

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Dear SUNY Empire Alumni and Friends,

It is hard to believe that nearly a year already has passed since the last Update newsletter. Since then, we shifted from Empire State College to Empire State University, settled into our brand as SUNY's leading online university, and finalized a strategic plan that will shape and inform our work for the next five years.

Since the unveiling of our strategic plan, Elevate '28, in March, faculty and staff from across the university have been hard at work creating objectives, goals, and tactics to support our four priorities. We are now in the implementation phase, and we look forward to advancing our work in student success, academic and inclusive excellence, organizational effectiveness, and raising our public profile. You can read all about it at www.sunyempire.edu/president/vision.

In July, I attended my second Alumni Day at the Races, which took me to the beautiful Saratoga Race Course for the second time. I was thrilled to be joined by SUNY Chancellor John B. King, who spent the day speaking with and learning from our alumni and staff. I thoroughly enjoyed this daylong opportunity to connect with our alumni.

This fall, I spent time traveling the state and country to meet with elected officials, CEOs, journalists, and colleagues across higher education to bring more recognition to Empire State University as a leader in serving learners of all ages. I joined SUNY alumni and colleagues on Capitol Hill during SUNY DC Days in September. SUNY Empire is in a great position in terms of enrollments and fiscal health. Every day I am energized by the possibilities and look forward to doing the work necessary to establish name recognition proportional to our impact. I attended a conference focused on public-private partnerships and innovation in higher education. I was excited to share with colleagues from institutions and philanthropic foundations across the nation the many ways in which we adapt and innovate in light of ever-evolving student demographics, workforce needs, and partnership opportunities.



Empire State University President, Lisa Vollendorf, Ph.D.

In November, we were joined by military-affiliated students and alumni, elected officials, and community leaders as we celebrated the opening of our Veteran and Military Resource Center at our 111 West Avenue location in Saratoga Springs. The 4,642-square-foot space will serve as a hub for SUNY Empire's veteran and military-affiliated students and reinforce our commitment to holistic student support for military families. The center will serve virtual and in-person students.

Day in and day out, we continue to provide high-quality, affordable education to students in New York and beyond. As we come up on the impressive number of 100,000 alumni, we have much to celebrate and much work to do to ensure we continually adapt and innovate in service to our students. Please follow @SUNYEmpire and me on Instagram and LinkedIn to keep up on the activity and to share your own SUNY Empire story. I love hearing from you!

Warmly,



Lisa Vollendorf, Ph.D.
President

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Craig Rosen and Jawana Richardson '16, '18, '21 at a ceremony in Albany.

Two Empire State University students received State University of New York Association of Council Members and College Trustees (ACT) awards this year. The two were among the six chosen for these highly competitive awards, which receive nominations from all 64 SUNY campuses.

Craig Rosen was awarded the Chancellor Nancy L. Zimpher Scholarship for Teacher Education, which acknowledges exceptional academic performance and dedication to the teacher education profession. **Jawana Richardson '16, '18, '21** received the ACT for Excellence and Student Initiative Scholarship, which recognizes excellence in academic performance and commitment to campus or community.

AN INSPIRING TEACHER

Rosen, a student in the Master of Arts in Teaching program, is a forensic science and math, science, and technology teacher at Charles W. Baker High School in Baldwinsville, NY. "This recognition is a testament to the incredible journey of learning and growth my students and I embark

on together every day," said Rosen, who lives in Liverpool, NY. "Teaching is more than a profession to me; it's a shared exploration of knowledge, made possible by the remarkable students and colleagues around me."

"I AM PREPARED TO BECOME A MORE EFFECTIVE AGENT OF CHANGE."

Jawana Richardson '16, '18, '21

Rosen is a retired military veteran who was inspired to teach by a high school science teacher. "When time came to go to college, I couldn't afford tuition, so I joined the military instead," he said "Twenty years later, I retired and the desire to teach was reignited."

He came to SUNY Empire after working for five years as a teacher's assistant and substitute teacher. "I am a true believer that all students deserve an education and that as teachers, we need to figure out how to reach the unreachable."

SUNY EMPIRE'S BIGGEST AMBASSADOR

Richardson, who lives on Long Island, considers herself an ambassador "for all things Empire State University." As a student, she received several Student Service Awards and a SUNY Chancellor's Award for Student Excellence and served on the Student Government Association. She recently completed a term on SUNY Empire's Alumni Federation Board of Directors, where she chaired the Diversity Committee. In addition, she's a graduate of the Leadership Institute and now a mentor and coach.

In her community, Richardson works closely with Mothers Against Drunk Driving. She also advocates for tougher laws and policies around DWI/DWAI violations while sharing her story about losing her husband to a drunk driver.

"My time at SUNY Empire has provided me with rigorous academic learning skills, invaluable networking opportunities, and exposure to transformative areas of study. I am prepared to become a more effective agent of change."

SEEKING NOMINATIONS FOR 2024 EMPIRE STATE UNIVERSITY ALUMNI AWARDS

Each year, SUNY Empire presents awards to our exceptional alumni in recognition of their lasting impact on society and the university.

In January, the Alumni Awards Committee will begin accepting nominations for the 2024 Alumni Awards:

- The Emerging Leader Award recognizes a recent graduate who demonstrates leadership in their profession, community, or at SUNY Empire.
- The Veteran Service Award is given to a veteran of the U.S. Armed Forces who has made a positive impact on their community, university, and/or fellow veterans.
- The Community Impact Award is given to a graduate who demonstrates leadership by providing exceptional service to their community and beyond.
- The Distinguished Leader Award recognizes a graduate who has provided outstanding service to the university and their community through philanthropic support.



If you know an outstanding graduate of SUNY Empire, consider nominating them for an Alumni Award. [Learn more.](#)

For information about making a nomination, contact alumni@sunyempire.edu.

JOIN US FOR A NEW SERIES

The Office for Advancement has launched Community Conversations. All alumni are invited to attend. Watch the alumni [events web page](#) for details and upcoming webinars. Here are a few:



VOTING 101

January 10, 2024, 11 a.m. to noon

THE WOMEN OF NASA & THE 2024 SOLAR ECLIPSE

March 13, 2024, 11 a.m. to noon

HOW ECLIPSES HAVE SHAPED HISTORY & OBSERVING A SOLAR ECLIPSE

April 8, 2024, 11 a.m. to noon

For information, contact AdvancementEvents@sunyempire.edu.

ASK5: CAREER LESSONS FROM OUR ALUMNI AND FRIENDS



Join Anita DeCianni-Brown '12, '15, SUNY Empire's career development coordinator, as she interviews alumni and others about their careers and work experiences in this new video series called Ask5.

The recordings give students insight into different careers and showcase how our alumni have successfully applied their SUNY Empire degree. View the [videos](#).



WATCH FOR UPCOMING EVENTS!

The Office of Alumni Engagement is working on new events for the coming months. Check out our [events page](#) for dates and details. Got an idea for an event? Contact alumni@sunyempire.edu.



While you may know that gifts to The Fund for SUNY Empire support student scholarships, did you know The Fund also supports student activities and faculty and staff development, including Scholars Across the University?

Scholars Across the University enables faculty to focus solely on their scholarly activities for one year. They can share their ideas, research, and findings with the university community and make a significant impact on our society.

When you make your gift to The Fund, you are partnering with the university to foster social change and community enrichment. Every gift helps support efforts to continuously improve our programming, retain exceptional faculty, and offer scholarships for a life-changing education.

[Please join us in changing lives by making your gift today!](#)

YOUR GIFTS AT WORK

MEET OUR 2023-24 SCHOLARS ACROSS THE UNIVERSITY



Rodlyn Remina Hines, Ph.D. is an assistant professor of child and family studies and human services mentor, based in Syracuse. She is also a certified family and consumer scientist and a family life educator.

What do you study?

- Transnational living and relationship quality

- Gender differences in transnational living behaviors and practices
- Impact of homeschooling on emotional and social development

What is your goal in a presentation?

My research focuses on immigrant groups, particularly African immigrants, a growing population in the U.S. Often, we know these immigrants as a colleague or a student, but we don't know their story, why they don't smile like we do, maintain eye contact when they talk to us, or participate in activities.

My talk will enlighten audiences on some fundamental aspects of African culture pertaining to marriage and family life. I will shed light on how African immigrants navigate work-family conflict and their cultural behaviors, practices and challenges living in the U.S.

What do you enjoy most about your work?

The rich life experiences that my students and mentees bring to my work daily. I learn something new every day. I count myself blessed being a part of the SUNY Empire community.



Julie Parato, Ph.D. is an assistant professor of natural sciences, in the Brooklyn location.

What do you study?

- Premature aging of the support structures of our brain cells and how they can lead to Alzheimer's
- How the brain matures during adolescence

- How cold-water swimming affects mood and cognition
- How farm and zoo animals interact with humans when faced with a challenging task

What is your goal in a presentation?

My goal is to provide my audience with a deeper understanding of the brain and its cells, as well as an appreciation for aspects of cognition and behavior. I started off as a cellular and molecular neuroscientist, so I will always try to link broader behaviors back to mechanisms that occur at the cellular level. I tailor my talks to my audience, so by the end of the talk, everyone, no matter what their biology background is, gets to learn something interesting in neuroscience!

What do you enjoy most about your work?

Empire State University has such a collegial, supportive environment. It is always rewarding to plan projects with colleagues.

