



**SUNY EMPIRE**  
STATE COLLEGE

# UPDATE

**SPRING**  
**2021**



Officer in Charge **Nathan Gonyea**

## Letter from the Officer in Charge

Greetings!

Over the past several months, the SUNY Empire State College community has reflected upon our first 50 years — specifically, the people and events that transformed a bold idea about what higher education could be into an institution that has become, over the course of a half century, a national model for innovation in higher education.

Although we enjoy the look back at our history and successes over the past half century, we know there is much work to be done to sustain SUNY Empire through the next half century.

The reality is that 50 years ago, the so-called non-traditional adult learner and the concept of distance learning weren't that common. But today, especially in the midst of a global pandemic that drove students out of classrooms and into online spaces, we have company — and competition.

The ability to be innovative and flexible enough to meet the needs of students where they are in this rapidly changing educational landscape means continual invention, reinvention, revolution, and evolution. It means staying

true to our mission to provide flexible, quality academic programs, yet adapting to societal shifts, workforce demands, and advanced technologies.

This summer, SUNY Empire opens a brand-new Park Avenue location in the middle of Manhattan. In the fall, we'll launch our first-ever doctoral program — an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership and Change. We're expanding master's and undergraduate programs, too, in business, general studies, liberal arts, and more. And our Center for Autism Inclusivity is leading the way in workforce development for professionals serving individuals with autism, creating autism-inclusive learning environments, and providing the most up-to-date research on autism spectrum disorders.

I wish you all a happy and healthy spring and summer, and on behalf of SUNY Empire State College, I thank you for all you do for our college community.

Sincerely,

Nathan Gonyea  
Officer in Charge



Alumni House in Saratoga Springs

## The Alumni Virtual Event Series Continues . . .

Grab your favorite beverage and join fellow SUNY Empire alumni and friends for a virtual midday coffee break! Each month, “Conversations Over Coffee” features new speakers and a new topic. All speakers are part of the SUNY Empire Community — alumni, faculty, staff, and students. Topics range from alumni stories and current events to career advice, faculty research, hobbies, and more.



The series started during the pandemic as a way for alumni to engage with one another when they could not meet in person. The series has now grown into a platform connecting alumni and building community in a remote world. For more information, or to suggest topics for discussion, please contact [alumni@esc.edu](mailto:alumni@esc.edu).

## Our Alumni Make It Happen – Refer a Student!

We know that many of our alumni Make It Happen for future SUNY Empire students. You may have learned about SUNY Empire State College from one of our alumni at work or in your personal life. Alumni are our best ambassadors; you understand the SUNY Empire experience and all the benefits of a SUNY Empire State College education.

With that in mind, we have created an alumni refer-a-student program. Through this program, a friend, colleague, or family member you refer to SUNY Empire State College can receive a \$100 Better Together Scholarship toward one term of enrollment and a waiver of the \$50 orientation fee. In addition, they will have access to a recruitment professional from their area to answer questions they have during the application process. Do you have a friend, family member, or colleague interested in starting or finishing their degree? Visit [alumni.esc.edu/get-involved/refer-a-student](http://alumni.esc.edu/get-involved/refer-a-student) for more information or call **518-581-5380**. Refer a student today and help make it happen!

## The Presidential Search

The process to identify the next president of SUNY Empire State College is underway. For information on the search, updates as they happen, and a list of members of the Presidential Search Committee, visit [www.esc.edu/presidential-search](http://www.esc.edu/presidential-search) or email [PresidentialSearch@esc.edu](mailto:PresidentialSearch@esc.edu).

## SUNY Empire Continues to Celebrate its Golden Anniversary

In 1971, SUNY Empire State College began as a bold reimagining of the higher education experience. A “non-campus institution,” as former SUNY Chancellor Ernest Boyer described it, “that would not depend on the rigidity of the calendar or class schedule but on the creativity of the students.” That college is SUNY Empire. Join us as we celebrate our 50th year with a yearlong series of events and activities. Learn more at: [www.esc.edu/50](http://www.esc.edu/50).



To stay connected, get involved, and view our calendar of alumni events, visit [www.esc.edu/alumni](http://www.esc.edu/alumni).

# A PASSION FOR LIVING... AND FOR GIVING

Meet Janice Pastizzo '98, '00, '04



When Janice Pastizzo first considered going back to school, she was married with children and working as a health and fitness director at a YMCA in upstate New York. She already had a nursing degree, but her careers in health and wellness left her with a vexing question: If people know what they need to do to be healthy — eat right and exercise — why don't they do it?

"I wanted to get a psychology background to learn the cognitive reasons why people do what they do, or don't do what they should do, to be healthy," Janice said.

She heard about SUNY Empire State College and knew it had a reputation for flexible schedules for working adults. So one day, Janice walked into the college's Schenectady location "just to talk." She walked out ready to enroll in a course.

"It was a wonderful conversation," she said. "I left there with all kinds of exciting ideas. I started with one course to make sure I could do it with my family and job."

She found out she could. She aced her course and decided to take two more the next term. Eventually, she parlayed her courses into an associate degree, which she earned in 1998.

"Every step of the way I felt empowered. I felt challenged. I just felt wonderful," Janice recalls. "My courses were challenging, and every professor was absolutely incredible. Everything I did empowered me to do more."

That same year, Janice left her post at the YMCA and opened her own wellness center, Fit for Life Wellness Center, which she runs to this day. She earned her bachelor's and master's degrees while growing her business.

"I was at a point in my life where I had a passion for everything I was doing. I loved planning my degree, getting guidance and expertise from professors, and running my business to help people. I was able to use my passion and experience to earn credits, and take courses that are part of my passion," Janice said.

In 2016, Janice and her husband Angelo, a commercial real-estate developer, established an endowed scholarship for students from the Capital Region studying community and human services at SUNY Empire. They advised those considering establishing a scholarship at SUNY Empire to start small, ask questions, and keep moving forward.

"Angelo saw what SUNY Empire did for me, and we liked the idea of funding an endowed scholarship to help students who have the passion to go to college, but not the means," Janice explained. "We've always been givers, even when we didn't have any money, because when you believe in something, you want to support it."

Hearing from the recipients the impact of the scholarship they endowed was proof positive that Janice and Angelo invested their money wisely.

"When we got our first letter, it brought us to tears," Janice recalls. "Giving this money makes us feel like we're making a difference to people who are making a difference to other people."



# The Fund for **SUNY EMPIRE** STATE COLLEGE

## 50 Years of Gratitude

During our 50th anniversary year, we find ourselves reflecting on the many people who have joined SUNY Empire State College in its journey to positively impact the lives of students and communities we serve. This milestone celebration comes at an unprecedented time in history — a time when we are all looking to those who can and do make a difference. While the college community bands together to support our students during this time of crisis, the Fund for SUNY Empire has been making a difference in the lives of our students every day for nearly five decades. Thanks to the generosity of our alumni, employees, and friends, the Fund supports efforts to continually improve our programming, retain exceptional faculty, and offer scholarship opportunities that enable so many students to experience a life-changing education.

When the first SUNY Empire annual fund drive was launched in 1975 — raising a total of \$2,273 — the college began raising funds to directly benefit students. Since then, the Fund for SUNY Empire has provided support to hundreds of students each year — students like 2020-21 Fund for SUNY Empire Scholarship recipient Karlie, who is pursuing a degree in educational studies. And students like Flore, who works for the Mayor's Office to End Domestic and Gender-based Violence in Brooklyn while she pursues her degree in interdisciplinary studies, and David, who is completing his degree in business, management and economics.

## Funding the Future: The Next 50 Years

Although we have been enjoying the look back over the past 50 years, we are also excitedly looking to our next 50 years and beyond and planning for the journey to come. We know, more than ever, that our students will need SUNY Empire's innovation and flexibility that allows us to meet them where they are, while providing quality academic programming that empowers them to take charge of their education.

We have come a long way since that modest \$2,273 raised in 1975. Thanks to alumni and friends like you, in 2020 the SUNY Empire State College Foundation provided nearly \$1.7 million to assist with collegewide initiatives, including just under \$1 million in financial assistance to more than 1,200 students, funding faculty research projects, and making investments in the development of new programs and partnerships. We are grateful for the generosity of those of you who have joined us in our efforts over the last 50 years, and we hope that you continue that tradition of paying it forward with a gift to the Fund for SUNY Empire in honor of the college's 50th anniversary. Please consider making your gift today at [www.esc.edu/giving](http://www.esc.edu/giving).

Thank you for being part of our community and for your loyalty to SUNY Empire. Together we can make it happen for the next generation of SUNY Empire students!