

CONNECTIONS

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NICHOL KING '17 "Harlem's Banker"

Working to Close the Wealth Gap

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CHARTING A NEW COURSE

Meet SUNY Empire's New Leaders



EMPIRE STATE
UNIVERSITY

CONNECTIONS

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A Letter from — **PRESIDENT** **VOLLENDORF**



It is hard to believe that the final weeks of 2023 are upon us already. This has been an incredible year for me as president of this unique institution. Some highlights from the past year include our transition from college to university, the creation of our new strategic plan, and the opportunity to celebrate our past, present, and future at my inauguration in March. In keeping with our values and priorities, we have redoubled our commitment to student success, academic and inclusive excellence, organizational effectiveness, and elevating our public profile.

In that spirit, we have elevated the look and feel of our university magazine, *Connections*. Our fall issue contains expanded content that represents a wider swath of the Empire State University community — alumni, students, faculty, staff, and friends — and includes some new features as well.

The stories featured here embrace themes that have been important to us since our founding more than 50 years ago, stories about perseverance, belonging, and making a difference in the world.

You will find an inspiring interview with Assistant Professor Brian Frederick, Ph.D., a queer cultural criminologist and head of our criminal justice program. Brian studies crime and related topics impacting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer individuals and their communities. Sharing this piece makes me especially proud because Brian studied at Long Beach State University with one of my dear friends, at the same time I was on the faculty there.

This issue also features the work of Michelle Krul '23, Claudette Miller, and Regina Rodriguez,

students in Professor Karen Garner's American immigration course. Through their family history projects, Michelle shares the story of her great-grandfather's arrival in America from Poland, Claudette discusses the Great Migration of her grandfather from a southern plantation to Buffalo, NY, and Regina tells the story of her Italian family and how she came to be born in the U.S. These stories serve as powerful reminders of the importance of diversity and inclusion as our nation continues to grapple with these fundamental issues.

I hope you are inspired — as I was — by the profile of Nichol King '17. Nichol is the 2023 recipient of the university's Emerging Leader Award, which recognizes alumni who demonstrate leadership in their profession, community, or at SUNY Empire. Nichol is known as "Harlem's banker," and after reading this story, you'll understand why.

I look forward to another busy and rewarding year with you as we continue to work hard to advance our mission to serve learners of all ages through high-quality, flexible, and innovative education.

Warmly,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Lisa Vollendorf". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail on the last name.

Lisa Vollendorf, Ph.D.
President



THE BULLETIN



Nursing Simulation Receives Support

The State University of New York has awarded Empire State University \$80,000 to support high-needs nursing simulation as part of a student's training. The funds will help address the nursing workforce shortage, and the need to increase the number of qualified nurses entering the field.

Nursing students are allowed to complete up to a third of their clinical training using quality simulation experiences. The simulated experiences are subject to rigorous standards, oversight, and approval by the New York State Education Department.



Making Science More Inclusive

Empire State University hosted a gathering of 50 national participants in the Howard Hughes Medical Institute Inclusive Excellence 3 initiative in Rochester last summer. SUNY Empire was among the schools to receive a grant, which will be used to help make the introductory sciences more inclusive for historically underrepresented students. The grant — totaling \$531,600 over six years — will be used for faculty development, student engagement, and curricular change to create more engaging content.



NYS Offers Support for Addiction Studies

A new scholarship program created by the New York State Office of Addiction Services and Supports will provide \$5 million in scholarships to Empire State University students already working in the field who want to pursue advanced studies.

The program will give credentialed alcoholism and substance abuse counselors (CASAC) and credentialed prevention specialists (CPS) the opportunity to obtain a B.S. in addiction studies. The funds will help strengthen the addiction workforce, and support those impacted by the opioid and overdose epidemic.



Dorothy Burnham
(credit: Jeremy Driesen)



First Recipient of the Dorothy Burnham Scholarship

At the suggestion of alumnus Keith Amparado '88, the SUNY Empire Foundation has established a new scholarship honoring former Manhattan-based professor and scientist Dorothy Burnham, who turned 108 this year.

The first recipient is Courtney Stockmar from Ticonderoga, NY. She is pursuing an undergraduate degree in community and human services. After graduating, she plans to pursue a master's degree in applied behavior analysis and advocate for the rights of individuals with developmental disabilities.

The Dorothy Burnham Scholarship celebrates Burnham's legacy and accomplishments at SUNY Empire as well as her activism in the civil rights movement. The endowed scholarship was created through the generosity of former colleagues and friends and will be awarded to students studying in fields such as science, technology, and math; community and human services; and nursing and allied health, areas in which Burnham worked.

Burnham joined SUNY Empire in 1977 and retired in 2014, at the age of 99. She is an artist and splits her time between Brooklyn and Martha's Vineyard.



New Donor Community Membership

The Office for Advancement has a new donor community membership, Empire True. This exclusive group is comprised of dedicated supporters who showcase their unwavering commitment and loyalty to the university by generously donating for three consecutive years or participating in monthly giving.

Establishing a tradition of annual giving from our esteemed alumni, employees, and friends of the university is crucial to the success of SUNY Empire. This consistent funding plays a vital role in fostering student scholarships, providing faculty support, and ultimately enabling our students to achieve their dreams of becoming SUNY Empire graduates. With Empire True, donors not only contribute to SUNY Empire students' success, but also align with SUNY Empire's mission of delivering high-quality, accessible, and affordable education to all.

To make a gift, visit www.sunyempire.edu/giving.



Office of Opportunity Programs Receives IMPACT Grant

The Office of Opportunity Programs at Empire State University was awarded a \$10,000 Liaison IMPACT Grant to help fund student success initiatives. SUNY Empire was one of five universities out of 500 applications to receive a grant of \$5,000 to \$20,000. Grants were awarded to projects that:

- Impact historically underserved or underrepresented students
- Take an innovative approach to increasing student engagement, improve the student experience, and drive better student outcomes
- Are repeatable and sustainable

The Office of Opportunity Programs plans to use the grant to certify 10 students to become online student leaders and 10 more to become peer mentors, expanding academic coaching and embedded course support. Funds will also be used to set up a reserve for opportunity program students who have emergency needs for course supplies that pose a barrier to taking a class.



Three New Degree Programs

Empire State University launched three new degree programs this fall: Bachelor of Arts or Science in media arts, Bachelor of Science in public health, and Master of Public Administration.



Faihaa Yassin '23

“Lebanese students like me, we displayed incredible resilience and unity. We actively participated in protests, demanding social justice and economic reform. So, when all schools and universities closed [due to the revolution and COVID-19], we quickly adapted to online learning. After the Beirut Port explosion, young people volunteered in relief efforts showing solidarity.

These experiences taught us valuable lessons, such as perseverance, adaptability, and the results of connected action. So, passion for our studies and our collective purpose motivated us. We recognized the opportunities that education can make for us. It actually gave us a positive mindset and had a positive impact.” — **Faihaa Yassin '23, at commencement in Beirut, Lebanon**

CHARTING A NEW COURSE

We've changed our name, hired a new president, and launched a new strategic plan. Now, let's meet four individuals who will help usher SUNY Empire into a new era.



DOUG GRUSE
Chief Marketing Officer

Gruse comes to SUNY Empire from Russell Sage College, where he was senior director of marketing and communications. He is also a former director of marketing and communications at SUNY Adirondack and an award-winning journalist.

What energizes you about Empire State University?

Its strong history of innovation as an online institution positions it to be a leader in the evolution of higher education. We continue to innovate, with a focus on providing access for everyone.

What's the best part of your job?

I'm committed to marketing the university through authentic stories about our students, faculty, staff, and alumni. I'm a storyteller at heart.

What's your biggest challenge?

Marketing technology is evolving at a rapid pace, and I think it's important to keep up. I'm constantly learning and adapting to digital innovations.

What's your number one goal?

Throughout my career, I've worked to not only pursue my own dreams but to empower others to become the best version of themselves. As chief marketing officer, I make it my goal to connect people to an educational opportunity that can enable them to reach their goals.

What's the last book you read? The last TV show you binged?

I recently read "The Cabin at the End of the World" by Paul Tremblay, a horror novel about finding truth in the age of misinformation. For TV, I'm catching up with the last season of "Atlanta."



ANDREA HENNESSY
Vice President of Enrollment Management and Marketing

Hennessy joined SUNY Empire in the fall of 2016 as assistant vice president of enrollment management. She previously worked at Nyack College as academic dean and later, vice president of enrollment and marketing.

What energizes you about Empire State University?

The mission of access and inclusion. I am passionate about serving first-generation college students and people from different backgrounds. Our origin around innovation has put us in this place and enables us to serve an ever-changing student population.

What's the best part of your job?

This question is easy: the people I get to work with each day. The faculty and staff at SUNY Empire are dedicated and committed to our students, and I love collaborating with them to find new ways to better serve our students.

What's your biggest challenge?

Prioritizing opportunities, whether it be marketing, partnerships, or new student populations. There's so much we are and could be doing in service to not only New Yorkers, but folks across the globe.

What's your number one goal?

To make sure everyone in New York and beyond is aware that we offer quality online public higher education.

What's the last book you read? The last TV show you binged?

My latest book was "You Were There Too" by Colleen Oakley. And my latest TV show binge was "Succession."



MARLY NORRIS
Vice President of Advancement

Prior to joining SUNY Empire, Norris worked at Dominican University of California, where she was vice president for advancement and public affairs. She was previously associate vice president for corporate and foundation relations and associate vice president for principal and major gifts at University of San Francisco. She also held key development roles at Smithsonian Institution, University of California Berkeley, and the San Francisco Opera.

What energizes you about Empire State University?

I love that SUNY Empire is serious about diversity, equity, and inclusion and has been for decades – we truly meet students where they are.

What's the best part of your job?

The great stories from alumni about how the university changed their lives and watching graduates walk the stage with their kids (or grandkids!).

What's your biggest challenge?

Establishing alumni identity without a physical campus or an athletics program. Those are the tools traditionally used to keep alumni close, so we must be more creative than a residential university.

What's your number one goal?

To retire the phrase “best-kept secret” forever. SUNY Empire simply can't be a secret, so my goal is to get the word out to the community and to potential donors.

What's the last book you read? The last TV show you binged?

The last book is “Horse” by Geraldine Brooks (not a deliberate choice, but a fitting one for living in Saratoga Springs). The last TV show my husband and I binged was “The Diplomat.”



JULIETA MAJAK
Senior Vice President
of Administration
and Finance

Majak was previously the assistant vice president for administration and campus controller at SUNY New Paltz. She oversaw the college's fiscal operations, including procurement and contracting, accounting services, and accounts payable.

What energizes you about Empire State University?

Knowing that our mission is to empower learners from diverse backgrounds to achieve their educational goals. I believe we truly “level” the playing field and provide flexible, affordable, educational access for those who thought a college degree was out of their reach.

What's the best part of your job?

Going to commencements held throughout the state and seeing the impact that Empire State University has on graduates ranging in age from 17 to 80.

What's your biggest challenge?

Trying to be nimble and remain compliant as we work with and correctly interpret various state and federal policies and regulations, which tends to slow down our processes.

What's your number one goal?

To strengthen the administrative support we provide the campus community and maximize the impact of our fiscal resources so that students, faculty, and staff can focus on what they need to do to further the mission of Empire State University.

What's the last book you read? The last TV show you binged?

“Where the Crawdads Sing.” I received it over a year ago and finally had the time to read it. The last show I binged was “The Good Place” – I loved it!

“

I believe we truly ‘level’ the playing field and provide **flexible, affordable, and educational** access for those who thought a college degree was out of their reach. — Julieta Majak

”



FAMILY HISTORY COMES ALIVE IN THIS CLASS

By Winnie Yu

When Karen Garner, Ph.D., introduced the family migration project for her American Immigration course in the spring of 2022, she wanted students to develop an emotional understanding of immigration by delving into their own histories.

“I created this project in line with the course outcomes, which is to understand the processes involved in international migration, and how, when, and why different immigrant groups came to the United States in broad and general ways,” says Garner, who teaches historical studies.

“I knew that this could be a way to understand some of the personal struggles and hopes and dreams that each immigrant group has felt.”

Here’s what three students learned about their families.



As a child, **Michelle Krul '23** never gave much thought to her great-grandfather Jan (later changed to John) Pich. He was a quiet man, who had come to America from Poland in 1907 at the age of 16.

"I didn't know anything about Jan," Krul says. "Initially, I felt there was nothing unique or interesting about his story."

Her classmates thought otherwise, especially when she mentioned that he had lost five fingers due to hazardous work conditions at a factory in Rome, NY. "I was surprised at the level of class interest and participation," Krul says. "I decided he shouldn't be forgotten."

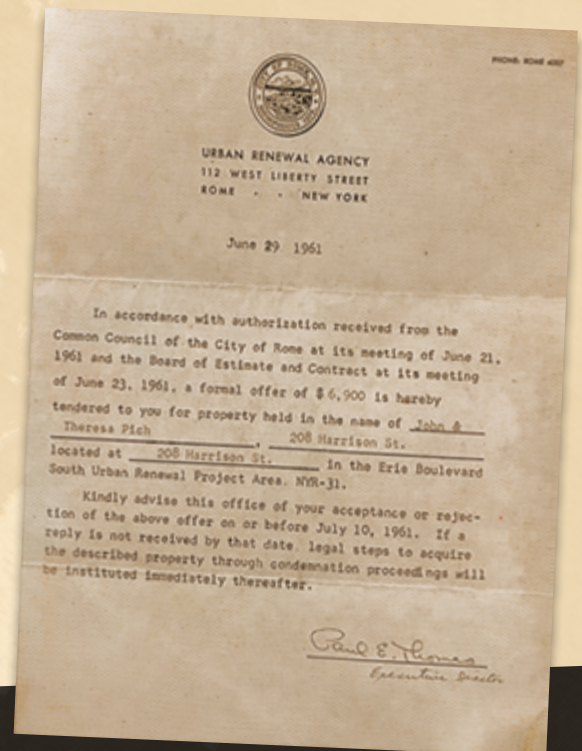
"If I hadn't taken this course and completed this project, his story would have been lost forever." *Michelle Krul '23*

Doing the research taught Krul about her great-grandfather's journey to the U.S. as well as the everyday lives of her ancestors. The most surprising thing she learned was how much Jan encouraged his wife, daughter, and granddaughters to be strong, independent women, a tidbit she learned from oral histories told to her by Jan's grandchildren, now all in their 80s.

"If I hadn't taken this course and completed this project, his story would have been lost forever," she says.



Michelle Krul, center, with her great-grandparents and siblings in the mid-1960s.



✓ Jan Pich and his wife, Teresa, with their two children. Teresa was a housekeeper who wrote poetry she read on the local radio station. The little girl is Frances, Krul's grandmother, and the boy is John Pich II, her great uncle.



Now known as John, Pich and his wife got the deed to their house in 1922. They were forced to sell the house in 1961 as part of the city's urban renewal project. The notice above shows the city used eminent domain to purchase the property for \$6,900.



Rodriguez's maternal grandmother, Regina Galiano, and paternal grandfather, Gerardo Galiano, (not related) in Mercato San Severino.



Regina Rodriguez believes she's an American because of two key events in her family's story: the few years her paternal great-grandparents spent living in the U.S. and the death of her maternal great-grandmother.

Domenico and Carmela, Rodriguez's paternal great-grandparents, came to Buffalo, NY, in 1910. While in Buffalo, their two eldest children, Earnest and Lucia, were born. Domenico and Carmela returned to Italy and had four more children, including Rodriguez's grandmother Onorina. "Without Earnest and Lucia being citizens, they would never have been able to sponsor two of their sisters to come to America, including my grandmother Onorina," Rodriguez says. "My father Walter, and his parents would settle in the Bronx."

Decades later, in 1973, Rodriguez's mother, Paola, suffered the loss of her beloved grandmother. At the time, Paola was engaged to a lawyer in Italy. As a way to cheer her up, Paola's father bought her a plane ticket to visit their family friend, Gerardo Galiano, in the U.S.

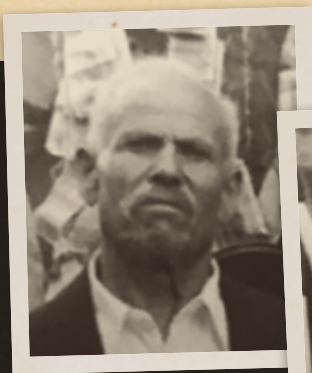
"(My mom) made it a priority for us children to understand we were equally American and Italian." Regina Rodriguez

"My mother arrived at John F. Kennedy Airport on June 7, 1973, and was met by my father, whom his parents had sent to pick up their visitor," Rodriguez says. "The rest is history; they were married that following January. Had my great-grandmother passed after my mother was married, then there was a chance my parents might never have met."

Although Paola spoke fluent English and loved her adopted country, Italy was always her home. "She made it a priority for us children to understand we were equally American and Italian."

Paola remained a permanent resident of the U.S. for almost 50 years. "She always half-joked, 'I am not an immigrant. I'm here on vacation,'" Rodriguez says. "After 49 years, four children, and nine grandchildren, she finally became a U.S. citizen on May 27, 2022, at the age of 71."

The project made Rodriguez "prouder than ever" of her family for their strength and courage to relocate to another country and their determination to remain close. "This project also reminded me how much I miss my grandparents as well as my great aunts and uncles," she says.



➤ Domenico Fimiani, Rodriguez's great-grandfather, first came through Ellis Island in 1906. He married Carmela Capuano in Italy in 1908. They returned to the U.S. two years later and settled temporarily in Buffalo, NY, where they had two of their six children.



Miller's grandfather George Walter Miller worked on the Wilson Dam in Colbert County, AL, in 1918. Shown here is the starting foundation. (Alabama Archives)



Claudette Miller didn't meet her biological family until she was a teenager. "I remember my grandfather George Walter Miller sitting at the dining room table trying to remember his grandchildren and who they belonged to as they were running in and out of the house," she says. "I was curious to know who this man was who spoke with a very thick accent."

With only two uncles remaining from her father's generation, Miller set out to learn what she could about her grandfather and how he wound up in Buffalo, NY. "My grandfather never told his children that he lived on a plantation in Savannah, GA," she says. "He told them he traveled from Jamaica at the age of 15 to the U.S."

In fact, George Miller came north

"I was curious to know who this man was who spoke with a very thick accent." Claudette Miller

Miller says doing the project taught her how African Americans migrated from one state to another and were able to survive, and that heading north was the best option for better opportunities. "It helped me to grow in knowing the truth of who I am and where I came from and how I can share this information with younger members of my family," she says.



TALKING TRUE CRIME WITH BRIAN FREDERICK

▲ *Frederick has frequently appeared as a subject matter expert on the true crime drama “Meet, Marry, Murder.” He has also been featured on “Making a Serial Killer.”*

By the time Brian Frederick, Ph.D., arrived at Empire State University in the summer of 2022, the Los Angeles native had been a Hollywood talent agent, worked on a major motion picture, and established themselves as an activist in the LGBTQ+ community.

The desire to do something more meaningful sent Frederick, who uses the pronoun “they,” to college. After completing their doctorate in cultural and global criminology in Europe in 2016, they taught criminology and criminal justice in the U.K. and lectured throughout the U.S. and Europe.

Today, they’re a leading authority on queer criminology, the study of crime against and by LGBTQ+ individuals. In addition to teaching and heading up SUNY Empire’s B.S. in criminal justice program, they frequently appear as a subject matter expert on true crime TV shows and continue to work as an activist.

We caught up with Brian Frederick to discuss their many roles.

How did you become a subject matter expert (SME) on TV shows?

A colleague at the University of Gloucestershire, Jane Monckton-Smith, wrangled me into it. One of the U.K.’s — if not the world’s — leading experts on intimate partner homicide (IPH) and coercive control, Jane was working with a U.K.-based true crime production

company on the TV series “Meet, Marry, Murder” and asked if I’d be interested in being an SME for 20 episodes that examined U.S. cases of IPH. The same production company approached me a year after filming to ask if I’d be interested in working on their new project, “Making a Serial Killer.” I was thrilled to accept.

Where did your interest in criminology come from?

I’d worked in the entertainment industry for about 13 years — first as a talent agent assistant and then a talent agent — but grew disillusioned by what I saw as backstabbing and petty in-fighting. One of the more memorable experiences I had, though, was working as an assistant to the producer of “Se7en,” a 1995 film starring Brad Pitt and Morgan Freeman, about two detectives hunting a serial killer who uses the seven deadly sins as his motives. Not long after filming “Se7en,” I decided on a career change that would “give something back,” so I left Hollywood in my early 30s and began training at Fullerton College.

What’s the most shocking thing you’ve learned about serial killers?

The realization that serial killers can often appear to be ordinary individuals. In fact, we often hear news reports of people who knew them say, “He seemed so normal.” Serial killers are not always the stereotypical “monsters” portrayed in movies or TV shows. Many of them are able to blend in with society, maintain relationships, and even hold down jobs, which makes them even more chilling.

Does that mean we could meet a serial killer and not know it?

The FBI estimates there are 25 to 50 active serial killers at any given time. Given the population of the U.S., the chances that someone may unknowingly meet a serial killer are thus extremely low.

Are LGBTQ+ people at greater risk for violence?

LGBTQ+ individuals can face increased vulnerability due to stigma, discrimination, and marginalization. They may lack social support and access to resources and be hesitant about reporting crimes to law enforcement due to concerns about bias or insensitivity. Of course, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and geographic location can also play a role.

Ultimately, it's important to approach the study of violent crimes in the LGBTQ+ community with sensitivity, without reinforcing stereotypes or assumptions. By being more sensitive to the experiences of the LGBTQ+ community and the complexities of different gender identities and sexual orientations, we can gain a better understanding

of the root causes of violence among these individuals and thus promote safer and more inclusive communities for all.

How do violent crimes differ in the LGBTQ+ community, both in terms of the perpetrator and the victim?

Perpetrators can include both individuals within and outside the LGBTQ+ community. In some cases, violence is carried out by individuals who harbor irrational fears and biases against LGBTQ+ individuals. These hate crimes are a distressing reality, and they can be committed by both strangers and acquaintances.

Intimate partner violence (IPV) also occurs within LGBTQ+ relationships. However, certain unique factors can influence IPV in the LGBTQ+ community. For example, so-called “normal” male-female gender roles can impact a relationship’s power dynamics and expectations. Internalized homophobia or transphobia — such as when LGBTQ+ people think that being non-heterosexual is somehow “wrong” or “immoral” — can also affect an individual’s self-esteem, communication, and coping mechanisms.

“People have always been fascinated by the darker aspects of life. True crime stories provide **a glimpse into the minds of criminals** and the motives behind their actions.”



▲ Frederick and Josh Boardman, SUNY Empire’s interim director of student engagement, participated in the AIDS Walk New York last spring.

Why are people so fascinated with true crime?

First and foremost, morbid curiosity. People have always been fascinated by the darker aspects of life. True crime stories provide a glimpse into the minds of criminals and the motives behind their actions. Second, people seek the thrill and suspense of true crime stories, which often involve suspenseful narratives, unexpected twists, and high-stakes investigations. Others want to understand the motives, actions, and consequences of criminal behavior. By “studying” true crime cases, some individuals may gain insights into the human mind and society as a whole.

Does all the time you spend teaching, researching, and studying the dark side of humanity get to you?

On the contrary. I feel safer because I’ve been able to dispel many of the myths around crime and policing.

NICHOL KING '17: "HARLEM'S BANKER" WORKS TO CLOSE THE WEALTH GAP

By Winnie Yu

Twenty years ago, Nichol King '17 and Tami Green met at a hair salon. "We sat next to each other under the hair dryer and instantly clicked," Green says. "Since that day, she became my little sister."

This year, Green nominated King for Empire State University's Emerging Leader Award. The alumni award recognizes someone who graduated within the last five years and demonstrates leadership in their profession, community, or Empire State University.

Green says she nominated her longtime friend in honor of "Nichol's heart, inspiring nature, determination, and outstanding leadership qualities." "Since I have known her, I've always observed that she's a go-getter and eager to help others," Green says. "Despite personal tragedies and obstacles throughout her career, she persevered."



Tami Green, left, nominated her friend Nichol King '17 for an alumni award.

of a meeting one day, she invited the manager to her Martini Thursdays. "I told him it was a meeting of people who were centers of influence and people with disposable income and he said, 'You should be a banker,'" she recalls. "I took my last unemployment check to Ann Taylor and got a black suit and lifts for my shoes. I said, 'I'm going to look the part.'"

King did more than look the part — she got it. She started in consumer banking on 125th Street in Harlem then moved to the bank's Business Banking team. She began to get a reputation for helping people improve their financial health. In 2016, U.S. Congressman Charles Rangel designated January 15 "Nichol King Day." "It was based on my passion to improve the financial health of individuals, families, and small businesses everywhere, especially in Harlem," she says.



BUILDING TRUST

But it was in her next role as JPMorgan Chase's first-ever community manager, where King made her biggest mark. After 17 interviews and against 32 contenders, King got the job in 2019.



UP THE BANKING LADDER

These days, her career struggles are a distant memory. King is known as "Harlem's Banker," a moniker she earned by working her way up the ranks of JPMorgan Chase, where she is now the executive director for community banking for the Northeast division.

King, who has a B.S. in business, management, and economics from SUNY Empire, started her career in the petroleum industry but was laid off in 2007 due to cutbacks. That year, she also lost her mother, bought a house, and launched Miss King Productions, an events management firm that hosted networking mixers for young professionals.

Once a month, she'd go to Chase to pay her mortgage and look at her investments. At the end

King was tasked with piloting a new community banking model in Harlem. As the liaison between the Harlem community and the nation's largest bank, King became the local ambassador for JPMorgan Chase. She had three goals: to build trust with the residents of Harlem, educate them about financial well-being with access to resources, and make it easy for them to do business with JPMorgan Chase.

"Historically, there's not been a lot of trust in banks in Black and brown communities," she says. "And we didn't grow up talking about finances at the dinner table."

King says even her own understanding of finances had been lagging. She thought budgets were restricting, not empowering, and had no idea that credit was essential to building wealth. "And I didn't know about investing and why it's important to invest as opposed to keeping money in the bank," she says.

“ I took my last unemployment check to Ann Taylor and got a black suit and lifts for my shoes. I said, 'I'm going to look the part.'”

- Nichol King '17

King set out to change that. As community manager, she held financial health workshops all around Harlem, teaching people about how to create a budget, invest, and save for retirement. King says she wasn't selling products to the community but doing what was best for them.

"We believe if we do the right thing by the community, then they will come," she says. "The goal is to advance minority communities and close the racial wealth gap."

In the process, King developed the prototype for the role of community manager. "I knew I was writing the playbook for this position," she says. "They've since opened 16 community centers across the country and hired 150 community managers."



SPREADING THE WEALTH

King is hoping to provide more financial planning services in the future, on topics such as investments, insurance, and estate planning. She's working toward a master's in personal finance from the College of Financial Planning and plans to take the exam to become a certified financial planner in March 2024.

People like Green already know what King can do. With King's help, Green overcame her compulsive spending. "The biggest problem I have is that whenever I'm stressed, I shop a great deal to feel better," says Green, a ticket agent for Metro-North Railroad. "Unfortunately, I would spend my entire paycheck without saving anything. That's my biggest fear, to retire and have nothing to show for all the money I've made."

With King's guidance, Green has learned to set a budget, create goals, and map out a two-year plan. "I now make more confident financial decisions and focus on the long-term benefits of saving, rather than spending for instant gratification," Green says. "Having received Nichol's assistance, I'm almost able to pay a down payment on a home. I am extremely grateful to her."



In Harlem, Nichol King '17 is known for helping people improve their financial health.

HOW YOU DO UNIVERSITY

ON YOUR SCHEDULE. ON YOUR TIME.

Kate

SUNY'S LEADING ONLINE UNIVERSITY

EMPIRE STATE UNIVERSITY

GIVEN THE OPPORTUNITY

By Lindsey Clark

At Empire State University, we don't just want our students to succeed — we make sure they do. That's where our opportunity programs come in, providing support and assistance to underserved students who show promise.

"SUNY Empire's opportunity programs exist for the sole purpose of making sure that all students can succeed regardless of their challenges, be they financial, academic, emotional, or logistical," says Dana Brown, senior director of enrichment and opportunity programs. "Whether they need extra tutoring, a laptop, or financial assistance, my staff and I are here to work with each individual student to ensure they have what they need to succeed at SUNY Empire."

Here's how four students thrived with help from these programs:

Kiearra Edwards, Bronx, NY

"Coming into this world, I knew I had three strikes against me: I was black, I was female, and I was poor. I knew I couldn't do anything about being black and female, but I could do something about being poor, and I found that something in education.

"I went from going away to college to dealing with the sudden death of my stepfather. My mother and little sister are all that I have, but it knocked all three of us off our feet. I felt that I lost every form of support that I ever had in my life. Even though we were around each other every day, each of our brains was wandering in our own blank space.

"I thought it was over for me until

my faith, determination, and grit placed me in front of SUNY Empire's doorstep and introduced me to the Educational Opportunity Program. The EOP became the foundation for my newfound confidence.

"Since my enrollment, they have made it their business to incorporate students like me into the mix. They keep me up to date with all things college, so my financial aid and course registration are completed on time. They constantly reassured me that I am on track and making progress toward better things in life. The EOP team has done nothing but give me the utmost support, and because of them, I am where I am now."



Educational Opportunity Program
Full-time Student



Empire State Opportunity Program
Graduate Student

Lisa Brandler '23, Spring Valley, NY

"The ESOP team supported my education and social goals, was there when I needed help, and gave me confidence because they had confidence in me. They set me up with a learning coach for study skills and time management to help manage school with my ADHD. And the ESOP staff held monthly meetings, where they discussed things happening at the school, the information we needed to know,

and tips to succeed.

"I was inspired to try new things, like becoming a student senator for the Student Government Association and becoming the first president of the Active Minds club. I would not have been nearly as successful, nor graduated summa cum laude, without Dana Brown and her team's amazing support. I developed a great relationship with her and asked her to write a recommendation for me for graduate school."

Donna Martini '23, Oyster Bay, NY

"After the pandemic, my then-current career had nearly stopped, and I knew I would need more education to continue supporting myself. So, in the summer of my 60th year, I decided to go to college. For many my age, this is a daunting task. But with learning disabilities, Crohn's disease, and some horrible memories of earlier school experiences, it can be terrifying.

"Still, I Googled 'SUNY online psychology degree' and landed on SUNY Empire's website. With nothing to lose and everything to gain, I contacted the admissions office and was led to opportunity programs. They helped me navigate the website, apply for loans, obtain

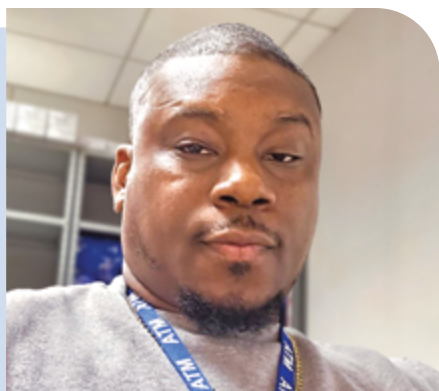
life credit, and find tutors. They even gave me a scholarship.

"From then on, my fear waned, and my confidence gained. ESOP was much more than an opportunity to me. It was a gift that helped me step into the role of student, one I took very seriously. For 20 months, I poured everything I had into my assignments and graduated last May, summa cum laude.

"Looking back, I see how afraid and overwhelmed I was initially, but ESOP kept me calm enough to keep moving forward and excited enough to keep pursuing my goals. I could imagine a very different outcome without my mentor, the staff, and their support. Thankfully, I don't have to."



Empire State Opportunity Program
Wellness Coach and Writer



Empire Promise Program
Administrative Assistant
at MTA Headquarters

Daniel Rose, Brooklyn, NY

"My experience at Empire State University has been amazing, challenging, and, best of all, eye-opening. This comes from a 40-year-old with a beautiful wife and two young children, who has always had a fear of furthering my education. The natural anxieties of 'mental ring rust' had me stuck in a fixed mindset about college.

"However, after finally deciding to bet on myself, I not only passed all my classes for the first and

second semesters, but I also made the dean's list in my first semester, proving to myself that I have what it takes to apply myself and be successful at SUNY Empire. Though challenging, the advice and encouragement I received from my mentor, instructors, and learning coaches — along with the college essay-writing and wellness workshops, and laptop loaner program — provide me with all the resources I need to move forward with my academic endeavors."



EMPIRE STATE UNIVERSITY HAS THREE OPPORTUNITY PROGRAMS:

- **SUNY Educational Opportunity Program (EOP)** is a program for full-time, first-time freshmen and full-time opportunity program transfer students.
- **Empire State Opportunity Program (ESOP)** targets full-time and part-time transfer students.
- **Empire Promise Program (EPP)** is geared to first-time freshmen, continuing students, and transfer students.



THIS FALL, SUNY EMPIRE LAUNCHED TWO NEW PROGRAMS:

- **The Military and Veteran Opportunity Program** provides wrap-around support services for military-affiliated and veteran students.
- **The Presidential Scholars Program** offers scholarships and support for transfer students who have already completed their associate degree, thanks to the generosity of donors and support from the SUNY Empire Foundation Board.

BRIAN SHERMAN '17

FORMER STUDENT UNRETIREES AT HIS ALMA MATER By Stephen Parato

IF YOU'RE LOOKING FORWARD TO RETIRING, DOUGLAS "BRIAN" SHERMAN '17 MIGHT CHANGE YOUR PLANS.

In 2021, at 60, Sherman retired from his job as chief warrant officer in the New York Army National Guard where he did recruitment and retention. His work involved helping military members advance in their careers, which often included higher education. He was also a combat veteran, who had served in the U.S. Marines, the U.S. Army, and the U.S. Army Reserves, with two tours of duty in Afghanistan.

In retirement, he became a post commander for American Legion Post 1461 in Galway, NY, and joined the Electric City Chorus, a men's a cappella barbershop group. His home and family life were busy too. Sherman is a husband, father of eight, and owner of five acres, as well as an avid cyclist who exercises every day.

Sherman soon realized that traditional retirement was not for him. "Retirement for most people is a final event," Sherman says. "For me, it was an awakening that life is continuous and that I am still marketable and relevant."



RETURNING TO THE WORKFORCE

Last March, Sherman became the military outreach and enrollment supervisor in the Office of Veteran and Military Education (OVME) at Empire State University. Sherman is part of a trend called unretirement, people who rejoin the workforce after retiring. Whether driven by financial or personal reasons, about 3.2 percent of people who said they retired a year ago were back in the labor market in March 2022, according to a survey by Indeed.com, the hiring site.

In addition to his military career, Sherman had worked in the private sector in the wireless technology industry, where his jobs varied from field technician and trainer to project manager and technical manager.

His combined military and private-industry experience made him a great fit for his job at SUNY Empire. For Sherman, the motivation was inspired in part by something he heard more than 40 years ago: "The day I stop learning is the day I die." The phrase stuck with him, and the "always learning" mentality has been a driving force in his life.



FINISHING THE MISSION

Sherman had taken college courses at age 18 while in the Marines but college was not a priority at that time. At age 56, he was ready. In 2014, Sherman began his lasting partnership with SUNY Empire when he decided to finish his bachelor's degree in business, management, and economics.

Once he decided to earn his degree, he hit the ground running, graduating with a 3.96 GPA. Sherman was one of the first students inducted into the SALUTE Veterans National Honor Society, which recognizes the service and academic accomplishments of veterans and military service members. He also received SUNY Empire's 2021 Veteran Service Alumni Award.

One thing the military taught him was to follow through — to work on a mission until it's complete. He did that with his college degree, and now he's back at SUNY Empire to fulfill his calling to help others and keep learning.



By Julianna Klein

HELPING NEURODIVERSE STUDENTS FEEL AT HOME

Empire State University
pioneers support beyond the classroom

Jo Young '23 has been experiencing neurodiversity all her life but didn't know it until she started attending Empire State University. Her Opportunity Program mentor was the first to suggest that she might benefit from getting evaluated, which led to a diagnosis for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, or ADHD — and a feeling of relief.

"I could recognize that it was a constant issue in my life," Young says. "But for someone else to see that and tell me I might benefit from [accommodations] was really impactful."

Her positive experiences didn't end there. Her professors helped with classroom accommodations, and her tutor, originally scheduled to work with her for only a semester, assisted with applications for graduate school and scholarships.

"I've been graced with a lot of good people at SUNY Empire," Young says.

Building an Inclusive Culture

According to the College Autism Network, there are only about 100 college programs in the U.S. for students with autism; many require disclosing a diagnosis and paying additional fees. Few offer the comprehensive support that SUNY Empire's Center for Autism Advocacy: Research, Education and Supports (CAARES) does.

CAARES was founded in 2020 and focuses on creating a culture where everyone feels at home. Instead of providing only individual accommodations for neurodiverse people, CAARES aims for built-in supports that benefit all, making access more equitable.

Neurodiversity is an umbrella term for differences in the way people learn and interact with their environment, and includes autism, ADHD, obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD), anxiety, and depression. Neurodiverse students often face more challenges in educational settings, especially as they transition to college. Increased socialization, need for self-advocacy, and self-management — all in a new environment — can be difficult or impossible, leading to lower graduation and employment rates.



Shannon
Mulstay '22

"By developing an inclusive environment, we're focusing on creating proactive, universal supports," says Noor Syed, the Susan H. Turben director of autism advocacy and director of CAARES. "What's unique about CAARES is that rather than developing a program for the student to better adapt to fit the institution, we're trying to change the institution itself."

Community Impact

CAARES has established mandatory university supports and annual training about neurodivergence for employees as well as peer mentorship and workforce development programs for students. In 2022, Anderson Center for Autism designated SUNY Empire a first-of-its-kind autism-supportive college. The center, which is based in Staatsburg, NY, has existed for nearly a century and provides services to people with autism.

SUNY Empire's welcoming environment is increasingly apparent. When Shannon Mulstay '22 started her bachelor's degree in 2014, she said neurodiversity wasn't widely recognized in society or academia.

"It's becoming more acceptable for neurodivergent students to step out of the shadows and proudly proclaim 'This is who I am,' without ridicule," Mulstay says. "I spent years hiding not only my mental illness but my epilepsy, not wishing to be labeled. We are learning as a community and society that disabilities do not demean or prevent us from being active members of society."

Syed has seen this, too. "Since CAARES started, we've seen an increase in people sharing with us that they are neurodivergent, autistic, or have other types of support needs," Syed says. "They feel more comfortable because they know that this is the movement that SUNY Empire is making."



ALUMNI NOTES



1970s

Jennifer Manocherian '74, a family therapist, divorce mediator, and Broadway producer, has published her first novel titled "Alpha Bette" (River Grove Books), about love, loss, and learning to let go.

1980s

Sarah Schulman '85 won the 2022 Lambda Literary Award for Nonfiction for her book, "Let the Record Show: A Political History of ACT UP New York, 1987-1993." The book was named a finalist by the PEN/John Kenneth Galbraith Awards.



Daniel Brown '87 of Red Hook, NY, has published "Family Portraits in Verse" (Epigraph Publishing), a collection of his poetry and writings with family photos.

Elliott Murphy '88 is doing concerts in conjunction with the release of his new EP "Wonder-Full."

1990s

Sharon Waagner '90 is a volunteer librarian for the Five Points Arts Center in Torrington, CT. The center's library was named in her honor as the Sharon Flannery Waagner Library.

Alison D. Gilbert '92 is a writer and entrepreneur who has a blog at alisondgilbert.com. The blog features the seven topics of her career, including finance, healthy food systems, and consciousness and spirituality.

Allen Nace '94, '04 is the CEO of Child and Family Guidance Centers/Step One, an addiction treatment and mental health services agency with locations in Highland, Kingston, and Ellenville, NY.

James Navetta '94, '09 recently published a book titled "Débonnaire Dog and Friends" (Austin Macauley) that teaches young readers about classical art. The first in the series explores the famous caves of Lascaux. Navetta is a certified engineer with the American Society for Quality and has been published in their magazine, Quality Progress.

Hakim S. El-Quhir '95 retired from the New York City Department of Correction as a warden. In October 2022, he wrote a novel titled "Gale: The Time Transport Man" (Page Publishing).



Mary C. Dahl '96 has earned an M.A. in integrative health and healing from The Graduate Institute. Since retiring from her 35-year career in student services in higher education, she has been working as an independent integrative mental health consultant.

Joseph Neil Glasgow '96 is a project management consultant in Statesville, NC, and has written a book titled "Surviving in a Buoyant Economy" (Dorrance Publishing).

Philip Morehouse '96 of Mineral Springs, NC, is a freelance technical writer who's working on his 20th novel.

Obed Figueroa '97, '00 has published his second children's book, "Marcus Shares His Friends' Interests in STEAM" (Austin Macauley Publishers).

2000s

Deanna Lynne Lothrop '02 is the coordinator of the Collegiate Science Technology Engineering Program (C-STEP) at Jefferson Community College, where she has been a full-time staff member since 2012.

Francesca Rizzo '09 had a story published in the Metropolitan Diary section of The New York Times.

Christopher Sapienza '09, a former U.S. marine and Gulf War veteran, is the police commissioner in Yonkers, NY. He met President Biden during a visit to New York City.



David Sherrin '09 has published a children's book titled "Big Bad Wolf's Yom Kippur" (Honey & Apples Press), which was a PJ Library selection in August.

2010s

Jeri Milan '13 has opened her own law firm, The Journey Law Group, which is dedicated to helping immigrants. The firm is based in New York City, with offices in Los Angeles and the Philippines.

Leon Summers '14 wrote and directed a play titled "Ella: First Lady of Song," for which he won an AUDELCO award for best director of a musical.



Rafael Roger '15, '21 was accepted into the inaugural class of National Association for Latino Community Asset Builder's new Latino Executive Advancement & Development (LEAD) Fellowship. Roger, executive director of the Business Initiative Corporation of New York, was among nine Latino nonprofit leaders selected for this

prestigious yearlong leadership development program presented in partnership with the Cisneros Hispanic Leadership Institute at George Washington University.

Kristina Kwacz '17 presented "Exploring Cultural Identity via Family Photographs" at the Polish American Historical Association Annual Conference in Philadelphia, PA. She also did a presentation on "Power, Propaganda, & Putinism: Lessons from the Stalinist Era" at the Association of Graduate Liberal Studies Programs Conference Coda: Continuing the Conversation.

Elena O'Connor '17, '23 performed the lead role in Giuseppe Verdi's "Aida," which was staged by the Finger Lakes Opera Company at the Rochester Broadway Theatre League Auditorium last summer.

Roberta Tamika McCulloch-Dews '18 has been named vice president of marketing at Greylock Federal Credit Union in Pittsfield, MA.

Jonathan Campano '19, now a member of the Screen Actors Guild, has appeared on camera in more than 25 productions. Recently, he served on the 29th Annual SAG Awards Motion Picture Nominating Committee and can be spotted as a penguin in "Hocus Pocus 2."

2020s

Laticha Brown '20 has been promoted from assistant professor to associate professor in the Fashion Business Management Department of the Jay and Patty Baker School of Business and Technology at SUNY's Fashion Institute of Technology.

Jasenya McCauley '20, '21 is a wardrobe stylist and owner of Styld n' EMRGD, a creative company that provides image consulting, fashion styling, and wardrobe management.

Toni Taylor '21, '22 is the chief program officer for Recovery Options Made Easy, a peer-run nonprofit providing supportive housing, respite, and recovery services in 10 counties across Western NY and the Finger Lakes.

Robert Doss '21, has been named deputy commissioner of emergency services and police liaison in Orange County, NY.

Jahmel Samuels '21 has been named the women's basketball head coach at Louisiana State University at Eunice.

IN MEMORIAM

This list includes updates on alumni and other members of the Empire State University community as reported by family members, newspapers, and other sources. To submit a name, please contact alumni@sunyempire.edu.

Jane W. Altes

April J. Anastasia '95

Eunice S. Antonucci '79

Florence Bahr

Doris S. Bell '85

Elma Boyko

Elizabeth Breen '91

Clayton P. Bronson '10

Paul Calabrese '87

Marilyn Chapman '06, '11

Albert Cotto '13, '14

John F. Desio '06

Janie K. Dodoo '86

Josephine Doherty '00

Michael Dorto '14

Eleanor J. Dun '73

Muriel Fickler '85

Gary D. Finch '90

Maureen A. Flynn '96

Mary E. Fritz '85

Steven Gokey '17, '20

Margaret E. Green-Witt '84

Quentin J. Hanrahan '78

Selwyn E. Harlow Sr. '78

Phillip J. Harper '77

Donald L. Hay '01

Jeremy Jones

William R. King II '74

Patrick D. Lamb '79

Josephine M. Lombardo '75

Paul A. Moore '79

Donald W. Nealon '78

Sandra L. Neighbour

Evelyn F. Nelson '79

Ann L. Nevitt '76

Dean Patsalos '08, '09

Carmen Reichelt '98

Paul G. Reile '88

Carol B. Rice '85

Anne Santino '89

Michael Van Strien '07

T. Urling Walker

Lynae E. Warren

Carol L. Wurster '78



"Education should help you fulfill and expand your life as SUNY Empire did for me. It can really make a difference in someone's life."

-Jeffrey B. Pascal '90, '92



The Boyer Legacy Society honors Dr. Ernest L. Boyer and his vision of accessible and affordable higher education for students of all ages and backgrounds.

Membership is open to all who notify us of their decision to include the university in their estate plans.

Contact Toby Tobrocke (Toby.Tobrocke@sunyempire.edu) to explore ways you can support the future of Empire State University.

Visit www.sunyempire.edu/plangifts or scan the QR code to learn more.





VIEWPOINT By Heather M. Reynolds, Ph.D.

KEEPING OUR SCHOOLS SAFE FOR ALL

It was 2018, and I was in the middle of a three-year term on my local school board in Saratoga Springs, NY, when the tragic mass school shootings in Parkland, FL, and Santa Fe, TX, happened. Local reactions to these tragedies in my small suburban community were swift, with demands for metal detectors, increased police presence, and armed security in schools. The community response reflected the national push for more funding for law enforcement in schools, arming teachers or other school staff, and increasing the use of technology for security purposes based on the perception that schools are “soft” targets. But does having more security and armed personnel on our school campuses really make students safer?

In fact, security upgrades and increases in policing alone do little to prevent school shootings and do not positively impact overall feelings of safety within a school community. Evidence shows that school policing has a disproportionately negative impact on students of color and students with disabilities. According to the U.S. Department of Education Office for Civil Rights, although Black students make up 15 percent of student enrollment, they represent 32 percent of students subjected to school-related arrests. In addition, arrest rates for students with disabilities increase exponentially when police are present on campus. Rather than focus on more restorative approaches that can disrupt discrepancies in discipline, many districts continue to utilize policies and practices that are harmful to students based on their race and disability status.

As a professor and researcher, I’ve spent years working on evidence-based strategies to address school and community safety. More than ever, school safety policies need to shift from a strong focus on “hardening” practices (such as more police and metal detectors) to practices and policies that foster a positive and supportive school community.

Recent post-pandemic data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention shows that nationally, students are suffering from high rates of anxiety, hopelessness, and suicidality. Among teen girls and LGBTQ+ students the rates are staggering. The National Association of School Psychologists recommends that the ratio of school psychologists to students be at least one for every 500 students. As of 2021, only one state has met this recommendation. This pervasive lack of personnel and funding for social, emotional, and mental health supports in many schools comes at a time when students need them most.

“More than ever, school safety policies need to shift from a strong focus on ‘hardening’ practices to practices and policies that foster a positive and supportive school community.”

Evidence shows that schools with positive and welcoming climates that use fair, nonpunitive disciplinary policies have happier and healthier students who feel safe, are less likely to be victimized, and have better academic outcomes. Money, time, and resources are wasted when districts focus on a narrow definition of school safety and don’t seek input from all school stakeholders about a broad range of safety needs. Encouraging discussion and partnerships around school safety is key to creating and sustaining holistic, evidence-based, financially viable, and relevant school-safety solutions that work for all district stakeholders and, most importantly, our children.

+ Heather M. Reynolds is a professor of teacher education in the School for Graduate Studies at Empire State University, where her research focuses on creating safe, engaging, and welcoming school and classroom environments. She was appointed to the Restorative Justice Panel in Saratoga Springs earlier this year.



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For questions, contact alumni@sunyempire.edu

