing Lab. Results from a follow-up study conducted during the spring 2015 semester showed that students who used the OWL’s new Argument & Critical Thinking section improved their writing skills. Funded by Excelsior’s receipt of a \$449,439 one-year grant from the Higher Education Services Corporation (HESC) in fall 2014, the work helped integrate the expanded OWL into introductory English courses at Excelsior, Monroe Community College, Onondaga Community College, and Queensborough Community College.

The OWL, initially funded by a \$639,000 grant from The Kresge Foundation, is a highly interactive, media-rich website designed to help first-year students or adult learners returning to school make the transition to college-level writing. The freely available resource continues to garner awards, including an Effective Practice Award from the Online Learning Consortium in October 2015. ■

For more news on the OWL, see page 5 and page 32.



NYQUIST LEADERSHIP SERIES ON “THE REAL COSTS OF CYBER IGNORANCE”

Panelists discussed the critical need to go beyond awareness training to ensure employees understand the value and importance of data assets. Jane LeClair, COO of the National Cybersecurity Institute at Excelsior College (right), hosted the panel. Participants (left to right) Andrew Hurd, faculty program director for cybersecurity at Excelsior College, Deborah A. Snyder, deputy chief information security officer within the New York State Office of Technology Services, and Don Wheatley, information technology director for information security and quality assurance for Price Chopper/Market 32, talked about cyber challenges in the areas of education, government, and business. Video from the February event and the first panel discussion on ethics in leadership can be viewed at news.excelsior.edu.

PHOTO: MIKE HEMBERGER

“For Excelsior students, the stakes are very high. The dream of a college education has very real implications for their lives, for their families, and for their communities.” —Glenn Braddock

Student Success Center Focuses on Personal Support

Excelsior launched a Student Success Center in December 2015 that houses a team of academic coaches and student services experts to provide proactive and holistic support for newly enrolled and at-risk students. Academic coaches support students to overcome academic and non-academic challenges, including time management, managing multiple commitments, study skills, facing personal obstacles, and navigation of learning resources. Proactive predictive models and watch lists are used to identify at-risk students, target intervention, and to better understand the factors influencing student success and attrition. The combination of increased early engagement, more effective support for vulnerable students, and the enhancement of advising services for all students promises increased persistence, retention, credit accumulation, and degree completion.

In developing the Student Success Center, the College has partnered with InsideTrack, a company that specializes in coaching, analytics, consulting, and technology to create success platforms for students. InsideTrack will guide the center's implementation of people, processes, and technology to effectively serve Excelsior students.

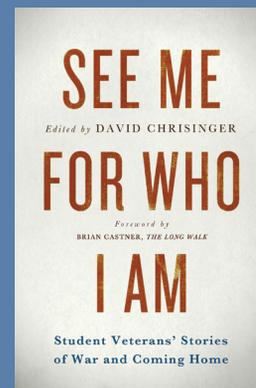
“For Excelsior students, the stakes are very high. The dream of a college education has very real implications for their lives, for their families, and for their communities. But they're adult students, they're working, and they have many pressing responsibilities and they're often trying to meet some very difficult challenges,” says Glenn Braddock, executive director of the center. “The Student Success Center employs success coaching, data analytics, and new technology to help our students meet those challenges, complete their degrees, and improve their lives.” ■

Walsh Wins Award for Online Excellence

Darren Walsh, assistant vice president for the Center for Online Education, Learning, and Academic Services, was recognized with an online learning excellence award by Pearson, an education publishing and assessment service, at its 16th annual Cite Online Learning Conference in February. Walsh was credited for his roles as technical developer and administrator of the Excelsior College OWL.

“Under his leadership, the EC OWL is highly innovative, offering the first-of-its-kind writing support in an open-source environment, one that is designed to respond to the writing crisis in the United States,” noted the award citation. As part of Walsh's Excellence in Online Teaching recognition, Pearson will donate \$1,500 to a scholarship fund of his choice. ■

NEW ON THE BOOKSHELF



In “See Me for Who I Am,” the latest book published by Hudson Whitman/Excelsior College Press, 20 veterans share essays they wrote as students at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point. The students were enrolled in a seminar, Back from the Front: Transitioning from the Military to Civilian Life, designed for veterans entering college. Edited by David Chrisinger, the leader of the seminar, the book aims to facilitate understanding of servicemembers' experiences.

Telling stories can help bridge the gap of understanding that exists between civilians and servicemembers, says Sue Petrie, director of Hudson Whitman/Excelsior College Press. An essay by Geoffrey Norfleet, a veteran who served not only in Afghanistan but also in European countries, highlights this challenge: “I am a walking Discovery Channel with a military background... I got to see the world and have lots of amazing adventures. In fact, I have more stories to tell about each of the countries in Europe I visited than I do about my deployment to Afghanistan. ...I have so much knowledge to spread, but when most civilians find out I served overseas, the only thing they want to know about me is whether I ever killed anyone. Do you know what it feels like to get asked a question like that?”

As a collection of stories written from the perspective of veterans who are students, “See Me for Who I Am” gives readers insight that isn't necessarily presented in the media. “If you don't know people who have served in the military, but are curious to understand the hows and whys, it's a very honest introduction,” says Petrie. “Student veterans can feel misunderstood by civilian peers. This book is a good way to balance understanding in the classroom.”

Hudson Whitman/Excelsior College Press acquires nonfiction works in areas of alternative education, cybersecurity, health, and military. More information can be found at hudsonwhitman.com.



Task Force Takes Aim at Writing Improvements

A Writing Across the Curriculum (WAC) Task Force is hard at work developing guidelines to implement college-wide writing standards, the resources needed, faculty training needs, and the evaluation of writing. Led by Joseph Bocchi, faculty program director for writing in the School of Liberal Arts, the task force is addressing a goal set forth in the College's strategic plan, and will present its proposal by the end of the academic year in June.

The task force seeks to develop a plan to systematically improve writing skills and prepare students to write within their chosen

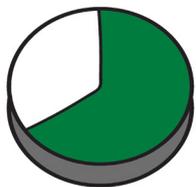
professions. Writing is a highly sought-after skill in the professions as identified by many studies. For example, the National Association of Colleges and Employers "Job Outlook 2015" survey shows 73.4 percent of respondents chose written communication skills as the third most-asked-for attribute after leadership and ability to work on a team. A 2015 study commissioned by the Association of American Colleges & Universities shows that while 65 percent of graduates saw themselves as prepared in written communication, only 27 percent of employers said they actually were.

"In our environment, students have to use language, whether it's in a discussion post, messages within classes, or formal assignments, or drafting—they have to engage with the language," Bocchi explains. Taking this important skill further, the task force seeks to integrate writing to learn into the curriculum. Writing to learn relies on writing processes (pre-writing, drafting, revision, and editing), involves peer and faculty feedback, and includes a range of informal/low-stakes (non-graded or low-graded) and formal/high-stakes (graded) writing. It links course outcomes to module and assignment

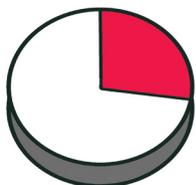
The task force seeks to develop a plan to systematically improve writing skills and prepare students to write within their chosen professions.

outcomes in an effort to build knowledge and skills incrementally. The task force will also seek to add writing in the disciplines guidelines that prepare students to write in a style appropriate to their professional field, be it nursing, liberal arts, or business.

Guiding the task force's efforts is the Written Communication VALUE (Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education) rubric, developed by the Association of American Colleges & Universities. VALUE rubrics are scoring guides that provide needed tools to assess students' own authentic work, produced across their diverse general education and program learning, to determine whether and how well students are meeting graduation-level achievement in learning outcomes that both employers and faculty consider essential. ■



65% of graduates saw themselves as prepared in written communication



27% percent of employers said graduates were prepared in written communication

EBERSOLE ENTERS IACE HALL OF FAME

John Ebersole, president of Excelsior College, was inducted into the International Adult and Continuing Education (IACE) Hall of Fame in November 2015. The Hall of Fame honors leaders in the fields of continuing education and adult learning. Ebersole joined 24 others, representing 10 countries, in the most recent class of inductees.

In announcing Ebersole's selection, the IACE recognized him as an international leader in prior learning assessment, degree completion, and the use of instructional technology, as well as a passionate advocate on behalf of adult and online learners.

"Given the prominence of those in this year's class, as well as that of past recipients, I must admit that I was humbled—and truly honored—when told of my induction," said Ebersole. "Having earned my first two degrees while in the Coast Guard, I learned early on the challenges facing adult learners. Those personal experiences continue to inform my approach to post-traditional education."

In 2014, Ebersole was inducted into the United States Distance Learning Association Hall of Fame. ■



▲ John Ebersole (center) is shown at the IACE Hall of Fame induction with past honorees Clinton L. Anderson (2000), a proponent of military continuing education, and L. Dian Stoskopf (2002), a leader in the Department of Defense Voluntary Education Program.

Now at Excelsior Life

For more news, go to excelsior.edu/excelsiorlife

COMMENTARY → BRINGING ALTERNATE REALITY GAMES TO ONLINE LEARNING

David Seelow, founding director, Center for Game and Simulation-based Learning, takes readers inside Secrets: A Cyberculture Mystery Game, a new course that is among the first fully online courses designed as an Alternate Reality Game (ARG).

arg.excelsior.edu



WATCH → PERSONALIZED STUDENT SUPPORT



In Excelsior LIVE, a new video interview series, Glenn Braddock, executive director of the Student Success Center, discusses the need for more personalized student support in higher education. sslive.excelsior.edu

PODCAST → CYBERSECURITY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT



Andrew Hurd, faculty program director for cybersecurity, discusses why so many employers are struggling to both build an educated and adaptable cyber workforce and create an informed cyber culture.

hurdpodcast.excelsior.edu

READ → IDENTITY STARTS FROM WITHIN



A transgender Excelsior employee offers advice on staying true to yourself.

identity.excelsior.edu

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Capping It Off

STUDENTS FOLLOW CAPSTONE WITH CONFERENCE POSTER PRESENTATIONS

By Dana Yanulavich

A group of students and their professor from Excelsior’s Master of Science in Nursing program are taking their show on the road. The results of their intensive and highly collaborative capstone course have been accepted for poster presentations at two national conferences and one regional event—the American Association of Colleges of Nursing’s Master’s Education Conference in Houston, Texas; the New York League for Nursing annual meeting in Saratoga Springs, New York; and the Nursing Education Research Conference in Washington, DC.

Poster presentations are opportunities for researchers to present their work at academic, scholarly, and professional conferences. Here the authors can field questions

and exchange ideas on the topic with conference attendees. It’s most often a competitive opportunity, whereby the presenters need to submit their poster idea in advance for peer review and selection from a pool of hopefuls. The students researched potential conferences for poster submissions and worked with their instructor to create the proposals and abstracts.

Led by faculty member Robin Dewald, the students revised two Excelsior courses—NUR 655 Curriculum and Program Planning and NUR 660 Evaluation and Assessment in Nursing Education—as part of the capstone curriculum. “They want to share it [their work] with the world,” explains Dewald. “These presentations are their idea.”

Working on a master’s degree in nursing education, Lori Gofter, Marie Anne Mancuso,

The capstone provided the real-world experience and close faculty interaction that is the hallmark of graduate work.

▼ Robin Dewald (left), a faculty member in the Master of Science in Nursing program, and students Andrew Palm and Lori Gofter attended the New York League for Nursing annual meeting in March. In April, they will be joined by team members Marie Anne Mancuso and Maureen Sileo when all are expected to present their poster at the Nursing Education Research Conference, sponsored by the National League for Nursing and Sigma Theta Tau International.



DAVE BENNETT

Andrew Palm, and Maureen Sileo found the course revision assignment a worthwhile challenge.

“It was priceless,” Sileo recounts of her capstone experience. “We are learning to be nurse educators and we took courses on curriculum design and evaluation, but to actually redesign a course was a tremendous undertaking,” says Sileo, a staff nurse in the emergency room at St. Charles Hospital in Port Jefferson, New York, and a faculty member at Molloy College.

The project, explains Palm, was an immersion into using the knowledge gained during the master’s program to redesign a course, improving it for future graduate students. A public health nurse for the Cortland County Health Department in Cortland, New York, he also teaches part-time at Tompkins Cortland Community College. “My capstone has been a valuable personal lesson in recognizing and responding to opportunity. I’ve learned that very effective groups can be created over distance,” offers Palm.

The capstone provided the real-world experience and close faculty interaction that is the hallmark of graduate work. “The project was relevant to my career and educational goals, because in the future, I would like to work in distance education and with online course redesign,” says Mancuso, who’s enrolled in a psychiatric mental health nurse practitioner program. “Gaining experience in something I would like to do in the future was a major blessing.”

Gofter, a Clinical Nurse IV (Education Track) at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center in New York City, is already applying in the workplace what she learned in the program. “I actually developed a competency-based course [IV insertion skills] that’s been implemented in some departments. The nurses have provided positive feedback and appreciate this educational opportunity,” she says.

One of the greatest challenges faced by the capstone classmates was coordinating their schedules. Even though the four students from various parts of New York state were more than 1,400 miles away

from their Florida-based instructor, they met weekly online using Adobe Connect. While their collaboration and many weeks spent working together has brought them close together, the February conference in Houston was the first time they had the opportunity to meet in person, with three of the four students making the trek to Texas.

“We’ve seen each other face-to-face, because we’ve used Adobe, so I’ll recognize them, but only from the waist up,” Dewald quips. “They’re going to be surprised to see how short I am.”

“She may be short, but she’s tall in my mind,” counters Sileo. A sentiment echoed by her classmates. Gofter applauds the tremendous support Dewald gave her students, and says, “I want to pay that back; I want to be able to give at least half of what Robin has given to us.”

As the four worked through the capstone, they learned the importance of mentorship, teamwork, and communication. Respect for one another and their instructor supported their work, and created the framework for continued professional collaboration.

Three of the four classmates have another attribute in common—they’re repeat Excelsior alumni. Sileo earned an associate degree in nursing in 1997, Palm has an associate degree in business (1991) and a bachelor’s in nursing (2013) to his credit, and Mancuso also completed her bachelor’s degree in 2014 at the College. Palm says, “All around, Excelsior College has provided a very efficient and effective learning experience for me with each degree.” Lifelong learners, three of the four are already pursuing other educational opportunities—Palm’s working on a Graduate Certificate in Public Health, and both Mancuso and Sileo are enrolled in PhD programs. “I love learning; it’s not a means to an end,” says Sileo, adding “when you stop learning, you’re dead!”

Gofter admits that the capstone was the most difficult course she ever took, but also the most memorable—something the graduates will take with them throughout their careers. ■

New Programs Prepare Students for the Workplace

The College recently added new degree programs.

The School of Health Sciences introduced a Bachelor of Science in Public Health program for those interested in protecting and promoting the health of populations. The curriculum introduces students to the five public health disciplines—behavioral health/health education, epidemiology, statistics, health services administration, and environmental health—and prepares them to address challenges to population health.

The school also offers a dual degree program, Bachelor of Science in Health Sciences to Master of Science in Health Sciences. Students can develop the managerial knowledge and skills critical to meeting the business demands of the health care industry. During the graduate course component, students can specialize in health professions education, public health, or health care informatics, or choose a no specialization option.

The School of Public Service introduced the Bachelor of Science in National Security program, designed to prepare students for employment and advancement in national security-related fields. The interdisciplinary program offers concentrations in military leadership, intelligence and security analysis, diplomacy/international relations, cybersecurity, and topics in national security.

The school also added an Associate in Science in Criminal Justice program. It integrates the theories, history, and legal and ethical issues typically covered in the study of crime and the criminal justice system. Completing an associate degree program in this field enables graduates to work at agencies that require 60 college credits to begin work.

For more information on academic offerings, visit www.excelsior.edu.



▲ Jennifer Gentry, AS '04, BS '11, MS '15
PHOTO COURTESY OF KIM HEDLEY

A Shot in the Arm

ALUMNA BOOSTS NURSING PROGRAM WITH NEW CPNE SITE By Dana Yanulavich

Jennifer Gentry remembers taking her Clinical Performance in Nursing Exam (CPNE) like it was yesterday. Now a chief nursing officer in the CHRISTUS Spohn Health System in Southern Texas, she's helping other aspiring RNs complete their degrees by hosting a CPNE testing site at CHRISTUS Spohn's Alice, Texas, location.

As any Excelsior student in the School of Nursing can tell you, the CPNE is the capstone of the associate degree program. It's the assessment designed to measure a student's ability to demonstrate the expected behaviors and skills of a beginning-level associate degree-prepared nurse. Once successfully completed, the CPNE validates that the student possesses the competencies to begin practice as an entry-level nurse. With the associate degree in hand, individuals can sit for the

National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX-RN) that allows them to practice nursing in their state.

Gentry recalls her CPNE experience as the most challenging event in her nursing career, but one with big benefits. Starting her career as an LVN, and then progressing through Excelsior's associate, bachelor's and master's programs in nursing, Gentry's career advanced as well. With that success came a desire to give back to her alma mater. "I feel like, honestly, Excelsior has done so much for me," she says. "I would not be where I am today without Excelsior and without the format for learning that fits so well with my learning style, personality, drive, and I wanted to give back to the school."

And give back she has. In addition to work to create the CPNE site, she is a member of the adjunct faculty and serves as a member of Excelsior's Alumni Leadership Council, where she helps guide and represent the interests of

the College's more than 160,000 graduates. In her role as a council member, she proposed that Excelsior create a CPNE testing center at her home hospital.

"She [Gentry] has a passion for Excelsior's program," says Kim Hedley, assistant dean of Excelsior's associate degree in nursing program. Gentry's support is mission-affirming, Hedley attests, noting it helps Excelsior meet students where they are—academically and geographically. By hosting a CPNE testing site in the southern part of the state, it reduces travel time for many Texas students. More than 11 percent of Excelsior's associate degree nursing students are in the Lone Star State, the second largest concentration after New York.

Once the seed of the idea was planted, it grew slowly as it took nearly a year to set up the site and complete such details as signing a contract, hiring and training faculty, and securing the necessary equipment. The inaugural testing at the new CPNE location was on September 11, 2015, when five students demonstrated their skills. With the CHRISTUS Spohn site now up and running, it joins the more than 10 other CPNE sites across the United States.

In addition to her role on the Alumni Leadership Council, Gentry serves as an advocate for Excelsior's nursing program as a mentor. The word is out, she says, that she's an Excelsior alumna and she's available for anyone who may need help. That even includes her next-door neighbor, Bonnie Harris, an LVN at CHRISTUS Spohn who passed her CPNE in fall 2015.

"We have been neighbors for about two years. I did not pass my CPNE the first time, and she [Gentry] was supportive and encouraging, making me feel like I could pass. I did pass the second time, eight months later, and she was as excited as I was. She has been a nurse manager for Spohn, and has worked her way up to CNO of the two biggest campuses in the Spohn system, while remaining down-to-earth, approachable, and being patient- and nurse-oriented at the same time. She is amazing, and I feel very grateful that she is my neighbor, my boss, and my friend," says Harris.

One of the things that appealed to Gentry in her Excelsior studies was the relevancy of each degree. "Each time I went back [for another degree] the information was very relevant to what I was doing and it was almost as though Excelsior was acting as my mentor/preceptor into the new role that I had stepped into," says Gentry. "What I was learning in school, I was applying to day-to-day work and what I was learning on day-to-day work, I was applying in my degree program. You just can't beat that."

Now Gentry's assuming the role of mentor. By helping to set up the CPNE site at her home hospital, her staff benefits as well. She notes that staff are learning more about the validity of the competency-based education model, the facility's nursing leaders have an opportunity to become Excelsior

"What I was learning in school, I was applying to day-to-day work and what I was learning on day-to-day work, I was applying in my degree program. You just can't beat that." — Jennifer Gentry

clinical examiners, and the exposure helps stimulate interest in the hospital's nurses to further their education.

Harris supports this notion, saying, "Earning my associate degree has meant the world to me. I have practiced as an LVN for 11 years in various settings: hospitals, outpatient surgery, doctors' offices, hospice, nursing homes... you name it. I would feel frustrated at times when something needed to be done that I had the knowledge to do, but not the credentials. ... [Now] I feel that I have so much more to offer the nursing profession, and that I can go far in my career."

Gentry is not only a staunch advocate for Excelsior's nursing program, but also for the profession of nursing. She's a member of the Texas Nurses Association and president of her local district. "I have a lot of passion for what I do and I feel a strong social responsibility to use my knowledge and skills to impact health care and the work environment for nurses for the better anytime that I can," she says. Gentry seeks to be politically active in the health care arena, bringing her knowledge and skills to bear on health care and nursing issues. She notes, "We need more nurses involved and engaged in that process."

Her commitment to Excelsior and the nursing field are elements that have helped Gentry prepare for a successful career. As she lays the path for future successful Excelsior students, she offers some words of advice as they anticipate taking the CPNE. She says, "They [Excelsior] have set up a very good program and they provide all the tools that you need to be successful, so use those tools, prepare, know your critical elements, and then when you get there, just breathe, and... try to let some of the stress go so you can think through what you're doing and the why, and you'll be fine." ■

UPWARD



Lab Report

A HANDS-ON EXPERIENCE DELIVERS AN UP-CLOSE UNDERSTANDING OF HUMAN ANATOMY By Maria C. Sparks



PHOTO: MIKE HEMBERGER

Students studying anatomy and physiology can now unbox their own lab and complete course requirements at home. During the eight-week labs offered by the School of Health Sciences, students explore different body systems using a customized kit that includes clearly labeled experiments, non-toxic materials, and safety instructions. They follow step-by-step instructions and consult photos to conduct experiments and specimen dissections. Students then meet in an online discussion forum to share their findings, challenges, and victories, and to seek guidance and encouragement from peers and the instructor. As with traditional online courses, students submit their work—in this instance, lab reports and still images of their dissections—to receive feedback and grades from their instructor.

“It is discovery learning at its best,” says Lisa Rapple, the faculty program director who planned the lab. She worked with a vendor to develop a kit that provides everything students need, from a fetal pig to household items such as tape and paper clips. Rapple emphasizes that the lab kit takes the student’s learning experience to another level by engaging all the senses. “It provides a better foundation for truly understanding what is happening in the body physiologically.”

The kits are designed for HSC 105L Anatomy and Physiology Lab I and HSC 106L Anatomy and Physiology Lab II (cross-listed as BIO 105L and BIO 106L), two one-credit courses offered since August 2015. The labs complement the existing anatomy and physiology courses, and students taking both a course and a lab earn 4 credits. A lab can also be taken as a standalone course for 1 credit.

Jessica Boettcher, a paramedic and medical instructor in North Carolina, took both labs as part of the Bachelor of Science in Health Sciences program. She says that as a visual learner, the information she gained from physically exploring the heart and brain will stay with her much longer as a result of completing the labs. “It [the lab] enhances what you learn in the course. It gives you that visual [example] and helps tie it all together,” she says. Boettcher notes each lab exceeded her expectations. “I wasn’t expecting it to be as involved, and I was pleasantly surprised that it was.”

She was likely not the only one. Boettcher was able to set up the lab at work, and three coworkers—who are enrolled at a different school—are now taking the Excelsior lab. ■

Pondering a Promotion?

HERE ARE A FEW TIPS ON HOW TO PROCEED

by Maribeth Gunner Pulliam

Asking for a promotion can be a daunting task, but it is one of the most important things you can do for your career. To make this encounter less of an obstacle and more of an opportunity, take some time to plan and prepare. A few well-executed steps now can provide a great springboard for advancement in the future.

BE PROACTIVE: ENGAGE IN SELF-PROMOTION

Before approaching your boss with a request for promotion, you'll need to clearly demonstrate your value to the organization. Begin by documenting your most recent achievements, ensuring the information is relevant and timely (within the past one to three years). Quantify your accomplishments by citing numbers, percentages, time saved, specific service improvements, etc. If you believe you are doing the job of two people, highlight that information. You may be saving the organization money with your double duty.

As the next step, gather recent credentials, such as college degrees or certificates you have earned, or recent trainings attended. Collect any copies of positive letters or emails you have received from customers, clients, colleagues, or other stakeholders. Then, organize your list of achievements, credentials, and other supportive materials into a portfolio that will showcase your invaluable service. Continuously update and add to your portfolio as you gain more experience. When the time is right to discuss your possible promotion, you'll have all the documentation prepared to present to your boss.

CREATE YOUR CAREER OPPORTUNITY

Not convinced you have amassed enough experience and/or achievements to secure a promotion? Continue to bolster your skill sets. Look for challenges and opportunities where you can make a

difference. Seek out areas within the organization that could use attention. Can you identify a resource or solution that resolves an issue or contributes to the organization? Another option is to gain expertise outside of your immediate job function. Take on a new responsibility or pursue a new proficiency that will set you apart.

Finally, at your annual performance review, inquire what you can do to increase your responsibility and improve your chances to move up the career ladder.

TIMING IS KEY

Once you are prepared to pursue a promotion, take a moment to assess the current climate of the workplace.

Is the timing of your request advantageous? Has business been moving in a favorable direction? Is your boss racing to meet a deadline? Also, check your own personal and professional barometer. You may believe that you are deserving of a promotion, but be sure you deliver a composed and confident request, neither cocky nor confrontational.

Understand that the boss may need time to consider your request. If you do not receive an immediate reply, ask when it would be appropriate to follow up, and then do it.

RELISH IN THE RESULTS

With effective preparation and planning, your next promotion may just be within your reach. However, if it does not immediately materialize, do not despair. Your efforts have effectively served to alert your superior that you're looking to advance. More importantly, you have demonstrated your unique value to the organization and made a lasting impression that may bode well when the next potential career opportunity arises. ■

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Excelsior.edu/career



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Dorsey Applrys

Faculty Program Director,
Public Health Programs
School of Health Sciences

Economic growth and improved public health rise in parallel, but not always at the same rate and for the same people. How do we ensure some populations aren't left behind as a community experiences an economic uptick?

Decision makers seeking to develop vibrant and healthier communities that thrive economically must be intentional about planning and implementing strategies that promote health and diversity among the individuals who make up that community. Examples of these strategies include policies and initiatives that ensure mixed-income and senior housing, walkable communities, public transportation, access to healthy foods, and quality schools. Individuals representative of communities directly impacted by economic growth plans must be included in the planning process.

You are an advocate on issues pertaining to cultural diversity and its role in the delivery of health care. What factors contribute to socioeconomic, racial, and ethnic disparities in health among the U.S. population?

There are an array of factors that contribute to socioeconomic and racial and ethnic disparities in health outcomes. These factors are systemic and multilayered in nature, making them difficult, but not impossible, to address. These factors can be conceptualized in the form of an iceberg. Factors such as racism and discrimination make up the base of the iceberg which lays beneath the surface.

While factors such as lack of education, high rates of incarceration, and unemployment rest on the base emerging to the surface. At the tip of the iceberg are factors that are more visible, such as an individual's health behavior, health care provider bias, lack of access to health care, environmental exposures, and chronic stress.

How can culturally competent health care providers improve the delivery of care for diverse populations?

Health care costs in the United States continue to increase, yet disparities in health outcomes for communities of color persist. To address the issue of rising health care costs, reforming the health care system has been a priority at the federal, state, and local levels. As part of the reform conversation, preventing illness and addressing social determinants of health have become key strategies. According to the World Health Organization, social determinants of health are the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work, and age that affect their health outcomes. Both strategies require health care providers to be more culturally sensitive and aware of an individual's environment and how it shapes the cultural norms that influence health behaviors and outcomes. When providers are culturally sensitive and aware, they are more likely to foster relationships of mutual respect that give the patients a sense of trust in the provider. They are also more likely to have empathy toward their patients and

develop realistic treatment plans. When empathy, trust, and respect have been established, patients are more likely to adhere to their treatment regimen, return for services, and refer members of their social network in need of care.

What is the role of higher education in helping to solve these challenges?

An aging population, widening health and socioeconomic disparities, health care reform, and advances in technology have resulted in tremendous growth in the health industry. This growth has led to great strides and challenges in protecting and promoting the health of populations in the 21st century and the need for a highly skilled and credentialed public health workforce. Institutions of higher learning play a critical role in meeting this demand by educating and training current and future public health professionals capable of addressing emerging public health issues.

In addition to training the next generation of public health leaders, institutions of higher learning serve as incubators for research, which sheds light on public health issues such as contaminated drinking water and health disparities and the interventions necessary to address them. These incubators also provide opportunities for cross-pollination of disciplines. This affords students with different career interests the opportunity to establish norms of working together to strategize ways to solve the most complicated issues of our time, which all have public health implications. ■



The Sky's the Limit



The study of drones takes off in the classroom as higher education institutions look beyond the image problem and focus on the implications

BY DANA YANULAVICH

With potential applications ranging from pizza and package delivery, crop inspection, and wildlife management to firefighting and humanitarian missions, to news reporting and safety inspections, drones are a veritable Swiss Army knife of technology. Although cutting through the growing regulations and legal and ethical concerns are proving to be a challenge, there's no stopping the burgeoning number of drone implementations from taking off. As the ideas continue to soar, many colleges and universities are adding drone-related concepts to the curriculum.



“Unique programs are starting every single day and so I recommend for schools to start small, start easy with some off-the-shelf products and *just start*. Because if you wait for the technology to slow down and for those exponential growth curves to taper off, it’s not going to be anytime soon, so the best thing you can do is to kind of jump in,” says Gregory Crutsinger, academic program director for 3D Robotics, a company headquartered in Berkeley, California, that produces consumer drones.

Drones are also known by other names; the two most frequently used are unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) and unmanned aircraft system (UAS). The common element, of course, is unmanned flight. The size, shape, and mode vary greatly and include fixed wing aircraft and copters with one or more rotors, ranging from 5 cm to 50 meters in size and with power sources from jet fuel to rechargeable batteries.

But before consumer drones can fully get off the ground and their use becomes more mainstream, they need to overcome an image problem. Many individuals equate all unmanned aircraft with much larger and costly military applications, such as the \$16.9 million Reaper that can carry over 10,000 pounds of Hellfire missiles and laser-guided bombs. In reality, however, drones are neither a new concept,

nor solely a weapon. The Austrians used unmanned aircraft in the form of balloons to drop bombs on Venice in the 1800s and the U.S. military used them in the 1900s as target practice for troops, but on the homefront, amateurs were flying radio-controlled aircraft for fun starting in the 1940s.

Altering the course of public thinking is on many people’s minds. “A lot of it [the image problem] is public perception, and that’s what we’re trying to overcome..., because you mention drone and everybody automatically thinks that’s a bad thing,” explains Agamemnon L. Crassidis, associate professor of mechanical engineering at Rochester Institute of Technology. “It’s really trying to educate everybody that this is a good thing and this has commercial applications, and we’re not going to use these to spy on people or drop bombs on people.”

It’s not just the public that needs to be educated, but students as well.

“Drones are here to stay,” says Arthur Holland Michel, founder of the Center for the Study of the Drone at Bard College. “They are already playing a crucial role in how modern wars are fought, and they will soon be playing a crucial role in a wide range of domestic industries. If higher ed is about training students for participation in society and

industry, then an understanding of drones—how they work, what they are used for, what opportunities and challenges they present—should be a part of that training.”

The scope of the beneficial uses of these crafts, however, is possibly as vast as human imagination and ingenuity. In the media, there have been reports of Amazon’s objective to use drones for package delivery, and there are other seemingly far-fetched delivery proposals, including dry cleaning, chicken wings, flowers, cake, and beer. A more grounded approach has seen humanitarian benefits, such as the Matternet Quadcopter in Bhutan that delivers antibiotics to a remote Himalayan mountain clinic, or the DHL Parcelcopter that brings medicines to the North Sea island of Juist. Other applications could see drones used for search and rescue, crop and livestock monitoring, and pipeline inspections.

NAVIGATING TURBULENT ISSUES

Despite the potential benefits of the commercial application of drones, there are a variety of worries and concerns—privacy issues and malicious intent chief among them. With regard to privacy, many believe that existing Peeping Tom and trespassing laws cover drones as well. “The privacy issues are no different than using binoculars or a telescope,” explains Excelsior College’s Michael Johnson, the faculty program director of energy management.

The FAA continues to grapple with regulations related to unmanned aerial vehicles. “The FAA still is trying to weave through the hay here and try to figure it out themselves, because things constantly change almost on a daily basis,” notes Crassidis, who also serves on the board of directors for the NUAIR Alliance at Griffiths International Airport in Rome, New York. NUAIR is one of six national sites chosen by the FAA for unmanned aircraft research. In addition to commercial partners, it supports colleges and universities such as RIT, MIT, Syracuse University, and Clarkson University, giving them a space to conduct their own research.

Drones are less regulated outside the United States. The FAA posits that when you fly a drone, you’re entering the nation’s airspace just like a jumbo jet or private plane. The FAA has teamed up with the Association for Unmanned Vehicle Systems International (AUVSI), the Academy of Model Aeronautics (AMA), and the Small UAV Coalition on a Know Before You Fly campaign that promotes safe and responsible flying. In addition, the FAA has enacted regulations that require a drone to be registered, and that limits its weight to 55 pounds, the height it can fly to 500 feet, and the speed it can travel to 100 mph.

As of December 2015, 26 states have laws governing unmanned aircraft and an additional six states have adopted resolutions. California, for example, prohibits paparazzi using

“If higher ed is about training students for participation in society and industry, then an understanding of drones—how they work, what they are used for, what opportunities and challenges they present—should be a part of that training.”

—Arthur Holland Michel, founder of the Center for the Study of the Drone at Bard College

drones on private property. Yet incidents continue to pepper the popular press. According to the Center for the Study of the Drone, there were 650 sightings and near misses as of August 2015. U.S. Transportation Secretary Anthony Foxx reported that 2015 pilot sightings of drones had doubled since 2014, and that there had also been reports of drones interfering with fire-fighting efforts. In October 2015, an individual was arrested after his drone crashed into the New York state Capitol in Albany, New York, and a drone carrying mobile phones, drugs, and hacksaw blades crashed into a prison in Oklahoma.

“Anytime you’ve got a disruptive technology like this, and the sort of tool that can be used for good or ill, inevitably there are some folks who are going to push the boundaries, and they’ll find uses that might not be what you would hope. So along with those great capabilities also come some challenges and, in some people’s perspectives, threats, and those are valid,” explains Michael Hatfield, associate director of science and education for the Alaska Center for Unmanned



Aircraft Systems Integration (ACUASI), another of the FAA's approved research sites.

At New York's NUAIR, research is underway on sense and avoid capabilities to prevent collisions with other manned and unmanned aircraft. But as Crassidis points out, there may also be a need for anti-drone technology.

"Terrorists aren't going to follow the rules. You see that already. Some incidents have happened, particularly the big one that happened at the White House [when a small drone crashed on the White House grounds in January 2015]. I think it's going to be an issue down the road—the need for an anti-drone system. ...I think as this evolves and more of them get out there that having use of these things for hostile type situations is eventually going to happen," Crassidis says.

Smaller consumer drones exist in part due to a variety of technologies that society now takes for granted. These include smart phones, GPS, digital cameras, Wi-Fi, and Bluetooth technologies, and it all adds up to big business when applied to the UAS field. For example, in the 2015 holiday season, the drone gift projections ran from 700,000 to 1 million units. The industry overall is expected to grow by 15 to 20 percent annually. The projected economic impact by 2025 is \$8–\$10 billion with the creation of 100,000 jobs. The upstate

New York NUAIR site, for example, is predicted to create 486 jobs and generate \$10 million in tax revenue. For commercial applications, a drone pilot could be flying high with a starting salary of \$100,000.

Manufacturing jobs, too, will be rewarding—averaging \$40,000 per year and requiring bachelor's degrees. A 2013 report by AUVSI (Association for Unmanned Vehicle Systems International) noted that delaying the integration of drones in the U.S. could be costly, leading to losses of more than \$10 billion in potential economic impact.

EDUCATION DRIVES THE FUTURE

With so much at stake in the UAS airspace, education can play a prominent role, not only in research and development, but also in the praxis of public policy. At Rochester Institute of Technology, where Crassidis teaches mechanical engineering, there is a dual degree program where engineering students can obtain a BS in mechanical engineering and an MS in public policy offering a unique skill set for solving problems related to drone technology as well as public policy issues.

"The technology has improved and technology has gotten so advanced, and there's so many capabilities there that

GRAD'S INTERESTS TAKE FLIGHT



Jonathan Daniels, BS '09, describes himself as a disruptive technology guy. Pushing the envelope with new systems and theories is something that excites and motivates him. Now president of Praxis Aerospace Concepts International, a service-disabled veteran-owned Nevada corporation, Daniels has cashed in on his military experience, education, and drive to become a professional unmanned systems (UxS) innovator, consultant, professor, and research roboticist.

But one thing he hasn't cashed is the check his father wrote him in 1993, payable to Excelsior (then Regents) College, to encourage him to get a college education. As a young 17-year-old, Daniels wanted to pave his own way and enlisted in the U.S. Army instead. Ironically, years later, Daniels decided Excelsior was a good option for him and enrolled in the School of Liberal Arts.

"The fun part is that I still have the check. I never cashed it," admits Daniels. "I was in my 20s, so I was 'like Ahh! I'm going to get it without you.' Then, 15–20 years go by, and it's not so much a matter of 'look, I can do this on my own;' it was a matter of 'I should have listened to you then' kind of discussion."

At first Daniels took advantage of the College's One Transcript program, which allowed him to consolidate the 11 transcripts he had accumulated while in the military. Soon, he was looking at degree programs and eventually took the remaining courses he needed to complete a Bachelor of Science with areas of focus in aeronautics/aviation and administrative/management studies.

Retiring from the military in 2012 with 24 years of service, Daniels was deployed many times and gained experience both as a pilot and in the new and growing field of unmanned aircraft. He served in the Gulf and Iraq Wars and flew 16 different aircraft on six different continents. Setting his sights on creating his own business after his military service, he completed an MBA at Kaplan University in 2010.

In addition to Praxis Aerospace, which is dedicated to the expert practical application of technologies, equipment, and robotic systems and concepts that support consumer drone applications, Daniels is also president of The Aerodrome LLC—a teaching airport. He's leading the design and management of the nation's first droneport under development in Nevada.

▲ Jonathan Daniels, BS '09, president of The Aerodrome LLC, a teaching airport, leads the creation of a droneport, a site to test and fly drones, in Boulder City, Nevada.

PHOTO: L.E. BASKOW/LAS VEGAS SUN

As the proposal manager for the Nevada Governor's Office of Economic Development, he played an integral role in landing the state's FAA Unmanned Aircraft Systems Test Site, one of only six nationwide, and was its inaugural technical director. Daniels shares his knowledge and enthusiasm in the classroom, too, teaching students in the Unmanned Aircraft System programs at University of Nevada at Las Vegas.

Daniels thrives on being at the forefront of technology and devotes a great deal of time and energy to keeping on top of his field and the current research. It's important, he says, to keep moving forward.

"The type of learner who ends up at Excelsior...get[s] this idea that you can't stop learning," he says. "Even if you take a break, you didn't stop. ... A lot of the encore educational experience taught me that you have to keep going."

—DANA YANULAVICH

“There’s nothing inherently dangerous about the technology—it’s what people do with it. I do believe education of the future is a lot about how we make it less scary.”

—Jonathan Daniels, president of Praxis Aerospace Concepts International

without some level of education and some level of training, you’re dangerous,” explains Jonathan Daniels, president of Praxis Aerospace Concepts International [see sidebar on page 21]. “There’s nothing inherently dangerous about the technology—it’s what people do with it. I do believe education of the future is a lot about how we make it less scary.”

At the University of Alaska Fairbanks, students are exposed to UAS in a variety of curriculums and research areas. According to Hatfield, this includes programs in geography, geology, forestry, and biology. Engineering students have, for example, designed an infrared camera for a UAS to study and characterize volcanic plumes and wildfires. In another class, undergraduate and graduate students are working side-by-side in the role of contractor, responding to two separate statements of work as they build up a new multirotor UAS and also retrofit an older fixed-wing UAS with off-the-shelf electronics.

“There’s a nice symbiotic relationship between the UAS and engineering programs because students are looking for relevant real-world projects and they’re not very interested in story problems; they want to do something that matters to the world,” Hatfield observes.

Johnson is exploring adding a UAV concentration to Excelsior’s programs. In the meantime, he coauthored an article, “Unmanned Aerial Vehicle Technology for the Nuclear Industry,” and was invited to Calvert Cliffs Nuclear Power Plant, located in Lusby, Maryland, by its innovation group to perform a drone demonstration. He believes drones could be

used to inspect cooling towers in nuclear plants, saving time and money, and protecting people who currently do the job.

While photographers and filmmakers have enjoyed the bird’s-eye view offered by drones, journalists may also capitalize on the aerial perspective in newsgathering. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the Missouri School of Journalism are just two examples of colleges offering courses that use drones.

Crassidis, of Rochester Institute of Technology, is working with Oklahoma State University to use drones to predict tornado-type scenarios. He says it’s important that students become excited about technology in general and drones in particular. “I do think [drones are] the way of the future, because there are multiple reports of the economic benefits of integrating these unmanned aircraft systems into the national airspace system..., but we need to educate young people and get them excited about drones and get educated in the right areas.”

The topic has proven popular on campuses. The first seminar offered on drones at Bard College was over-registered by 100 percent; it was one of the largest classes offered that semester. While Bard, a small liberal arts school in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York, is not focused on drone-supportive STEM programs, it recognized the need for further scholarly exploration early on, according to Michel. He notes, “We figured that in order to have a truly substantive public discussion that would lead to better policy on an issue as complex as drones, that discussion needs to be informed by expertise from a wide variety of disciplines, from computer science and economics to law, history, and human rights.”

Comparing the current state of drones in academia to the development and growing popularity of the automobile at the turn of the 20th century, Crassidis predicts the need to fill the education space to meet the growing industry head-on.

“It was very select people who could afford an automobile, and then Henry Ford came along and then everybody started building automobiles but no colleges or universities had a dedicated automotive engineering program and now most schools do,” he says. “The same thing can be said for aerospace engineering. I think the next logical progression is as [drones] become integrated in the national airspace system and people see the utility of using these things and how popular they’re going to be, there’s going to be a void in terms of [the] education aspect where somebody’s going to have to step up to the table and take up that void.”

Ford neither invented the car nor the assembly line, but he had the foresight and leadership to exploit those technologies to make an affordable consumer vehicle. Similarly, while drones aren’t new, they are rapidly transitioning into the commercial and consumer spheres—a textbook case for the creation of curriculums and programs in higher ed to safely and responsibly support the many potential positive implementations. ■



THE
JOKE'S
ON

A humor-infused
curriculum
has its benefits

BY DANA YANULAVICH
PHOTOS BY GARY GOLD



education is serious business. After all, earning a degree takes a big investment in time, money, and energy—it's not a laughing matter. But what if the ivory tower is a little off center once in a while? Is it okay to infuse humor and levity into the classroom?

The answer is a resounding “yes”! Studies have shown that properly placed humor in the

classroom can not only influence participation but also pique and keep student interest. A well-placed humorous example can lighten the mood and have surprisingly positive results on content retention.

“There’s a big difference—I don’t think people understand this—between using humor and telling jokes,” explains Ellen Zimmerman, former program director and now adjunct faculty in Excelsior’s School of Nursing. “We’re not telling jokes. There’s no punch line.”

Research indicates that humor in the classroom creates a positive environment. It can lessen a student’s fear and help reduce anxiety, especially in subjects often regarded as dry, and sometimes dreaded, such as statistics. The use of humor can also enhance an instructor’s image, bridging the gap between learner and leader and increasing students’ affinity toward faculty. Those who use humor when they teach literally go to the head of the class—they’re more highly rated by their students.

But like any skill, humor needs to be used properly and appropriately. “I think you need to be comfortable with laughing at yourself,” says Deborah Smithers, faculty program director in the School of Health Sciences. “You can’t be somebody who’s not funny and then try to be funny. Then your integrity falters, students lose respect for you; you’re no longer knowledgeable in their eyes.”

Humor in the classroom can promote a sense of community and enhance self-esteem. There are even physiological benefits such as improved respiration and circulation, lower blood pressure, and the welcoming release of endorphins, the brain chemicals that can elevate your mood.

“I always start off [my class] with ‘Florence Nightingale and I were roommates,’” says Zimmerman, an RN with 40 years of nursing experience. “It’s a very simple statement and, of course, we weren’t, but yes, I’ve been a nurse a really long time. It immediately engages them and they want to hear more about Florence Nightingale.”

The Lady with the Lamp icebreaker may be doing more than enlightening nursing students on the importance of sanitation, one of Nightingale’s many contributions to nursing.

Research shows attempts at humor can increase students’ interest in learning and create a positive atmosphere that may lead to improved test scores. But scoring better grades with humor isn’t necessarily the point. “Your score doesn’t interest me; what you learn interests me,” says Zimmerman. “That’s the bottom line. That’s what you take forward.”

Zimmerman and Smithers recently teamed up on a poster presentation, “Incorporating Humor into the Virtual Classroom.” Chosen from among 400 submitted concepts, it was one of approximately 100 displayed at the National League for Nursing Education Summit in fall 2015. The majority of other posters at the Summit were research results on important yet dense topics. Smithers and Zimmerman believe their poster on humor garnered a lot of attention, not only because of the subject matter, but also because it provided a welcome relief from the heavy-weight topics.

Research indicates that humor in the classroom creates a positive environment. It can lessen a student’s fear and help reduce anxiety, especially in subjects often regarded as dry, and sometimes dreaded, such as statistics.

Using humor isn’t new to these two faculty members. Both brought deep experience teaching nursing in a traditional classroom to the online setting. Because nursing is such a serious subject, they sought ways to enliven the material. Zimmerman, for example, would outfit herself with a pink boa, glasses, and a hat, topped off with a Depend adult diaper over her clothes, and used a walker to enter her gerontology class.

While at first glance, it may seem impossible to integrate such lively theatrics into the online environment, Zimmerman and Smithers beg to differ. Video is one readily available tool that can be used online to demonstrate the very same scenario. Smithers says, “We have a lot of young students and a lot of students who may be working two jobs, plus going to school, trying to fulfill a degree, have a family, and I think they need to get something that will grasp their concentration and see it through to fruition.”

Smithers cites an example used in the poster presentation that she’s used to reinforce cardiac rhythms in a traditional

classroom. She shares a YouTube video link to “Diagnosis Wenkebach” with students. Created by medical students from the University of Alberta, it’s a spoof of Justin Timberlake’s “SexyBack.” After watching this video, one of her classes scored 100 percent on a difficult quiz on the subject. And Zimmerman, an avid dancer, has worn her tap shoes to class at brick and mortar institutions to tap out the rhythm while students look at the matching rhythm strip.

Care needs to be excised when using humor, however. Too much can give the wrong impression—that the content isn’t important. And of course, it needs to be appropriate for all audiences while not offending any culture, gender, or race. “You have to be very aware. You have to be very nonjudgmental, and you have to respect whatever that culture might be. You have to be very careful with the humor [online]. You need to know when the time to interject it [humor] is and when do you just remain serious.... It has to be appropriate, because [if not] it would then be offensive,” says Smithers.

Humor can be a double-edged sword—one side may tickle one person’s funny bone, while the other might cut into their deepest sensibilities. Some theorists suggest that

self-deprecating humor is the safest way to avoid offending others. Examples of humor that are best suited to online use are visual elements, such as comics, photographs, illustrations, or videos. Top 10 lists and wordplay are other successful tactics for online use.

In the nursing field, the laughs never come at the expense of the patient, both Smithers and Zimmerman emphasize. “A lot of the humor comes from being in an awkward situation or being uncomfortable with something that went on,” Zimmerman says. “As critical care nurses, we both worked in ICUs and I worked in the ER—it’s life and death all the time. So if you can’t have a sense of humor and de-escalate yourself and your staff, you’re going to burn out in flames.”

Both Zimmerman and Smithers are proud that no student ever fell asleep in their classes thanks to their efforts to keep the instruction interesting. They agree that adding a little light and levity to otherwise serious and dense subjects is rewarding for faculty as well as for students. “You get everything out of it. You know you made your point. You engaged them and interested them,” Zimmerman says. And that’s no joke. ■



Faculty members Ellen Zimmerman (left) and Deborah Smithers (right) have diagnosed humor in the classroom as among the leading causes of content retention, anxiety reduction, and other benefits. The duo presented a poster, “Incorporating Humor into the Virtual Classroom,” at the 2015 National League for Nursing Education Summit.

NURSES ON CALL

THREE QUESTIONS WITH THREE NURSING AMBASSADORS

On a typical day in the Admissions Office, a savvy prospective student might say (and often does), “I know that earning an associate degree in nursing is the next step in my education, but before I invest my time and money in Excelsior College, I’d like to speak with someone who graduated from this program to find out more about it.”

Enter our Alumni Ambassadors—the volunteers who extend the College’s reach. While Ambassadors span all degree programs, in this case, there is a loyal group of nursing graduates who are “on call” to speak with prospective nursing students. So, when the Office of Alumni Affairs sends an email to this group asking, “Are you available to speak with a prospective nursing student?” the responses come back immediately and enthusiastically.

Here, in their own words, three nursing graduates discuss how their experiences led them to become Alumni Ambassadors. They are Rebecca Crane, AS in Nursing ’03, who earned a BSN from Indiana Wesleyan University, an MSN from Kaplan University, and is pursuing an EdD at Northcentral University; Lisa Dukes, AS in Nursing ’08, MS in Nursing ’16, who earned a BSN from Chamberlain College of Nursing, and is pursuing a MSN Nurse Educator at Chamberlain; and Karen Kiefer, AAS in Nursing ’97, who earned a Bachelor of Arts in Individualized Studies from Fairleigh Dickinson University, and is pursuing an MSN at Walden University.

What impact has Excelsior College had on your life?

CRANE: Because I was able to fulfill my dream of advancing from an LPN (of almost 30 years!), Excelsior is very special to my heart. I became an LPN at the very young age of 19.

Each time I attempted to go back to college (brick and mortar), I became pregnant! Well, in order to keep the population below the “Cheaper by the Dozen” level, I quit trying. Then one day at the age of 49, my husband, who was working at the post office at the time, came across an advertisement for a group who offered a way to become an RN while still working and without having to try to make the time to go to a campus. I was hooked at the first bite and immediately began my journey. I fulfilled my dream in about 12 months.

DUKES: Excelsior opened doors by providing a means for me to transition from paramedic to RN. I had been working as a desktop publisher and graphic designer for a government consulting firm for a decade, and I became a paramedic to volunteer in my community. I applied to a hospital closer to home to be a patient care technician in an emergency department (ED), and I took a huge pay cut in the process. As it turns out, it has been worth every penny! After working with my RN colleagues in the ED, I knew nursing was for me. After investigating my educational options, I enrolled in Excelsior’s ASN program in 2006, really found my stride with it in 2007, and graduated in 2008. I passed my NCLEX-RN and remained in the same ED as a new graduate RN. I soon became a Certified Emergency Nurse (CEN) and a Certified Pediatric Emergency Nurse (CPEN). I transitioned quickly from an RN II to RN III via our hospital’s clinical ladder. I earned a BSN at another school and was

selected in 2011 to commission into the Army Nurse Corps as an ED nurse, in a time of far more applicants than positions (400+ applicants, 50 selected). I served for more than four years on active duty, achieving the rank of captain in less than three years and deploying to Afghanistan as the Officer in Charge of the trauma section of a Forward Surgical Team attached to a Special Forces Operational Detachment Alpha team—an amazing experience. After I commissioned into the Army Nurse Corps and settled into my first duty station, I asked my Army leadership how to use Army tuition assistance for a graduate education. I was told to figure it out myself and then teach them, and so I did—and I happily returned to the familiar virtual “halls” of Excelsior for an MS with a focus in Nursing Informatics. I completed most of my coursework courtesy of Army tuition assistance, and I even did a 15-week course while deployed to Afghanistan.

KIEFER: Excelsior provided the tools, manner, and opportunity to change my life as well as my family’s. When I started at Excelsior (then Regents), my goal was to obtain my RN so that I could afford to send my children to college. I was intimidated with the online learning then so I chose to combine taking courses at the local community college with the rest of the program. While I was at the community college, I met someone who assisted and taught me to advocate for my children with learning disabilities. As I went through my program, my confidence grew, I was able to obtain needed services for my children, and I advanced myself in my career. Excelsior showed me that I could achieve my dream



DUKES



CRANE



KIEFER

and should never give up, always believe in perseverance, and understand that anything is possible. Since then I have continued my education, advanced myself in my career, and continued to advocate for others.

Why do you volunteer as an Alumni Ambassador at Excelsior?

CRANE: I volunteer for Excelsior for several reasons. The first is that it is easy; just like going to school there, I can mentor or volunteer right from my own home. The second is that I want others to find the joy of completing a dream, just as I have for myself. Lastly, I am absolutely passionate about being a nurse! I want to pass that passion on to the next generation of nurses coming up.

DUKES: Because I believe in the value of education and the flexibility and support of Excelsior College, and I want to help other students achieve their own success. It is very empowering to progress toward a degree through dedication and commitment, and I really enjoy sharing my experiences with current and prospective students via social media. The Facebook groups where I am active have become a source of support

and information for associate degree and graduate students, and the numbers in those groups increase daily.

KIEFER: As I advanced in my career I reflected on where I started and am very grateful. I am fortunate enough to have others assist me in my endeavors, and I feel responsible to pay it forward to others.

What is the one piece of advice you would give to an Excelsior student or prospective student?

CRANE: My advice would be simply to make a commitment to fulfill your dream and then do it! Sometimes I had to prod myself to pick up that book and study, but the closer I got, the faster I zoomed through the program. Build a momentum that just won't quit!

DUKES: Find your mentors and listen to them; they have often been where you are, and they can guide you with the benefit of looking back at familiar ground and help you avoid the missteps they made.

KIEFER: To believe that you can achieve anything with hard work, perseverance, and belief. Never let anyone tell you that you cannot achieve excellence.



2015–2016 ALUMNI LEADERSHIP COUNCIL

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★★★★ ELECTION 2016 ★★★★★

Visit www.excelsior.edu/alumni to meet the 2016 nominees for the Alumni Leadership Council and vote on the proposed slate. The Alumni Leadership Council is the leadership of the Alumni Association. Voting will be open from May 1 through May 7, 2016.

AUTHOR? AUTHOR!



Excelsior alumni are a busy and talented group. If you don't believe us, just take a look at the shelves of our virtual Alumni Bookcase, www.excelsior.edu/alumnibookcase. The Alumni Bookcase provides a platform for the literary achievements and intellectual discourse of our diverse alumni. If you're a graduate who has published a book and would like to have it added to the Alumni Bookcase, submit the following information to alumni@excelsior.edu:

- Author's name
- Complete title of book
- Link to website from which book can be purchased

If you're a writer who has yet to have your work published, you may be interested in the publishing resources for writers posted on the Alumni Bookcase.

ALUMNI CONNECTION

Interview Workout: Getting in Shape for Your Next Interview

MONDAY
APRIL
25
7-8 pm ET

Like for any other competition, it's important to be in peak condition for interviews. In this web chat you'll get in shape for your next interview. Key training tips for your warm-up (interview preparation), the day of your competition (the interview itself), and your cool-down period (wrap-up and follow-up) will be discussed. Join us for this interesting and interactive discussion on getting in shape for your next interview.

Registration required at career.excelsior.edu/webchats.

Virginia Beach Alumni Event
Cypress Point Country Club

SUNDAY
MAY
1
2-4 pm ET

Join LCDR Shannon McMillan, AS '07, BS '09, for a reception to meet local Excelsior College alumni, students, and faculty; hear about happenings at the College; and learn about ways to become active in the Alumni Association. You will also have a chance to share your Excelsior story. This event is free of charge, but space is limited.

Registration required by April 25 at www.excelsior.edu/AlumniEventReg.

Alumni Association
Annual Meeting

FRIDAY
JULY
8
10-10:30 am ET

The annual meeting of the Alumni Association will be broadcast live online. The meeting takes place at the College on the morning of Commencement. This is a great opportunity to catch sight of your Alumni Association leadership and hear inspiring stories from this year's graduates. If you're not able to view the meeting live, look for the recorded version on the alumni website and watch at your convenience.

acpro.excelsior.edu/aab

Washington, DC Alumni
Graduation Reception

THURSDAY
JULY
14
6-8 pm ET

The event will be held at Excelsior's DC Center located at 2000 M Street NW. Stay tuned for more information.

For the most up-to-date information about upcoming regional and online events, visit www.excelsior.edu/alumnievents. Alumni events are open to alumni, students, and faculty. Online registration is required: www.excelsior.edu/AlumniEventReg.



Nursing graduates Sandy Butterfield, BS '86 (left), and Lisa Roberts, AS '89, BS '94 (right), co-hosted, along with Ken Desforges '10 (not pictured), the alumni gathering in San Diego, California.



SPARK PHOTOGRAPHY

ALUMNI EVENT RECAPS

WHAT: Faculty/Alumni Meet Up

WHEN: October 6, 2015

WHERE: Excelsior College, Albany, NY

WHO: Excelsior faculty and alumni from New York's Capital Region enjoyed dinner and networking in this first-ever gathering.

WHAT: Portland Alumni Event

WHEN: October 15, 2015

WHERE: Lucky Lab Brewing Company, Portland, OR

WHO: Hosted by Alumni Ambassador Brad Woodruff, BS '11, this casual gathering drew students, alumni, and faculty from the Great Northwest.

WHAT: Binghamton Alumni Event

WHEN: November 7, 2015

WHERE: Lost Dog Café, Binghamton, NY

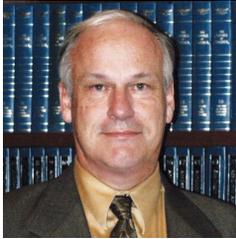
WHO: For the third time, Alumni Leadership Council secretary Adrienne Mason, BS '11, and former Alumni Association president Robert Williams, BS '95, welcomed alumni, students, and faculty from New York's Southern Tier, many of whom came to Excelsior through an academic partnership with Broome Community College.

WHAT: San Diego Alumni Event

WHEN: February 28, 2016

WHERE: Tom Ham's Lighthouse, San Diego, CA

WHO: Alumni, students, and faculty gathered with hosts Sandy Butterfield, BS '86; Ken Desforges, BS '10; and Lisa Roberts, AS '89, BS '94, to network and hear a message from Excelsior College President John Ebersole.

SCHOOL OF
LIBERAL ARTS

Kevin E. Ready Sr., AA '73, of Ballard, California, retired as senior counsel for Santa Barbara County, California, after 26 years. His most recent primary assignment was as legal advisor to the Santa Barbara County sheriff-coroner. Prior to his work with Santa Barbara County, Ready was with Imperial County, California, and, earlier, served as a commissioned officer in both the U.S. Army and U.S. Navy. Following his retirement from government service, he will take over duties as publisher at Saint Gaudens Press, a publisher of general fiction, history, and reference books and ebooks with offices in California and Kansas. He also earned a BA in government from the University of Maryland University College, and a Juris Doctor from the University of Denver.

Michael LaFerne, BS '79, of Lakeville, Massachusetts, was a nominee for the 2015 Schwartz Center National Compassionate Caregiver of the Year (NCCY) Award.

Patrick J. Ford, BS '86, of Soap Lake, Washington, was appointed grant manager for Big Bend Community College's drone technology program. The New Opportunities in Aviation program will train drone technicians and pilots, with a focus on agricultural applications of drone technology. Ford also has a master's degree in space studies from the University of North Dakota and a PhD in decision sciences from Walden

University. He had a 30-year career in the aerospace industry.

Michael Kandoll, BS '86, of Yermo, California, is chief of police for the Department of the Army at Fort Irwin, California. He retired in 2008 from the U.S. Air Force Reserve with 20 years of military service, including 11 years on active duty. In addition to Kandoll's military and law enforcement career, he set up a nonprofit organization to help people in recovery from alcohol and drug addictions. He credits Excelsior with helping him earn a bachelor's degree necessary for him to advance in his law enforcement career. Realizing that he would need a college program that would allow him to work while earning his degree, he found Excelsior. He writes, "I am ever grateful to Regents College, now known as Excelsior College, for helping me to achieve my educational and professional goals."

Leonard Le Blanc, BA '91, of Bangkok, Thailand, sponsors a charitable project in Afghanistan called the Helmand Doll Project. He contracts with Afghan women to handcraft ethnic dolls and sells them on eBay, Etsy, and Amazon and a portion of the sales proceeds goes back to fund humanitarian and charitable projects in Afghanistan and other parts of the Third World.



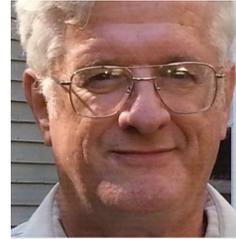
George L. Salis, BS '95, of Sarasota, Florida, economist and lawyer, recently earned the Certified Business Economist designation (CBE) awarded by the National Association for

Business Economics (NABE). The CBE is a symbol of distinction that candidates earn by meeting a prescribed level of achievement. It documents a professional's accomplishments, experience, and abilities, and demonstrates mastery of the body of knowledge critical for a successful career in the field of economics and data analytics. Salis, principal senior-tax compliance analyst & counsel at Vertex Inc., is a member of the inaugural class of the CBE designation, where only about 75 candidates received the designation nationwide. In addition to his Excelsior degree, Salis has a PhD in international and comparative law and policy from Union Institute and University and a JSD from Thomas Jefferson School of Law.



Steven G. Rindahl, BA '96, of Cibolo, Texas, is instructor and curriculum developer at the Army Medical Department Center and School in the Department of Pastoral Ministry Training at the Health Readiness Center for Excellence, Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas. In his new position, Rindahl develops and teaches courses designed to equip military chaplains and chaplain assistants with how to care for the spiritual health of soldiers in times of combat and emergency trauma; provide a ministerial response to a growing number of soldiers suffering moral injury; and how to best maintain and enhance spiritual fitness in support of comprehensive soldier fitness. He earned a Doctor of Ministry at the University of Chester, a Master of Theology at Spurgeon's

College, and a Master of Divinity at Southwestern Seminary.



Stephen Finlan, BA '97, of Warwick, Rhode Island, has published two books, "Bullying in the Churches," and "The Family Metaphor in Jesus' Teaching: Gospel Imagery and Application." He also earned a MA in New Testament Studies from Pacific School of Religion, an MPhil in New Testament Studies from Drew University, a PhD in Pauline Theology from the University of Durham, and an MTS from Boston University School of Theology.

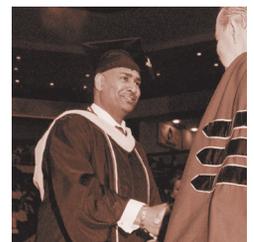


Mary Foster, BA '99, of Burlington, Kentucky, director, quality and regulatory, for ZoomEssence Inc., is responsible for assuring products are in compliance with all food safety regulations and various quality parameters. In May 2015, she was elected president of the Society of Flavor Chemists, a national organization dedicated to the field of flavor chemistry, with about 400 members. A military veteran, she served as a helicopter repairer in the regular Army, then with the Maryland Army National Guard for a total of nine years. She then began her food industry career working for such companies as McCormick, Pepsi, and Tones Spices.



Johnnie L. Frame, BS '99, of Berkeley Springs, West Virginia, serves as the director of modeling and simulation for the U.S. Marine Corps Marine Air Ground Task Force Staff Training Program (MSTP) in Quantico, Virginia. He is tasked with improving the training of senior commanders (3-star level) and their battle staffs in operational planning and warfighting skills at the Marine Expeditionary Force (MEF) and Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) levels as part of a joint and combined force. His efforts have been directly involved in training deploying staffs supporting Operation Enduring Freedom for the past 12 years.

Chris Kinter, BS '00, of Hershey, Pennsylvania, joined Assertive Professionals, a defense and intelligence consulting firm, as a managing partner in November 2015. He graduated from Penn State University with a Master of Public Administration.



Alain Patrick Wescott, BS '04, of California, Maryland, is an aviation electronics technician—chief petty officer in the U.S. Navy. Wescott has been in the Navy for more than 18 years and has been deployed in Iraq. He also earned a master's degree in business and industry training from Old Dominion University in 2012.

Carlos Floyd, BS '06, MA '13, of Saint Joseph, Missouri, published "Missouri's Young Adult Black Males: An Endangered People."

William Saltiel-Gracian, BS '13, of Hermiston, Oregon, earned a Master of Public Health in 2015 at American Military University. He's enrolled in AMU's Space Studies department, pursuing a master's degree in aerospace science. Saltiel-Gracian is also an applicant for NASA's astronaut candidate program.

Doug Pursley, BS '15, of Greenville, South Carolina, was promoted to training sergeant with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.

SCHOOL OF NURSING

Karen Cox, AS '82, of Kansas City, Missouri, was invested in 2015 as the V. Fred Burry, MD, and Sandra Hobart Burry Chair in Nursing Advocacy and Leadership at Children's Mercy Kansas City. Cox was also elected to a two-year term as president-elect of the American Academy of Nursing, which will be followed by a two-year term as president of the organization. The executive vice president/chief operating officer at Children's Mercy Kansas City, she earned a BSN at the University of Kansas, and an MSN and PhD at University of Missouri-Kansas City.



Susan Beth Janicke, AS '98, of Kenyon, Minnesota, is a

nurse practitioner at the Minneapolis VA in the Spinal Cord Injury & Disorder Center. She also has a private pain consulting practice and is a member of the Nurses Organization of Veteran Affairs and the American Society of Pain Management Nursing. Janicke earned a BSN/MSN from Graceland University and a Doctor of Nursing Practice from Walden University. She writes, "My experiences with Excelsior (then Regents) College opened the door to professional nursing. It made me a self-directed learner. I refer licensed practical nurses to the program; it's the perfect nursing program for the busy professional."

Diana Mitchell, BS '07, of Brookfield, Connecticut, was approved by the Connecticut Board of Nursing and selected by the National Council of State Boards of Nursing to participate on the NCLEX item development panel of subject matter experts that was held in Chicago in December 2015. Mitchell was one of six nurses from across the nation to be selected. She was nominated on the basis of clinical specialty and nursing expertise.



Marc Sacco, AS '08, of New Fairfield, Connecticut, is an RN in the emergency department at Danbury Hospital, a level II trauma center. He cofounded the Patient Whisperers, a clinic that specializes in using hypnosis to treat a variety of conditions. He and his partner are National Guild of Hypnotists Certified Consulting Hypnotists. They have become subject matter experts in hypnosis in health

care and lecture internationally on a variety of topics. Sacco writes, "I was blessed to find Excelsior College when I did because it was the only way for me to change the direction of my life at the time. Had I not completed their nursing program, I wouldn't have this awesome career and life I have now! Thank you!"

Billie Kunzang, AS '12, of Delhi, New York, worked in her community providing medical care in the home to residents of Delaware County, New York. She has also worked at Bassett Medical Center in Cooperstown, and now at O'Connor Hospital, a small rural critical access hospital in Delhi, New York. Kunzang volunteers for the American Red Cross of Greater New York's disaster response unit. She's also a Reiki practitioner, hypnotherapist, and aromatherapist. In spring 2015, she volunteered to provide medical assistance and health education to earthquake victims in devastated communities in the remote mountainous regions of Nepal.



Johanna Sulca, BS '14, of Coconut Creek, Florida, has been named director of nursing for the Care Center at Covenant Village of Florida, a faith-based, non-profit continuing care retirement community administered by Covenant Retirement Communities, the nation's fifth largest nonprofit senior services provider. Sulca has worked in the health care field for nearly 15 years, most recently as director of nursing at Riverview Health and Rehabilitation Center, Savannah, Georgia.

SHARE YOUR NEWS

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Find your College merchandise at excelsior.edu/store



OPERATION EARN THE DEGREE

At the annual Awards Convocation

held on the eve of Commencement, graduates often say they would not have been able to achieve their degree without the support of their families.

In 2015, graduate Brian Farrell put a twist on that by recognizing the support of a fellow Florida Army National Guard member, colleague, and friend, when he nominated Herschel “Ray” Freeman Jr. for the Student Support Award.

Freeman, of St. Augustine, Florida, earned his bachelor’s degree in 2013 and then set out to help others do the same. Typically, the Student Support Award has recognized family and friends for helping graduates succeed, but this was the first time an alumnus was nominated by a colleague. The award is given annually to recognize someone whose valuable assistance and encouragement significantly contributed in helping a graduate reach the goal of earning their degree. When nominating Freeman for the award, Farrell shared: “Ray took on the mission of motivating me to get back into college and was relentless until I was as excited about completing my college degree as he was about me completing my college degree.”

Freeman and Farrell have worked together for 10 years, as helicopter instructor pilots in the Florida Army National Guard. They deployed to Iraq and Kuwait together, and while in Iraq, Farrell witnessed Freeman continuing to take courses. Six months after returning from deployment, Freeman completed his coursework and graduated from Excelsior. Freeman takes his student support role seriously. Not only did he assist Farrell, he also helped five others in their workplace with enrolling at Excelsior and registering for courses.



“Ray walked each one of us through the entire admissions and enrollment process as if he was an Excelsior academic advisor,” said Farrell.

Freeman’s enthusiasm was contagious. Farrell, of Jacksonville, Florida, had not attended college since 1988 when he completed his Associate in Arts. Eventually, the timing of his military work and a break in deployments permitted a return to college. In Freeman, he found a skillful mentor—one who was in his office when he talked with an admissions counselor, who provided scholarly guidance, and who brainstormed ideas when he needed help with a course or a project. “His support, motivation, and mentorship were instrumental in how smoothly I transitioned through my courses,” shared Farrell.

While speaking at the Awards Convocation in July 2015, Freeman told the audience about his educational journey, one that saw him put college aside in 1988 and join the military. In 2010, he decided it was time to earn his bachelor’s degree. Of Farrell, he

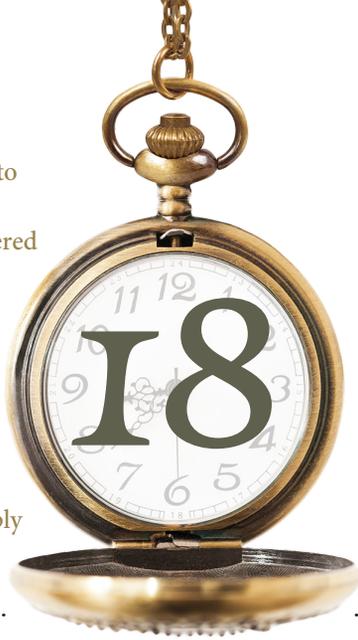
▲ In 2015, Brian Farrell, BS ’15 (right) nominated his coworker and friend Ray Freeman, BS ’13 (left) for the Student Support Award. The two alumni celebrated the honor at the Awards Convocation in Albany, New York. PHOTO: MIKE HEMBERGER

said, “He’ll tell you I supported him through this. I had a very small part of that, but my motives were selfish. When I completed my degree in ’13, I realized how easy it was...I enjoyed watching him and the others as they get closer to that degree, and it really brings my spirits up when I see those guys feel the same way I did at that time.” He recalled that he often reminded Farrell and the others that if you’re taking a class, you’re one step closer to the degree.

Receiving the Student Support Award brought Freeman closer to fully celebrating his own achievement of an Excelsior degree. Unable to attend Commencement in 2013, Freeman participated in Commencement 2015, walking across the stage thanks to alphabetical serendipity alongside Farrell, adding another shared bond between the two graduates. ■

BY THE NUMBERS

The number of hours a student can expect to spend each week on one eight-week course. The majority of Excelsior courses are delivered in an eight-week format. To support students taking these compact courses, the Student Success Center developed a video that offers eight tips for success. Tips range from purchasing textbooks early, so students are prepared for the start of the course, to suggestions on how to manage time. Best of all, the tips can apply to all students taking online courses.



58

The percentage of alumni who had been promoted, according to a recent survey of alumni who earned an Excelsior College degree three years earlier.

10%

The percentage of current students who are veterans. Given the College's history as an educator of choice for military servicemembers and veterans, Excelsior formed a chapter of Student Veterans of America in January. In establishing a chapter, the College aims to provide veterans with a sense of community and connected-

ness much like they experienced as servicemembers. The College also began a Facebook group for military and veterans so that they, and their families, can connect with peers. The Facebook group joins a refreshed LinkedIn group serving the same audiences.

70



The number of educational institutions worldwide that are using Excelsior's Online Writing Lab. The OWL has received many honors for its interactive, multimedia-rich approach to boosting students' writing skills. University Business magazine included the OWL in its Models of Excellence recognition program, which acknowledges colleges and universities for initiatives that impact student success. More than 10,000 individual users from more than 150 countries access the OWL monthly.

45

The number of years that Excelsior's model of providing educational opportunities has been going strong. Among other notable organizations celebrating a 45th birthday are the NASDAQ, Federal Express, and Starbucks.

Today, Starbucks has 22,519 stores (as of June 28, 2015) and Excelsior College (as of summer 2015) has 39,014 enrolled students—in addition to 159,884 graduates.

DESTINATION
DEGREE

How can your gift “step up” student success?

→ The average gift amount is \$95.54. **Small gifts add up to big impact.**

← **A gift of \$100** funds the cost of a \$95 exam, equivalent to 3 credit hours of coursework completed.

← **A gift of \$500** could fund a textbook for five different students. The average cost of a textbook is \$100.

← **A gift of \$1,500** funds the cost of one course and a textbook to go with it.

There are nearly 39,000 enrolled students, and many would benefit from financial support as they pursue their degree. **In 2015, more than 700 students received support** from the annual fund and other College sources.

→

The User's Guide to

being the best networker, tweeter, Facebooker, donor,
cheerleader, promoter, recruiter, mentor, supporter,
overall **most Excelsior-est alum ever!**



Connect with Excelsior at excelsior.edu/Alumni