

SPRING 2019

Invention

THE MAGAZINE OF THOMAS EDISON STATE UNIVERSITY



Doctor of Nursing Practice

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A Passion for Patient Care

CENTER FOR LEARNING AND TECHNOLOGY RENAMED IN HONOR OF PIONEERING PROVOST AND VICE PRESIDENT, WILLIAM J. SEATON

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Dear Alumni, Students and Friends,

Our cover story this issue features a member of the first graduating class of the W. Cary Edwards School of Nursing's Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP), Celeste Bethon.

Bethon originally thought she wanted to become a teacher, but shifted course midway through her college years to turn her attention to nursing, where she realized she could enjoy the caregiving aspect of the role while also utilizing her passion for teaching.

As it does for so many of our students, education lit a candle within Bethon and she became a lifelong learner, earning her associate and bachelor of science degrees in nursing, followed by a master of science in nursing degree, a Nurse Executive Advanced-Board Certification (NEA-BC) credential and, finally, her Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP).

"My parents instilled in me the belief that I could achieve great things if I put my mind to it," she tells us.

Also in this issue, we meet Regina Davis, who is most comfortable when she can find solutions to problems. Her Master of Science in Information Technology (MSIT) degree in Health Information Technology from Thomas Edison State University is the ticket to fulfilling that goal.

"I felt that in social services there were dilemmas that could not be solved, but in my technical roles, I feel like there is always a solution to be found," she tells us of her career path.

For another alum and Thomas Edison employee Dennis Devery, the solution was in giving back through the establishment of the Dr. Dennis W. Devery Endowed Scholarship. Inspired by the stories of fellow alumni, including his own son, the 30-year Army veteran hopes to see the scholarship aid those in need of emergency help to complete their education at the University.

"People can still hit emergency financial barriers that could stop their education in its tracks. I can only hope to help give them that boost to get them over the top when they need it," he explains. "We all need a little help sometimes."



Merodie A. Hancock, PhD
President



❖ School of Applied Science and Technology Launches *Journal of Women and Minorities in Technology*

The School of Applied Science and Technology is launching the *Journal of Women and Minorities in Technology*. The open access journal provides quality peer-reviewed articles written by academics and professionals in the fields of aviation, nuclear technology, cybersecurity and information technology who are interested in providing both technical and soft-skills information needed to perform successfully in the field of technology, with a special emphasis on women and minorities.

“There is a high demand for individuals skilled in these specific technologies, and a low number of women and minorities currently working in these areas,” said Dr. Tanis Stewart, assistant dean, School of Applied Science and

Technology. “*The Journal of Women and Minorities in Technology* will offer a platform to increase those numbers by providing information and guidance on gaining the knowledge and experience needed to work in these challenging technological fields.”

Manuscripts should be original, previously unpublished papers, which are not under consideration for publication to any other journal. Submissions of all types including interdisciplinary research, critical issues, current trends, conceptual and empirical-based research, new programs, promising practice, policy and practice-based research, experience sharing and strategies for career success and mentoring for women and minorities are encouraged.



Dr. Tanis Stewart, assistant dean, School of Applied Science and Technology

For more information about submitting articles to the quarterly publication or for other questions, please email JWMT@tesu.edu or visit the website at tesu.edu/ast/women-and-minorities-in-technology/journal.

❖ Dr. Merodie A. Hancock Inducted into 2018 International Adult and Continuing Education Hall of Fame

President Merodie A. Hancock joined 12 other educators who were recognized with induction into the International Adult and Continuing Education (IACE) Hall of Fame in November.

The IACE Hall of Fame is a nonprofit organization whose purpose is to honor individuals who have made distinguished contributions to the field of adult and continuing education and to serve as a record and inspiration for the next generation of continuing education leaders.

Held at the New Orleans Marriott, the Hall of Fame marked its 23rd anniversary. Among previous notable inductees are Malcolm Knowles (1996), Barbara Bush (1997) and John W. Gardner (2003).

Hancock was commended for dedicating her career to serving as a strong and consistent advocate for adult and continuing education policy, funding, practice and assessment. The IACE recognized that she is widely known for delivering innovative education across campuses and international borders.

Among her other contributions to the field, Hancock has served on the Department of Defense Taskforce on Developing Best Practice Standards for Distance Learning, playing a key role as its technology expanded to deliver high-quality academic programming to busy professionals, parents, caretakers and other adults with time and place constraints.

Election to the Hall of Fame acknowledges that these men and women have made distinguished contributions to the field of



Dr. Merodie A. Hancock, president, Thomas Edison State University, right, receives her plaque from Chair Dian Stoskopf, left, after installation in the International Adult and Continued Education Hall of Fame.

adult and continuing education. Each has provided a crucial nexus between resources and learners. These innovative leaders have believed passionately in the evolutionary power of education. Each are exemplary lifelong learners and have left lasting impressions on the students, institutions and organizations they have served.

University's Center for Learning and Technology Renamed in Honor of Pioneering Provost and Vice President, William J. Seaton

President Dr. Merodie A. Hancock announced that the University would rename its Center for Learning and Technology “The W. J. Seaton Center for Learning and Technology” in honor of the provost and vice president’s years of commitment to the University and educational technologies that support adult learning.

“Bill’s uncompromising commitment to quality and high standards in the application of technology as an academic tool has played a significant role in the University’s standing as a pioneer and symbol of academic integrity in adult learning,” said Hancock. “Our Board of Trustees, on the recommendation of President Emeritus Dr. George A. Pruitt, agreed to rename the University’s Center for Learning and Technology in honor of Bill, and we are thrilled to have the center reflect his legacy.”

expanded to respond to the burgeoning adult learner market and oversaw the institution’s launch of the guided independent study program. Later, the Computer Assisted Lifelong Learning (CALL) Network, a pre-internet innovation, was introduced, enabling students to take courses and access the college’s services via a dial-up computer network. Soon after, Seaton became associate vice president of the University’s Directed Independent Adult Learning (DIAL) program. Under the program’s auspices, the college was

“BILL’S UNCOMPROMISING COMMITMENT TO QUALITY AND HIGH STANDARDS IN THE APPLICATION OF TECHNOLOGY AS AN ACADEMIC TOOL HAS PLAYED A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN THE UNIVERSITY’S STANDING AS A PIONEER AND SYMBOL OF ACADEMIC INTEGRITY IN ADULT LEARNING.”

Dr. Merodie A. Hancock

of alums – from active-duty military service members to registered nurses – who depend on the university’s course technologies to advance their education.

“I’d like to thank Bill for his 37 years of service to both the University and the field of adult education,” said Hancock, during a reception and portrait unveiling held in Seaton’s honor in December. “His counsel, advice and the foundation he has laid have been invaluable to me. I wish him the very best in his well-deserved retirement.”

Prior to joining the University, Seaton held faculty positions at Susquehanna University, Penn State University, Bucknell University and The College of New Jersey. He has been an active participant in both national and international higher education-focused presentations and has also served on numerous accreditation teams both domestically and internationally. He has been active with several international foundations that focus on adoption and education for indigenous people and has been active with the U.S. Humane Society and the ASPCA – all of which he plans to continue in retirement. “It has been an honor to work for Thomas Edison State University,” said Seaton. “I am proud of my contribution to expanding access to higher education for adult learners and confident that the University will build upon this in creating an exciting, meaningful future for itself and the community it serves.”



Bill Seaton, fourth from left, and his family with his portrait.

Seaton, provost and vice president for Academic Affairs at the University, announced his intention to retire this past fall. When he joined the institution in 1981, the 9-year-old college was already familiar in higher education circles for awarding adult learners credit for prior learning and testing. He anticipated that distance education modalities would need to be

able to position itself as one of the first accredited institutions in the nation to offer courses and, later, entire degree programs online.

Since then, Thomas Edison State University has grown from offering a handful of courses and 18 enrollments, to enrolling more than 16,000 students and celebrating tens of thousands

University Harnesses Open Educational Resources (OER) In Launching an Accessible and Affordable Degree Pathway for Students

The University recently launched an open educational resources (OER) track of courses within its Associate of Arts (AA) degree in Liberal Studies program that eliminates textbook costs and allows students to complete their degrees using OER alternatives.

OERs are free learning resources that reside in the public domain and customarily include course materials, textbooks, software and multimedia components like videos and podcasts. According to Matt Cooper, associate provost at the University's W.J. Seaton Center for Learning and Technology, the OER option has been integrated into the AA program, but students in any of the University's bachelor's degree programs can utilize the same OER options to complete their general education requirements – potentially 60 credits toward a bachelor's degree program – using courses that have no textbook or learning materials costs.

"The appeal of OERs is that they are helping us tackle some of the biggest barriers that students face in higher education," Cooper noted. "Survey data shows that 7 out of 10 students have skipped purchasing assigned textbooks for their courses because they are too expensive. We've also found that students who intend to purchase a textbook for their course will often delay buying it until they've received their financial aid package – even though the course has already started. These factors can have an adverse effect on their success."

The new OER course structures, interface and learning activities will be familiar to any student who has already taken an online course at the University. The primary difference will be that course materials, including readings, case studies and associated articles, will be integrated in the courses themselves.

"Students will use TESU's online learning management system as a central 'hub' for all course information, and the student is free to export or download their materials into whatever format they choose for reading and review outside of the online course space," Cooper said. "Course textbooks will be in the form of OER-style materials that provide the students with the freedom to read, save and share the materials however they wish." University mentors and subject matter experts are also involved in the selection and curation of the new OERs. Proponents elsewhere in higher education agree that the OER technology option in degree completion is a positive step.

According to Cooper, while the library of OER offerings has expanded dramatically in recent years, there are still unique challenges for institutions that are adopting and maintaining openly sourced materials. "The key challenge is finding the precisely correct resource for the content that is being taught," he said. "Much like a bookstore, OER databases now enjoy multiple options for every academic discipline. It falls to our development team to select the correct resource



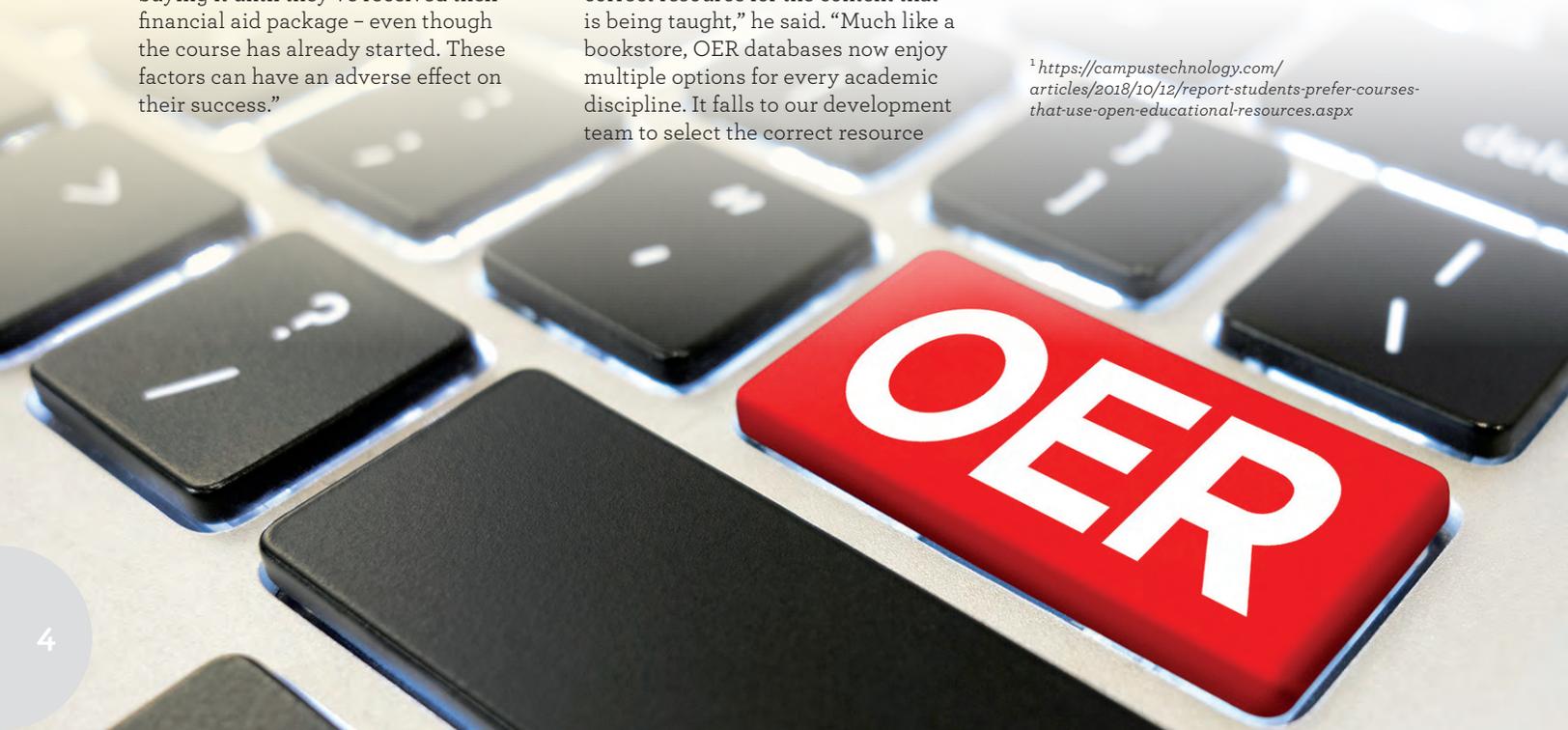
Matt Cooper, associate provost at the University's W.J. Seaton Center for Learning and Technology

for our purposes and students' needs. Sustainability and quality are two issues that will be continuously monitored."

The consensus among students indicates that OER options are here to stay. According to an October 2018 article in *Campus Technology*, "Report: Students Prefer Courses that Use Open Educational Resources," students using OERs reported a boost in their learning experience and felt a stronger level of engagement in their courses. Furthermore, the study found that OER courses saved students an average of \$66 to \$121 per course.¹

To learn more, email staff at the W.J. Seaton Center for Learning and Technology at clt@tesu.edu.

¹ <https://campustechnology.com/articles/2018/10/12/report-students-prefer-courses-that-use-open-educational-resources.aspx>



❖ Foundation Assists USCG Members During the Partial Government Shutdown

THOMAS EDISON STATE UNIVERSITY FOUNDATION: SERVING THOSE WHO SERVE

Emergency scholarships were essential this winter to insulate Coast Guard students from the adverse impact of the federal budget impasse. During the February term, despite the suspension of federal tuition assistance caused by the partial government shutdown, Coast Guard students were able to remain enrolled in the University's courses.

Dr. Merodie A. Hancock, president of the University, announced on Jan. 14 that the Thomas Edison State University (TESU) Foundation was stepping in to help enrolled Coast Guard students until their tuition assistance was once again available.

"TESU has always stood by our military students and we stand with our Coast Guard students today in their time of need," Hancock said. "I'm delighted but not surprised by the generosity of the TESU Foundation Board in its support of our students. These Coast Guard members are facing serious hardships through no fault of their own. We would like to give them peace of mind when it comes to their education."

On Jan. 17, The Tuchman Foundation Chair Martin Tuchman announced a commitment to strengthen the TESU Foundation's pledge to the affected students through a new Coast Guard Educational Fund. In addition to the

February term, the fund pledged to cover tuition for the following two terms should the shutdown continue. The Tuchman Foundation's pledge also included a one-time scholarship of \$500 to cover emergency personal expenses such as textbooks for February term students.

"By serving as a backstop for Thomas Edison State University students, we ensure that they can continue their education without being affected by government shutdowns or other distractions," Tuchman explained.

The Coast Guard sent notice in early January that it would suspend all tuition assistance during the partial shutdown. This notice suggested that the tuition assistance program would be resumed once the Coast Guard had a fiscal year 2019 appropriation. However, students were informed that they could potentially have full financial responsibility for funding their courses



The Tuchman Foundation Chair Martin Tuchman

if they started classes without an approved tuition assistance voucher.

"Coast Guard operations that protect life, property and national security must continue despite the lack of resources," said Dr. Michael Toscani, chair of the TESU Foundation Board. "We are proud to do our part to support educational opportunities for our Coast Guard members."

Of the five branches of the armed services, only members of the Coast Guard were affected by the partial shutdown, since their education is funded through the Department of Homeland Security. Other military students are funded by the Department of Defense, which was not affected by the shutdown.



RX:TECHNOLOGY

Regina Davis, MSIT '18

For Regina Davis, the blend of healthcare and technology is a natural fit. “Technology is the cornerstone of almost everything we do in this day and age, and I have a natural inclination to take all of that to the next level,” Davis began. “My goals have shifted in my career, but, ultimately, I will be working in a field that I love and will continue to excel in.”

This inspiration fueled Davis’ drive to pursue her Master of Science in Information Technology (MSIT) degree in Health Information Technology from Thomas Edison State University.

“The Health Information Technology track most closely fit what was near and dear to my heart,” said the 2018 graduate. “I have worked in the area of healthcare since earning my undergraduate degree.”

“HER DUAL COMPETENCIES IN SOCIAL SERVICES AND HEALTHCARE INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY UNDERScore HER ADAPTABILITY IN THE WORKFORCE AS WELL AS HER VALUE TO THE HEALTHCARE COMMUNITY AND THE PATIENTS IT SERVES.”

Dr. Tanis Stewart, assistant dean,
School of Applied Science
and Technology

Earning her Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology from Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey’s Livingston College in 1996, Davis’ career in healthcare and technology spans 20 years. She previously served as an IT project coordinator with Quest Diagnostics and business analyst with Healthfirst in New York.

“Prior to my technical roles, I was in social services,” explained Davis, who has also served as a social services specialist with Centene University Health Plan in Edison, N.J.; an infectious disease clinic case manager with Irvington General Hospital in Irvington, N.J.; and an integrated case management services case manager with Care Plus in Lodi, N.J.

“I felt that in social services there were dilemmas that could not be solved, but in my technical roles, I feel like there is always a solution to be found. Those roles have allowed me to be well rounded. As a business analyst, I needed to be able to speak the language of the business as well as the language of the technical team. I have to keep both sets of skills sharp, which, I believe, sets me apart.”

Although the road to her current career aspirations has had some twists and turns, Davis is confident that it ultimately led her down the appropriate path.

“Part of my desire was also to mentor/teach an online class in the technology arena,” Davis said. “So it all worked out now that I have my master’s degree in Health Information Technology.”

Davis noted that the University’s master’s degree program fit perfectly into her lifestyle and gave her the additional skills that she needed to advance in the field.

“In the last quarter of 2017 and first quarter of 2018, I worked as an IT project coordinator and, although I lead plenty of projects in my role as a senior business analyst, I took a project management course, which allowed me to work more efficiently and with a greater understanding of what I needed to accomplish in order to achieve both personal and project successes.”

Even when compared to the School of Applied Science and Technology’s customary student standards and alumni successes, Davis’ trajectory is nonetheless impressive. “We’re immensely proud of Regina’s accomplishments,” said Dr. Tanis Stewart, assistant dean of the School.

“Her dual competencies in social services and healthcare information technology underscore her adaptability in the workforce as well as her value to the healthcare community and the patients it serves.”

Explaining that she has worked remotely since 2011, Davis was hopeful when looking for a degree program in which she could incorporate remote learning. She was pleased to find that “TESU fit the bill!”

“The first time I recall hearing about TESU was from a close friend,” said Davis. “I have known this person since I was a teenager, and he had taken a different path, but as an adult decided he wanted to earn a degree and completed his education at TESU. I didn’t think much of it until my longtime neighbor decided to finish her undergraduate degree at the University, too. I checked it out to see if it was an option for me and here I am today, a graduate with my MSIT!”

Davis noted that she is a devoted cat lover, a student of tai chi and a movie enthusiast. For the past nine years, the Northern New Jersey resident has attended The Life Christian Church in West Orange, N.J., and proclaims herself a proud godmother and “auntie.”



For
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Dr. Celeste Bethon's personal momentum is fueled by her belief in the limitless power of nursing. Her professional momentum, and her power to improve patient outcomes, is fueled by higher education.

A member of the first graduating class of the W. Cary Edwards School of Nursing's Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree program, Bethon became acquainted with the School's offerings in 2000 after a colleague enrolled in the School's Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree program. >>>

passion for patient care

Celeste Bethon, DNP '18, RN, NEA-BC

A TESTAMENT TO THE POWER OF PROFESSIONAL NURSING.

Celeste Bethon, DNP '18, RN, NEA-BC

“A nurse I was supervising completed her BSN degree requirements at the School within a year. I mentored her throughout and found the program to be rigorous with an emphasis on the needs of the adult learner,” said Bethon, who was a student herself in another DNP program before transferring to Thomas Edison State University (TESU). “From my experience mentoring my colleague, I felt the DNP program would meet my personal and professional needs and contain the rigor I felt was necessary.”

TESU’s DNP degree in Systems-Level Leadership prepares nurse leaders like Bethon with competencies in advanced nursing practice that encompass organizational leadership, healthcare policy, technology, economics and finance, and prepares them for leadership positions in a variety of healthcare settings. Bethon found that the program’s time frame fit well with her objectives and the course work correlated with her career needs.

“I felt that the timeline for completion of the DNP degree program was something that I needed to fulfill my personal and professional goals. The program also accepted some of the credits I had earned from the other DNP program,” she noted. “I am currently in a senior director-level nursing leadership position and have chief nursing officer experience. TESU’s program connected well to my work experience, correlated to the current demands of a nurse executive and aligned with the American Organization of Nurse Executives (AONE) Nurse Executive Competencies.”

As the senior director of Inpatient Nursing, Medical-Surgical for Englewood Hospital and Medical Center in Englewood, N.J., Bethon oversees the medical-surgical division, which includes inpatient surgical units, neurology/oncology, cardiopulmonary, orthopedics, inpatient interventional cardiology/step-down unit and behavioral health. She is also responsible for the nursing supervisory

staff, who provide off-shift, weekend and holiday coverage, the medical-surgical float pool and staffing. She supports the chief nursing officer and Englewood’s executive leadership, serving as a team lead for implementation of the Epic electronic medical record system and as a departmental co-chair for the Joint Nursing Practice Council.

“I am increasingly involved in budgetary and performance improvement activities,” said Bethon. “I work with an extraordinary leadership team, including directors, nurse managers and assistant nurse managers who work tirelessly to ensure that the staff is supported and that our patients receive the best care possible.”

She recently piloted a program at the hospital that effectively reduced patient fall rates by 50 percent while reducing operational costs in associated staffing. The successful pilot program was an outgrowth of her DNP project work at TESU.

“Patient fall prevention has been a passion of mine for years, and I was excited to have the opportunity to complete the requirements for my DNP program while focusing on the issue,” she said. “My DNP project, ‘The Influence of Video Monitoring on Falls and Sitter Outcomes,’ consisted of deploying a video monitoring system for eight beds located within the hospital’s neuro/oncology unit.



“TESU’S PROGRAM CONNECTED WELL TO MY WORK EXPERIENCE, CORRELATED TO THE CURRENT DEMANDS OF A NURSE EXECUTIVE AND ALIGNED WITH THE AMERICAN ORGANIZATION OF NURSE EXECUTIVES (AONE) NURSE EXECUTIVE COMPETENCIES.”

Dr. Celeste Bethon



Dr. Celeste Bethon (second from right) celebrates with fellow DNP program graduates Linda Johnson and Vi-Anne Antrum during the University's 46th Annual Commencement at the CURE Insurance Arena in Trenton, N.J.

Patients at risk for falls, or who required one-to-one sitters due to impulsivity, were assigned to the monitored beds. A patient care associate (PCA) was assigned to watch the monitors. This team member alerted other team members if a patient in one of the monitored beds was exhibiting impulsive or at-risk behaviors that generally precede a fall. The results of the initial four-month pilot program demonstrated clinical significance in the reduction in patient falls and sitter utilization on this unit. The pilot was continued through June 2018. These results have provided not only clinical significance, but also statistical significance in the reduction of one-to-one sitters and has been identified as a success by my organization. This video monitoring has been expanded to 10 beds on the neuro/oncology unit and similar equipment has been ordered for 10 more beds on our cardiopulmonary unit."

Originally, Bethon hadn't even considered a career in nursing. "My original career path was

teaching, and I actually completed three semesters as a physical education major," she said. As Bethon's enthusiasm for the career path began to wane, a friend suggested that she try the nursing field. "I entered an associate degree program and once I got over the apprehension of walking into a patient's hospital room for the first time, I felt that nursing was the path for me. I enjoyed the caregiving aspect of the role and quickly realized that my passion for teaching would be utilized."

According to Bethon, the power and impact of nurses in the field today is limitless. "Nurses have the ability to directly impact the lives of others and positively influence healthcare delivery," she said.

"Dr. Bethon's passion for patient care has translated to policy and positive change for a large healthcare organization and acute care teaching hospital," said Dr. Ana Maria Catanzaro, interim dean of Graduate Nursing Programs at the School. "Her impact is one example of our positive program

outcomes and the myriad of ways our students and graduates are able to implement and lead positive and continuous improvement for their organizations."

In addition to her DNP degree, Bethon possesses a master of science in nursing degree from Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, Newark; her Nurse Executive Advanced-Board Certification (NEA-BC) credential; and her associate and bachelor of science in nursing degrees from Felician University in Lodi, N.J. "My parents instilled in me the belief that I could achieve great things if I put my mind to it and my children and grandchildren inspire me to do my best always. I have also been very fortunate to have great career mentors who have supported and inspired me through my academic journey."

To learn more about the Doctor of Nursing Practice degree in Systems-Level Leadership program, visit www.tesu.edu/DNP.

A CIRCLE OF GRATITUDE

Dr. Dennis W. Devery, MSM '05

For Thomas Edison alumnus Dr. Dennis W. Devery, who also serves as the University's vice president of Enrollment Management, the expression of giving back has taken on a new meaning. After enlisting at age 17, Devery's career in the Army saw him piloting helicopters, commanding tanks, jumping out of airplanes and recruiting soldiers while being stationed all over the world. "I was a midlevel officer serving as a recruitment commander. I knew I wanted to be in contention to be promoted to a senior officer, and I knew I needed an advanced degree to make that possible," Devery explained. During this time, he oversaw approximately 100 recruiters in 30 locations and needed to find a way to pursue his master's degree without disrupting his schedule or ability to fulfill his responsibilities with the Army. "That's when I found Thomas Edison State University (TESU)."

Devery earned his Master of Science in Management degree from TESU in 2005 and continued moving up the ranks of the Army, ultimately retiring from his 30-year career as a colonel and commander of the Joint Training



A CIRCLE OF GRATITUDE

Dr. Dennis W. Devery, MSM '05

and Training Development Center at Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst in 2011. After retirement, he wanted to give back to the place that helped him to advance his career, but in a different way. He joined the University as a vice president for planning and research – a role that would allow him to help others on their educational journey.

“It feels like I am living in a parallel universe,” Devery said. “The similarities between the military and higher education are amazing. Both ultimately prepare individuals to learn and build their own capacity in order improve their lives or the lives of others.” Working for the University influenced his desire to further his own education and, in 2017, Devery earned his doctoral degree from Rowan University.



“I HAVE SEEN FIRSTHAND THAT THE UNIVERSITY CAN BE A PLACE FOR SECOND CHANCES FOR PEOPLE LIKE MYSELF, MY SON AND COUNTLESS OTHERS. IT’S A PLACE WHERE PEOPLE CAN GET ANOTHER OPPORTUNITY TO EARN A DEGREE, BUT EVEN WITH THE OPPORTUNITY, PEOPLE CAN STILL HIT EMERGENCY FINANCIAL BARRIERS THAT COULD STOP THEIR EDUCATION IN ITS TRACKS. I CAN ONLY HOPE TO HELP GIVE PEOPLE THAT BOOST TO GET THEM OVER THE TOP WHEN THEY NEED IT.”

Dr. Dennis W. Devery

Dr. Dennis W. Devery and his son, Connell.

Devery fully understands the needs and challenges adults often face as they try to complete or advance their degrees. In fact, Devery’s son, Connell, who faced challenges with the traditional educational learning model throughout his life, also benefited from TESU’s non-traditional model. “I knew TESU would provide the perfect setting that would enable Connell to learn at the pace that was right for him,” Devery said. “For people that may learn in different ways or have competing priorities, attending four physical classes at the same time each semester and meeting those tight deadlines isn’t always feasible. TESU provided a better path for myself and my son.” Having flexibility to take courses at Rowan College at Burlington County (RCBC) and complete courses online at

TESU made it possible for Connell to earn his bachelor’s degree in communications in 2017.

Shortly after earning his degree, Connell was hired for a position at the state’s Department of Taxation, which occupies the office building just across the street from his father’s TESU office in Trenton.

“He needed to have a degree from an accredited four-year institution to even be considered for that job. Without it, he wouldn’t be where he is today. For anyone who doesn’t have a degree, a lot of doors are closed,” Devery elaborated. “That fact motivates me every day to do what I can so that others can realize the endless opportunities that a degree can make possible. My education changed my life and changed my son’s life.”

Now Devery is taking another step toward ensuring that more people have access to such opportunity. Last October, Devery attended the TESU Foundation’s annual “Employee Campaign Kickoff” where a panel of current TESU students shared their personal stories with employees. One speech in particular, that of current student Tiana Lopez, struck Devery personally. Lopez discussed the hardships she faced balancing a career and education as a single mother to her daughter, who was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder at age 3. Lopez explained that it was only through a scholarship that she received from the University that she was able to continue her education. Other students on the panel shared their gratitude for the scholarships they also received and thanked all of the donors in the room.

“RECEIVING THE FINANCIAL SUPPORT HAS MEANT A GREAT DEAL FOR ME. IT UPLIFTED ME BECAUSE I WAS READY TO QUIT AND GIVE UP. THE SCHOLARSHIP WAS A REMINDER THAT I AM NOT IN OVER MY HEAD...”

Tiana Lopez



Tiana Lopez

A scholarship helped Tiana Lopez to remember that giving up was not an option

“Listening to the impact that immediate funding had on their educations and lives reminded me that there are so many people out there who may not fall into any specific group to qualify for certain scholarships, but still may need help,” he said. “There is another group of people out there; those that may fall into a rough patch or have an emergency strike them at any time, that just need a little help to keep going.”

That concept had personal resonance for Devery, whose father passed away when he was 12 years old, leaving his mother to raise five children on her own. “She struggled to keep us all together in our house and take care of all of us. Listening to Tiana speak about being a single mother reminded me of my own circumstances. People face situations that they never expect to. I know my mother never expected to have my father die at the age of 43 and have to raise five kids alone. This is real life that creates obstacles,” he explained. “I saw my opportunity to be able to help those people.”

In December 2018, Devery established the “Dr. Dennis W. Devery Endowed Scholarship Fund” at Thomas Edison State University. With this generous financial commitment, the University will be able to fulfill more scholarships for students in need.

“That’s what I hope this endowed scholarship can achieve,” he explained. “I have seen firsthand that the University can be a place for second chances for people like myself, my son and countless others. It’s a place where people can get another opportunity to earn a degree, but even with the opportunity, financial barriers remain obstacles that can potentially stop the pursuit of education in its tracks. I will be grateful if my support helps give people that boost to get them over the top when they need it.

“We all need a little help sometimes.”

Tiana Lopez faced earning a degree, balancing a career and being a single mother to her daughter who was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder at age 3. It was only through scholarship funding that Lopez said she was able to balance competing priorities and continue her education at the University.

“Receiving the financial support has meant a great deal for me. It uplifted me because I was ready to give up. The scholarship was a reminder that I am not in over my head, and that I’m handling everything as well as I can,” said Lopez, a Bachelor of Science degree in Homeland Security and Emergency Management student. “I’m succeeding.”

Currently an assistant branch manager for Oritani Bank in Clifton, N.J., Lopez spends her workdays assisting customers with accounts, establishing connections with businesses and helping her office run efficiently.

With the aid of the scholarship, Lopez is able to continue the pursuit of her degree.

Lopez said she owes her determined spirit to her ‘proudest accomplishment,’ her 5-year-old daughter, Gianna. “I had gone through so much at a young age that I believed I couldn’t be a great mother. When Gianna was born, I immediately let go of all those insecurities and decided I would devote myself to being the best mom I could be for her,” she said. “She is the light of my life and my drive to be better each day.”

class notes

Robert Boccolini BA '08

Robert Boccolini was awarded the Stanley B. Rizman Distinguished Service Award by the Certified Court Reporters Association of New Jersey for Outstanding Contributions to the Court Reporting Profession. The award was presented at the Mid-Year Conference in October 2018.

Dr. Deborah Donnelly-McLay ASAST '94, BSAST '95



Dr. Deborah Donnelly-McLay graduated from Nova Southeastern University in Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., in December 2018, earning an EdD. Donnelly-McLay has also been working as a researcher at Harvard University's T.H. Chan School of Public Health and has published three

papers with Harvard. Examining the environmental factors that affect airline pilot health, her research includes a pilot health study, a study on the effects of CO₂ on pilot performance and a study on radiation effects on the DNA of pilots. She is currently a B767 captain at UPS Airlines and recently celebrated her 20th anniversary with the company.

Nestor Gonzalez AAS '18



Nestor Gonzalez, a gunner's mate 1st class, was named the Center for Security Forces 2018 Sailor of the Year. The program recognizes one exceptional sailor who stands out above all the superior sailors who serve around the globe. Gonzalez currently serves as an instructor for the

Navy's Survival, Evasion, Resistance and Escape (SERE) course — one of the most challenging and rewarding tours of duty in the Navy.

Jennifer Johnson AA '12, BSBA '16



Jennifer Johnson graduated with a Master of Science in Accountancy from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (UIUC) in December 2018 with a 3.897 GPA. She is currently working as a teacher's assistant at UIUC for spring 2019.

Christopher Jusino

AAS '07, BS '12, MSM '14

ALUMNI AMBASSADOR



Christopher Jusino was promoted to assessment director at Mid Atlantic Regional Maintenance Center, Norfolk, Va. In his current position, Jusino oversees numerous Ballistic Missile Defense war platforms within the Surface Forces Atlantic Command. He exercises management

and supervision on all assessment activities, and provides oversight and coordination in the development of standard operating procedures and policies to current regulations and directives.

Andrew Kester AAS '04

Andrew Kester was named the director of the Montgomery County Veterans Service Organization in Montgomery County, Tenn. Kester, who retired from the U.S. Army as a first sergeant in 2010, received his EdD in organizational leadership from Western Kentucky University in Bowling Green in 2017.

Jenell Leonard BA '06



Jenell Leonard, vice president of public affairs for Marketing Resource Group, Inc., was appointed by Gov. Rick Snyder to the Michigan Humanities Council. Previously, she served as director of the Michigan Film Office and external and strategic affairs advisor for Lt. Gov. Brian Calley.

James Santora Jr. BA '97



James Santora recently published his first book, *Underrated Rock Book: The 200 Most Overlooked Albums 1970-2015*, in September 2018. Santora describes it as a collection of some of the most overlooked and underappreciated albums from his time as a writer, radio talent, promoter and musician.

Dr. Robert W. McGee

AA '80, BA '82, ASM '83, BSBA '83



Dr. Robert W. McGee is a 71-year-old accounting professor with Fayetteville State University in Fayetteville, N.C., who recently won his fifth martial arts world championship. Previously, McGee competed in the 50+ age ring in 2017 and in the 60+ age ring in

2018. He is a world champion in karate (3), taekwondo (1) and kung-fu (1), and a world silver medalist in tai chi. McGee has won 35 gold medals at taekwondo national championship tournaments and took six first places in karate national championship tournaments. His career gold medal count is 239 as of Feb. 1, 2019. He has published 59 nonfiction books, five novels and novelettes, and more than 700 scholarly articles in a half dozen disciplines. According to McGee, various studies have ranked him #1 in the world for both accounting ethics and business ethics scholarship.

Wayne Staub MSM '04



Wayne Staub, New Jersey Business and Industry Association's chief business relations officer, has been chosen as a 2019 Lead New Jersey Fellow. He joins a select group of business, government and nonprofit leaders who will spend the next 12 months exploring major public policy issues facing New Jersey and identifying solutions.

ALUMNI AMBASSADOR

To learn more about the Alumni Ambassador program at Thomas Edison State University, please visit www.tesu.edu/ambassador.

To connect with the Office of Alumni Affairs and fellow TESU alumni, join the conversation on social media:

Alumni Facebook Group: www.tesu.edu/FacebookGroup

Student and Alumni LinkedIn Group: www.tesu.edu/LinkedInGroup

Alumnifire: tesu.alumnifire.com

Janet Ruiz BSBA '98



Janet Ruiz has been appointed director of strategic communication at The Insurance Information Institute.

Keep us posted!

Submit your news online at:
www.tesu.edu/classnotes

Updates can also be sent to:

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