

# Update

Alumni Newsletter *from*  
Mitchell S. Nesler, Ph.D.



Spring 2018

[www.esc.edu/Alumni](http://www.esc.edu/Alumni)

This March, SUNY Chancellor Kristina Johnson asked me to serve the college as its “officer in charge,” taking on the duties of the president following the departure of Merodie Hancock, who is now serving as president of Thomas Edison State University in New Jersey.

This is a rare and exciting opportunity, one that I accepted with great enthusiasm. So, now it seems only fair that I share some of my background with you. A first-generation college student, and a SUNY graduate, I earned both my undergraduate degree and a Ph.D. in psychology at the University at Albany. I am the single parent of two terrific sons, both of whom currently attend SUNY institutions. The elder graduated this May as part of the class of 2018.

In the 16 years I have been at Empire State College, I have come to admire and respect the way our students, employees and alumni embrace our mission of providing adult learners with access to flexible and innovative academic programs built on their work and life experiences and their personal and professional goals.

That mission is the undergirding of the college’s new and expansive Strategic Plan, crafted by more than 700 faculty, staff and alumni during the past 18 months and squarely focused on student success, ongoing academic innovation, enhanced reputation and creation of a culture of continuous improvement in all college operations. The plan is filled with measurable initiatives, many achievable within a matter of months or just a few years. And, very importantly, the plan will provide a blueprint for us as we prepare for the all-important reaccreditation of the college by the Middle States Commission in April 2020.

I have spent time during the first few months in my role as officer in charge touring our locations around New York and marveling at the good work that is being done, the progress being made by our remarkable students and the enthusiastic involvement of our alumni. And I am listening. People have been open and honest about what operational issues need

attention and where they are experiencing success. What has really impressed me is that almost all of what I have heard relates to the desire our employees have to improve the student experience.

With the arrival of the warmer months in New York, I also hope to increase my involvement with our alumni at many of the exciting events planned for them, from our annual Day at the Races in Saratoga Springs to dinner at the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park. I look forward to meeting some of you at these events.



*Mitchell S. Nesler, Ph.D.*

While all this planning and traveling is going on, work is still being done. We again held a very successful statewide open house in April for prospective students, aided in many locations by generous alumni volunteers. We are giving serious attention to strengthening our partnerships with both community colleges and businesses across New York, and we’ve been given authorization from SUNY System Administration to begin the search for a new president. This process includes hiring a search firm to help us find the most qualified candidates who will be vetted by a committee led by our College Council and representing all constituencies of the college. Ultimately, candidates will be screened by the entire college at the end of a nearly year-long process.

Working closely with the college’s extended leadership team over the next year, I expect to turn over to the next president an institution that is fiscally sound, one that is taking clear guidance for its future direction from the strategic plan, one whose employees remain passionate about our mission and our students, and one that is fully prepared for the Middle States’ review. If we can do that, and I believe we can, it will have been a fruitful and well-spent year.

## Mark Your Calendar, Great Events Planned

### **Nursing Alumni Reunion: July 26-27**

2018 marks the 10th anniversary of the founding of our School of Nursing. To mark this milestone, we are inviting all of our nursing graduates to Saratoga Springs for our first reunion on July 26 and 27. A celebratory dinner with faculty, hospital administrators, the advisory council and alumni is planned for July 26. On July 27, the nursing alumni will join the rest of the college at our annual event at Saratoga Race Course.

### **24th Annual Day at the Races: July 27**

Sign-ups are now open for our day at Saratoga Race Course. Please join

more than 200 alumni, students, faculty and friends for this very popular event at the oldest sporting venue in North America.

### **Philadelphia Orchestra: Aug. 3**

On Aug. 3, we will gather for our annual evening at the Saratoga Performing Arts Center to hear the Philadelphia Orchestra perform Holst's *The Planets*, a multimedia event where each movement is named for a planet in the solar system. At the reception prior to the performance, faculty member Audeliz Matias, Ph.D., will be our guest speaker. Matias is a NASA Peer Reviewer for its Solar System Workings Program.

### **Faces of Labor Exhibit: Sept. 24**

Did you know that more than 9,000 alumni have graduated from The Harry Van Arsdale Jr. Center for Labor Studies? We will celebrate the labor program and our union partners at the opening of Faces of Labor. Portrait artist Bruce Bundock '08 will unveil his student portraits representing all our union partners and programs. Van Arsdale alumni will hear more shortly.

To learn more about these and all of our alumni student events, please go to [www.esc.edu/Alumni](http://www.esc.edu/Alumni).

## A Big SALUTE at Inaugural Induction Into Veterans National Honor Society

I am happy to announce that 76 active-duty military and veteran SUNY Empire students and alumni have been inducted into SALUTE Veterans National Honor Society. Representing all branches of the U.S. Armed Forces, they are the first from SUNY Empire to be inducted into SALUTE.

Of the college's inductees, 61 are veterans, nine are on active duty and six serve in the National Guard or Reserves. Sixteen serve, or have served, with the Air Force, 33 with the Army, three with the Coast Guard, 12 with the Marines and 12 with the Navy.

Nearly 1,100 veterans and military students are enrolled at SUNY Empire. I am very proud to say that only Jefferson County Community College, located less than 20 minutes from Fort Drum, N.Y., home of the U.S. Army's 10th Mountain Division, educates more military students at a single campus within SUNY.



To read more about our Office of Veteran and Military Education and SALUTE, I encourage you to visit [www.esc.edu/veteran-military/](http://www.esc.edu/veteran-military/).

*Nine members of the inaugural SALUTE class, from left, Andrew Smith, Raul Rodriguez, Juan Nicholson, Teri Tompkins, Nicholas Lee, Elissa Greene, Brandon Dearborn, Douglas Sherman and Bryant Smith, took the induction oath on Saturday, April 7, in Albany, N.Y.*

## Three Cheers for Alumni Volunteers

I want to extend a very special thank you to all of our 1,500 alumni who have volunteered to assist the college this past academic year.

You have come out in record numbers to serve as panelists at Statewide Open Houses, information sessions and Lunch and Learns. You have contributed to the student experience by offering testimonials, assisting at conferences, appearing on career panels and staying engaged on social media.

To top it off, you have volunteered at eight regional commencements across New York state to help welcome the newest class of graduates into the alumni ranks.

If you are interested in learning more about ways to get involved, please go to our alumni website at [www.esc.edu/Alumni](http://www.esc.edu/Alumni).

## Alumni Profile

### Beverly Reeves '81

**Beverly Reeves** has done a multitude of things in her long life, all of them geared toward helping others. The mother of a quadriplegic son, Reeves supports an organization that researches and seeks cures for spinal cord injuries. She has been active in her church, where, she says, she learned the value of helping others. She's worked with the whole spectrum of humanity from children to seniors. She's volunteered with the developmentally disabled and with those getting social services who needed a hot meal.

"The way I feel and handle my philanthropy is hopefully the way I live my life. I've always done volunteer work," she explained.

Reeves began her career as an RN, married a family physician shortly after earning her certificate, and was an elementary school nurse for two years. She also worked one year in pediatrics. But once her children arrived, she devoted most of her time to raising the four of them. It was difficult for Reeves to work in her profession. "It's not like today where you have split shifts and can work part time," she said. But, she eventually was able to take a minimum wage job at the Geneseo Country and Village Museum for 30 seasons, including as a cook in a historic kitchen.

Besides service, another thing Reeves values is education. She has been supporting Empire State College for 37 consecutive years, ever since graduating in 1981. Why does she give yearly, making her a member of the Loyalty Leaders Club?

"I guess I always valued education and just thought that I should do it," she said. She believes that it is good to give back. "Some people aren't able to go to college. I enrolled in college after raising young children, and I think it is important to get a college degree." In addition, she had the example of her husband, who always supported his college. "He felt loyalty to it, and I guess I felt the same way."

Although she had her RN certificate and additional credits earned at SUNY Geneseo when she enrolled at SUNY Empire, "I still didn't have a college degree, and I had all these credit hours." At Empire State College, she earned prior-learning credit for her voluminous college-level learning and a degree.

"Empire State College made it possible for adults to get an education. You could take time off. You had a mentor who worked with you every two weeks and you could design your own program," she said. She had many interests, such as New York state history, anthropology, sexuality of the handicapped, American history and American art. Her self-designed degree allowed her to explore all of those things.

The best thing? Because she got a degree in Community and Human Services, she was able to apply it to her volunteer work.

To what does she attribute her desire to help others? Despite the fact that she lost her parents at an early age, she grew up with an aunt and uncle and a lot of love. "I never felt like an orphan," she said.

She also remembers having tuberculosis before the era of antibiotics, and having a minister's wife come and read to her a



*Photo provided*

*Beverly Reeves '81*

chapter of a book every day. "She spent all of her time helping people. I remember that. You do try to help people who are less fortunate."

For some of those reasons, Reeves has been active in her church, was a church deacon and felt she put her degree to good use when she did her visiting as a church elder.

Their mother's example influenced her children's careers; one daughter is a nurse, the other is a dean at the Rochester Institute of Technology and one is retired from working with the developmentally disabled in group homes. Her son overcame his challenges and was a lawyer before his death.

Reeves still lives in the 185-year-old home she shared with her family, and still stays busy.

Reeves believes it doesn't matter what the size of the gift is that you give to your alma mater, as long as it is used to give others the same opportunity you had. She feels a sense of duty to contribute to Empire State College because she values her education. "I was able to go to school, take courses and do all the other things I needed to do in life. You can't do that at other colleges."

We are so grateful to you, our generous supporters, for helping us create opportunities for so many students. In 2017, your generosity allowed us to award more than \$780,000 in scholarships. Just like Beverly (page 3), many of you loyally show your support each and every year. Alumni and friends who have made a gift to SUNY Empire State College for three, five, 10 and 20 or more years consecutively are welcomed into the Loyalty Leaders Club.

Our annual phonathon is starting soon and is a great way to continue your generous philanthropy, and join the Loyalty Leaders Club or make your very first gift to SUNY Empire. Our callers are looking forward to hearing about your SUNY Empire State College experience and letting you know how you can make a difference in the lives of thousands of students with a gift to the Fund for Empire State College. Want to make your gift before calling begins? Use the enclosed envelope or visit [www.esc.edu/Giving](http://www.esc.edu/Giving).

In the upcoming months, you may notice a bit of a schedule change for The Fund for Empire State College; this year we will not be hosting a Giving Day Challenge. We have enjoyed hosting our 24-hour and four-day challenges over the past few years, but this year we want to focus our efforts on other innovative ways to create awareness about the impact of gifts to the Fund for Empire State College throughout the year. Thank you for your support as we inspire curiosity and empower success.

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## Your Gifts at Work – One Student’s Story, Every Student’s Gratitude

Gifts from the college’s donors are utilized in a number of ways, including direct student support through scholarships and fellowships, faculty development efforts, academic program development and a number of other student-focused activities. By far, the largest percentage of funding goes to scholarships and student-centered initiatives. In 2017-18, the Empire State College Foundation allocated more than \$784,000 in funding directly to students.

Donors to the college have established more than 100 annually funded and endowed scholarship funds, identifying various preferences and criteria for awards. More than 500 students received one of these donor-funded, named scholarship awards this year, while more than 100 additional students received unrestricted funds through the Foundation’s program budget.

Each of those 500 students has expressed their gratitude for this scholarship assistance, and their stories

are sincere, powerful and resonate with our alumni’s own personal histories.

Alumni support is crucial to students like Emma Manno, a recipient of the Morton Bahr ‘83 Distance Learning Scholarship. Manno, a full-time student and single mother, has a passion for the study of human development and neuropsychology.

“Attending SUNY Empire has been an enriching and rewarding experience for me,” Manno said. “Having gained the knowledge and tools, added to my life experiences, provides me with the ability to be an effective human service professional. Being a student at SUNY Empire has helped me grow and increase my life skills.”

Manno started her associate degree at Sullivan County Community College more than a decade ago, ultimately earning it at SUNY Empire. She is graduating this summer with a bachelor’s degree in Community and Human Services.

“The advantages from a higher education have improved life for my family, specifically my daughter, Sofia, who makes me proud every day, showing me the true meaning of life. My goal is to take steps toward self-improvement, hoping to be a good role model for her. New possibilities have opened up; I’ve benefited in a multitude of ways and owe much of my success to academia. Thank you for providing me with the opportunity to pursue my passions and improve my life.”



*Emma Manno and her five-year-old daughter, Sofia*