

COMMENCEMENT EDITION

FALL 2022

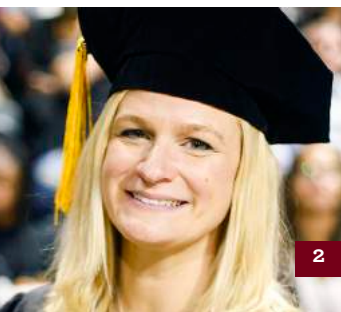
Invention

THE MAGAZINE OF THOMAS EDISON STATE UNIVERSITY

Graduating Our First DBA Cohort

Erin Rybicki, DBA '22

*The
50th Annual
Commencement*



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Dear Alumni, Students and Friends,

I am incredibly proud to bring you this edition of *Invention* magazine. Not only because we devoted the issue to our 50th Commencement ceremony and the remarkable graduates who share this milestone, but, also, because their collective resourcefulness, scholarship and endurance have now coalesced around the event for half of a century.

This year's Commencement provides a pinnacle occasion for us to once again join hundreds of graduates and their families in Trenton, N.J., to share the unique sense of validation that only a college degree can deliver. I hope you agree the profiles and images herein adequately capture this auspicious moment.

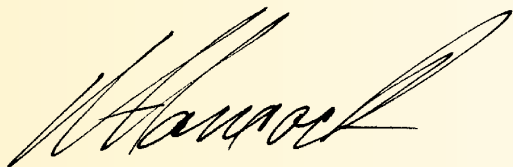
Among those featured is Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) graduate Dr. Erin Rybicki who inspired attendees as the Commencement ceremony student speaker. As a proud member of the inaugural DBA cohort comprised of executive leaders, consultants and educators, Rybicki is solidifying her impact as a college professor, attorney and scholarly publications author, who is now taking that expertise to the next level.

You will also meet Mariana Beshai-Ascander an MSM degree in Public Service Administration and Leadership program graduate. Her degree is helping to positively impact her work for the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development's Pathways to Recovery and Senior Community Service Employment programs. Also in this remarkable mix is John Adams, an Master of Arts in Educational Leadership (MAEdL) program graduate whose degree is helping him close performance gaps and empower students in his urban school district so that they can lift up their communities.

We will also meet Edgar Newell, an assistant vice president of Clinical Engineering for the largest healthcare system in New Jersey, who tells us that his career has "exploded forward" and that his BS degree in Technical Studies validates what he does every day. Also in this issue is Accelerated BSN Program graduate Priyal Parikh, RN. Straight out of our program, Parikh secured a position as a nurse fellow for Lenox Hill Hospital in New York caring for the institution's most vulnerable patients.

Their *Invention* profiles represent just a cross-section of our extraordinary graduates. Since 1972, TESU has played an integral role in the national movement to close achievement gaps, launch innovative degree pathways, empower the workforce and transform the lives of 65,000 alumni and the communities around them. We are preparing for our next 50 years so that we can keep transforming yours.

I hope you enjoy this issue of *Invention*,



Merodie A. Hancock, PhD
President





*A New Class
of Leadership*

Dr. Erin Rybicki, DBA '22

Leading, Achieving and Transforming

It only takes a minute in the company of any member of TESU's inaugural Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) cohort to grasp the resounding effect the degree has on their professional lives.

As a graduate of TESU's flagship DBA cohort, Dr. Erin Rybicki can speak to the program's relevance and career-enhancing power across multiple professional channels. She extolls the program's practicality and its immediate application to what she does every day.

"My coursework has positively impacted my career in more ways than I can count," noted Rybicki. "Earning a doctoral degree can be a challenge but the curriculum and my research work connected to it have helped to expand my expertise as a college educator, lawyer and author.

Rybicki serves as an associate professor and coordinator for Mercer County Community College's (MCCC) legal studies, paralegal studies and business programs. When not working with students, she serves as a legal ethics textbook author for Cengage Publishing.

"I have a strong passion for state education and through my work at MCCC, I became very familiar with the incredible programs at TESU. Earning my DBA was a natural progression as I extend my teaching scope and advance to a higher level in business and academic environments," noted Rybicki. "As my career continues to evolve, I've begun teaching MBA and upper-level undergraduate business courses encompassing law, organizational leadership and business communications."

As a collective unit at MCCC, Rybicki said that she and fellow faculty members work together to meet the needs of students while ensuring the best academic experience at "an incredible value."

"I sometimes need to pinch myself because I enjoy college-level teaching so much," she noted.

Rybicki can fully relate to the adult learner experience since much of her educational journey occurred while she balanced competing responsibilities. She earned her BA in political science from Rowan University in 2001, before pursuing her Master of Education in Educational Foundations from Widener University, Chester, Pa.; and earned her Juris Doctorate (JD) from Widener University Delaware Law School, Wilmington, Del., in 2004. She was admitted to TESU's inaugural DBA cohort in December 2019.

"Dr. Rybicki is a consummate professional," said Dr. Michael Williams, dean of the School of Business and Management, who oversees the DBA

"IT WAS DEMANDING TO WORK A FULL-TIME JOB AND PARENT WHILE STAYING ON TRACK WITH MY DBA. BUT THE PROCESS TAUGHT ME NEW SELF-DISCIPLINE SKILLS AND MADE ME VALUE WHAT I LEARNED EVEN MORE."

Dr. Erin Rybicki

program. "Her vision, academic leadership, professional credentials, continuous sense of purpose and scholarship speak to her strength as an adult learner."

In addition to her current responsibilities, she serves as a part-time associate professor for graduate business and undergraduate legal studies programs at Peirce College, Philadelphia, Pa. From 2010 to 2016, she served as assistant director of the Legal Education Institute for her alma mater, Widener University. She has also worked as an educational consultant for Thomas Edison State University and was a practicing attorney in southern New Jersey before moving into academia full time.

When Rybicki initially decided to pursue her second doctoral degree, friends and family asked why she would put herself through the challenge. However, she said, she knew in her heart it was the right path.

"It was demanding to work a full-time job and parent while staying on track with my DBA," she said. "But the process taught me new self-discipline skills and made me value what I learned even more. I am now developing a new associate of science degree track focusing on supply chain management. That opportunity was the direct result of my DBA research project. Our youngest child was 3 when I started the program, so my husband Sebastian's support along the way has been invaluable."

She noted that the DBA cohort model was uniquely beneficial because it exposed her to a diversity of professional experiences and offered access to mentors who were leaders in their respective fields.

"Our mentors were incredible, each one focused on a different aspect of business

and management to provide the most industry-relevant well-rounded doctoral experience possible. The mentor for my Scholar-Practitioner Field

Project, Dr. Tami Moser, was incredible, and I was amazed at her capacity for support. Our coursework deepened our expertise across a broad range of disciplines. This allowed for inspiring conversations and thoughtful debate among our cohort members. Dean Dr. Michael Williams was also an immense support throughout and was always available whenever we needed him."

Off the clock, Rybicki said that she and her family members are, 'big fans of all things Disney.'

"I am mom to 23-year-old Ava-Kathleen and 7-year-old Sebastian-Ari. We have a small ball-of-fur dog, Olivia, and we enjoy snorkeling and anything beach related. I generally avoid snow at all costs."

To learn more about the School of Business and Management's DBA program, visit tesu.edu/business/graduate/dba.

ACCELERATING SUCCESS

❖ Priyal Parikh, BSN '21

When a nurse made an early and indelible mark in Priyal Parikh's life, she became determined to follow the same path.

Priyal Parikh's admiration for a nurse practitioner sparked a nascent interest in patient care. Her laser-like focus and love for a challenge helped her transform that admiration into a personal mission. The route that resulted led her to the most vulnerable patients in a nationally ranked hospital.

"I've always had an interest in healthcare because my mother passed away

from cancer during my senior year of high school. Her wound-care nurse practitioner was so amazing that he really inspired me," recalled Parikh, a December 2021 graduate of TESU's Accelerated BSN Program. "He was so attentive, caring and intelligent."

Shortly after earning her degree through the W. Cary Edwards School of Nursing and Health Professions' program, Parikh was hired as a neurosurgical intensive care unit (ICU) nurse fellow at Lenox Hill Hospital in New York.

Although she previously earned a bachelor's degree in psychology from

Hunter College in 2018, Parikh always gravitated to healthcare, volunteering at hospitals and outpatient clinics in high school and college before serving as a certified nursing assistant, medical assistant and medical scribe. Now, she's turning her attention to critical care and her nursing fellowship that allows newly graduated nurses to work in the ICU without the traditional prerequisite year in a medical/surgical or stepdown unit.

"Being a critical-care nurse pushes you to always be diligent, think critically and pay attention to details," she said. "So as a type A person, I can't think of another track that's better suited for me."

Parikh secured a position as a nursing assistant at Lenox Hill while at TESU with the goal of "getting my foot in the door. I thought it would improve my chances of being considered for the fellowship," said Parikh, of the Manhattan-based institution.

That strategy worked, and the fellowship is everything Parikh had imagined.

"It pushes my boundaries, allowing me to grow and never get too comfortable," she said. "I like it when theoretical knowledge coincides with real-world practices and the big picture just clicks together like a puzzle."

In addition to providing education in the classroom and simulation lab, the fellowship program offers nurse fellows an opportunity to work directly with patients.

"It allows us to gain experience in all of the hospital's ICUs, which is how I discovered my interest in the cardiothoracic ICU," Parikh said. "My ultimate goal is to become a certified registered nurse anesthetist (CRNA).





Priyal Parikh helps administer COVID-19 vaccinations at a Trenton, N.J., clinic.

So, after gaining a few years of ICU experience and earning my CCRN (certification from American Association of Critical-Care Nurses), I plan to apply to CRNA programs.”

Parikh chose TESU for the short duration of its full-time Accelerated BSN Program for adult learners, which has since expanded from a 12-month to a 15-month course of study.

“I knew that 12 months would be extremely rigorous, but I had already spent so much time in school that I wanted to get to my end goal as quickly as I could,” said Parikh. “The program is feasible for someone who is able to learn certain things independently to supplement their classroom learning. It’s difficult yet doable. My advice to others considering this program is to understand your learning style and how to manage your time.”

Parikh appreciated TESU’s program because it prepared her for the National Council Licensure Exam for RNs (NCLEX-RN) while familiarizing her

with a variety of nursing specialties, disease processes and patient populations, including “factors that were not always clinical, but rather social, political or financial.”

In fact, Parikh gained invaluable practical experience with traditionally underserved patients during her time at TESU when she volunteered to administer COVID-19 vaccines through New Jersey’s Trenton Department of Health.

“I was super excited, because we were finally practicing what we were learning to do in the classroom,” she reflected. “When I talk about the pandemic in the future, I’ll be proud to say that I was among those who helped fight it when the first vaccines came out.”

Because her studies coincided with the initial wave of the COVID-19 pandemic, Parikh’s program changed to a hybrid model, with lectures online, labs and clinicals in person, and professors ready to help if clarification was needed.

“Living at home and commuting for labs and clinicals allowed me to save money and have family support,” Parikh said, adding that her now fiancé was always on hand to offer emotional support.

Parikh is also thankful to her family for another advantage — her ability to speak six languages.

“My first language is Gujarati, which I learned growing up at home,” she said. “Hindi and Urdu are extremely similar, and I learned those from Indian movies. Punjabi is similar to Hindi, so I was able to pick it up from friends and other peers.” In addition, she took Spanish in high school and college. “Speaking different languages definitely makes me stand out from my peers in interviews, but it also allows me to provide the most responsive care for my patients who speak those languages.”

To learn more about the programs in the W. Cary Edwards School of Nursing and Health Professions, visit tesu.edu/nursing.

EYES ON THE PRIZE

Kevin Sanders, MSC '22, BS '13, AAS '13

Continuing education will always be a given in Kevin Sanders' life.

An ever-evolving succession of cybersecurity concerns will ensure that recent master's program graduate Kevin Sanders can never fully rest on his laurels.

"I was motivated to earn my Master of Science in Cybersecurity (MSC) degree mainly by my love for computers, puzzles and troubleshooting," said Sanders. "The digital forensics aspect of cybersecurity, for example, is analogous to a challenging puzzle, especially if you are attempting to decipher and resolve an issue that has occurred on a computer network or device. I also enjoy educating others on better practices when dealing with their digital information."

Sanders currently serves as a senior engineer with IT services and consulting company ManTech (formerly Gryphon Technologies). As a retired U.S. Navy chief petty officer (CPO) with 21 years of active duty and experience in the field of naval electrical systems and electronics testing, maintenance and troubleshooting - his military training is serving him well in civilian life.

"My time in the Navy most definitely shaped my trajectory, and my experiences exposed me to my love for electronics and systems security," he noted. "My BS degree in Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness I earned at TESU complements my master's degree. Some of the same thought processes surrounding risk management and governance applies to both disciplines. Providing effective support during a crisis event like a natural disaster or a cyber breach requires a comparable mindset. My employer provides great opportunities in areas of cybersecurity that I now may be qualified to take advantage of in the future."

In his current role, he provides technical support for naval combat systems equipment. This can encompass power supplies, peripherals, sensors, training

and tactical software, and handling systems as well as leveraging computer aided design (CAD) to create system block diagrams for combat systems equipment and technical guidance for the U.S. Navy's L-Class ships.

Sanders is also living proof that college degree completion is a family effort.

"My wife provided strong encouragement during the times that I was at a standstill. Her support and spiritual affirmations kept me going each term and during my many nights spent writing papers and completing assignments. She constantly reminded me of what the experience of getting to graduation and receiving my diploma would be like," said Sanders, who earned his master's degree in March.

Sander's elation is well founded, he possesses one of the most in-demand skillsets in a field that is expanding significantly faster than other occupations. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (*BLS.org*), the average growth rate for employment in information security-related professions is predicted at 33 percent through 2030. Comparatively, the average growth rate across all occupations is 8 percent.

"I chose the MSC program at TESU because of my familiarity with the institution and its support of military and veterans. Earning my master's degree will also help me to meet my personal goals faster," said Sanders, who received a \$10,000 Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) Scholarship as a student. "I am truly thankful for the NRC's generous support. I utilized my GI Bill tuition assistance benefits to earn my AAS and BS degrees right before retiring from active duty. When I decided to earn my master's degree as a veteran, I had to apply for student loans because I had already gifted my remaining GI Bill tuition benefits to my children. Receiving the NRC Scholarship offset that financial burden."

Sanders also lauds the quality of TESU's academic programs and student support structure in helping him achieve his goals.

"I genuinely enjoyed my experiences at TESU. The quality of the online courses is exceptional, the course structure was excellent and the exchanges with fellow students added to the experience. The interactions with mentors were always positive and there was always a way to get help - whether from the staff or a classmate. If I was unsure about instructions from our mentor or the course content, I was always able to ask a fellow student for their insight or provide the same when needed."

Sanders has been married to his "beautiful and loving wife, the former Courtney Norwood, for the past 25 years." Off the clock, the couple serves as directors of the food pantry at their church, Faith World Ministries, based in Norfolk, Va., alongside a group of devoted volunteers. They have three adult children: daughters Elisia and Danielle, and a son, Kevin Sanders II, who is also now enrolled in a degree program at TESU. They have five grandchildren: Braylon, 5, Aubrey, 3, Landon, 3, Tia Lynn, 1, and Maliyah, 1. Rounding out their strong family ties are Sander's father, Grover; mother, Eloise; brother, Cedric; and his mother-in-law, Sharon Ward. The couple resides in Chesapeake, Va.

During any downtime, Sanders also enjoys repairing computers and TVs, taking in movies, solving puzzles and spending time with his family. Originally from Kansas City, Mo., Sanders is an avid Chiefs fan. He is also a licensed minister and blog writer: www.keys2unlock.com.

For more information on the programs available in the Heavin School of Arts, Sciences, and Technology, visit tesu.edu/ast.





conflicting DUE DATES

❖ Vanessa Guezala, BA '21

When Vanessa Guezala decided to return to college, she knew there would be challenges. What she didn't anticipate was one small but mighty obstacle.

"I studied psychology at Rutgers University many years back, but I never finished my degree," Vanessa Guezala explained. "In 2019, I decided to return to school. At the time I had two children, one 7 years old and a 5-month-old infant. So, when I learned about TESU through an internet search, I realized it was the perfect school for me because it offered all classes online, and I was able to do all my coursework on my own time and at my own pace if it was delivered on the due date. At times it was hard because of my children, my jobs and other responsibilities, but I was able to manage."

However, like many adult learners, she had to put her academic plans on hold again for a year for personal reasons. But in April 2021, she was determined to return to complete her degree. It was then that Guezala was confronted with another one of life's unexpected events.

"Right after I registered for classes, I found out I was pregnant with my third child," she revealed. "It was actually impossible to do anything; I was feeling sick and having migraines, while trying to focus on my life, jobs and kids. If it wasn't for Cynthia Strain (assistant dean of the Heavin School of Arts, Sciences, and Technology) and how much she

helped me, I probably would have withdrawn from my classes. She was my angel; she believed in me even when I didn't have the strength to believe in myself. I am beyond thankful for her and everyone else who helped me move forward. I have three children that look up to me, and I want to be better not only for myself, but also for them. They were by far my biggest motivation."

Calling Guezala her 'hero,' Strain added, "Vanessa embodies the spirit of a TESU student, and it was a pleasure working with her. Despite all the challenges she faced, she did not give up but persevered and reached her goal."

In addition to the support from Strain and other TESU staff, Guezala was impressed with the personal attention she received.

“My mentors were amazing and helped me tremendously,” said the 2021 Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology grad. “The flexibility you have by taking classes online, the ability to message my mentors and receive their prompt responses made such a big difference in my life. Studying at TESU was one of my greatest educational experiences.”

Guezala currently serves as a special education teacher at the Dr. Joyanne D. Miller Elementary School in Egg Harbor Township, N.J. She previously supported the school district’s Learning Resource Center (LCR) and also provided in-class teaching for special education students in English language arts and social

and sees what I do. He was so proud of me when he knew I was earning good grades and, especially, when I received my diploma. That made every tear and stressful moment worth it.”

Guezala is thankful for and acknowledged the support of friends and family, especially her mother, Chiqui, for always helping with the children.

“I honestly don’t know what I would do without her,” she noted.

She is also grateful to her boyfriend, George O’Donoghue, for believing she could finish her degree and for giving her words of encouragement whenever she questioned herself.

In her spare time, Guezala loves spending time with her family. “They are my happiness. We bought a camper last year

and it has been an amazing experience traveling with them. We can’t wait for summer!”

To learn more about Bachelor of Arts programs available in the Heavin School of Arts, Sciences, and Technology, visit tesu.edu/heavin/ba.

“All of my affiliations have helped me grow as an individual...earning my degree in psychology from TESU helped me obtain the teaching position I had hoped for.”

studies leading up to her full-time role in July 2022.

“All of my affiliations have helped me grow as an individual,” Guezala noted. “And, earning my degree in psychology from TESU helped me obtain the teaching position I had hoped for. What I am most proud of in my career, is being able to work with children; it has its challenges, but it’s also the most rewarding job I have ever had.”

Born in Lima, Peru, Guezala came to United States in 2000 when she was 19. Today, she lives in Egg Harbor Township with her children, Caden, 10, Kyleigh, 3, and Francesca, 10 months.

“My children are my reason to be better and to grow every day,” she said. “My two girls are still little, but my son more fully understands



THROUGH THE LENS OF LEADERSHIP



John Q. Adams, MAEdL '22

A master's degree is helping John Q. Adams move from the classroom to an even more pivotal role for his school district.

In his new position as a senior manager of Assessments and Programming for the Camden City School District, N.J., John Q. Adams has found a professional sweet spot centered on data analysis and enhanced by higher education.

"In February 2022, I began an amazing new role overseeing the district's state testing and K-12 afterschool, summer school and credit recovery programs," said Adams, a 2022 graduate of TESU's Master of Arts in Educational Leadership (MAEdL) program. "My time is largely spent working with the Division of Teaching & Learning staff in examining relevant data to understand the most pressing needs of our schools, our students and their teachers."

An important measurement for urban communities like Camden, N.J., district-wide assessments allow school leaders to systematically review data that will help them address performance gaps, identify their district's most pressing needs, and prioritize outcomes for students and instructional staff. The endeavor also demands that Adams be continuously connected to a range of internal and external stakeholders including community leaders, elected officials and district vendors.

"These assessments provide me with important contexts, including instructional outcomes and graduation rates; the resources and academic climate at each of our schools; and educator effectiveness and retention rates," noted Adams, who was a special education teacher for the district between 2015 and 2022 before assuming his present role. "The endeavor has allowed me to put my teaching experience and coursework to good use and operate at the leadership level as I prepare for doctoral-level pursuits."

Adams and his colleagues are committed to providing the district's students with an educational framework that establishes an indelible pattern for success.

"Succeeding in educational pursuits during their formative years positions our students to affect positive change in their families and advance their

communities," he noted. "The MAEdL degree in District Leadership program and my continued academic pursuits will help me to become a change agent in this undertaking. TESU's hallmark learning structure allowed for my intellectual growth, and the collegial exchanges I had with fellow students enriched the experience. I now

University, Philadelphia, Pa., and a Bachelor of Arts degree in psychology from Rutgers University Camden. He also possesses a series of teaching and leadership-level certifications through the N.J. Department of Education.

Outside of his academic pursuits, he launched the *Camden City News* in 2020

"TESU'S HALLMARK LEARNING STRUCTURE ALLOWED FOR INTELLECTUAL GROWTH AND THE COLLEGIAL EXCHANGES I HAD WITH FELLOW STUDENTS ENRICHED THE EXPERIENCE."

John Q. Adams

recommend the program to everyone in my field who is interested in advancing in their career."

He chose the Heavin School of Arts, Sciences, and Technology program after narrowing down his choices and examining each institution's graduate-level curriculum, admission requirements and tuition. Throughout the process, he said, TESU remained the best choice.

"John represents the best and brightest of our 2022 MAEdL graduates," noted Associate Dean Dr. Tara Kent, who oversees the program. "His real-time application of our course content and simultaneous career progression speak to his dedication as a school district leader and the value our curriculum can immediately bring to his profession. We celebrate his accomplishments as he advances to doctoral-level study."

The former special education teacher for K-8 grade students, Adams has navigated a nontraditional pathway as an adult learner, spending more than 20 years in various healthcare and business settings before becoming an educator. He was recently accepted into the EdD program at the Rutgers School of Graduate Education, New Brunswick, N.J. Prior to earning his TESU degree, he received his Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree in pharmaceutical healthcare and marketing from Saint Joseph's

and intends to grow its parent company, the Camden City News Corporation, into the "number one source of newsworthy information for the city and its residents."

"Transitioning to education administration only recently, I had been teaching via virtual instruction since 2020. As teachers, we were all navigating uncharted waters and working diligently behind the scenes to ensure we were meeting the needs of our students. Amid these efforts, Camden's Pre-K to 12th-grade educators were forced to migrate the district's entire curriculum practically overnight to accommodate virtual learning while continuing to engage with students in a meaningful way during the pandemic."

Adams is celebrating 21 years of marriage to his "beautiful wife, Maisha K. Adams." The couple has a son, John Q. Adams III, who he says makes him proud every day. "I love movies and can become completely immersed in a television series, which means that I'm still disappointed that 'Game of Thrones' concluded," noted the Camden resident. Adams' favorite pastimes are "good music, good food and great conversation."

To learn more about the programs available in the Heavin School of Arts, Sciences, and Technology, visit www.tesu.edu/heavin

Chasing a Dream

❖ Emsley Baptiste, ASBA '19, BSBA '22

Emsley Baptiste had always dreamed of earning a college degree; today, he has two and is planning to pursue a third.

Growing up, Emsley Baptiste put his dreams on hold while he helped support his mother and siblings. Now, he has realized his aspirations.

“My mother was a single parent that had the task of raising four other siblings and me on her income as a self-employed seamstress,” recalled Baptiste, who grew up in Guyana, South America, and came to the United States in 2015. “As the eldest - after completing high school - I started working to assist my mother. This responsibility made it impossible for me to fulfill my dream of earning a degree in business or accounting. Instead, I pursued studies with the Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (a global professional accounting body). Furthermore, I obtained qualifications as a Certified Accounting Technician (CAT). Even with these credentials, I felt incomplete until I finally earned my degree.”

Baptiste was encouraged to study at Thomas Edison University by his wife.

“Throughout my college experience, my wife has been my biggest cheerleader and encouraged me to hang in there even when the going got tough, and I felt like I wanted to quit,” said Baptiste. “She impressed upon me that TESU was perfect for working adults based on her comparison of other universities,





and its accounting degree program was accredited.”

The School of Business and Management graduate, who earned his Bachelor of Science in Business Administration degree in Accounting in June, further explained, “My wife wanted me to enroll in a school that provided students with a work/school/life balance and would accommodate the flexibility of schedule that I needed.”

Baptiste, who also earned an Associate in Science in Business Administration degree in 2019 from TESU, is preparing to begin working toward his Master of Science degree in Accounting at the University.

“It took me approximately five years to complete my two undergraduate degrees,” he reflected. “Online learning was new to me, and, at first, it was challenging. I overcame these hurdles because the course structure and study materials were carefully selected and relevant. The mentors challenge students to think critically through active participation in the discussion forums and respond promptly and clearly to our concerns and questions.”

Currently a business owner, Baptiste registered Nissi Home Improvement

LLC in August 2020 and started operations in Trenton, N.J., before relocating to Salem County, N.J., in 2021. His company makes general home improvements but specializes in luxury bathrooms and kitchen installations. Before launching this endeavor, Baptiste was a tax preparer with Jackson Hewitt Tax Service Inc. in Newark, N.J.

“My accounting skills help me to improve my accuracy in preparing estimates for clients. Also, the training I received enhanced my management skills, along with keeping proper records of my business activities,” said Baptiste, who holds a commission as a Notary Public (Mercer County) and is a member of the National Association of Tax Professionals. “Being a Thomas Edison State University student was a great experience because it was my dream to earn a bachelor’s degree. Also, online learning helped me to expand my thought process and to become a more well-rounded individual. Now that I achieved my first goal, I am inspired to continue, and my experience with TESU is a big part of why I want to continue with the University to earn my master’s degree.”

Baptiste, who lives in Pennsville, N.J., with his wife, Imebet, has three daughters, Elizabeth, Ezema and Esther. He enjoys traveling across the U.S. with

his daughters and watching comedy in his spare time.

“We have taken family trips to explore different places and see different sights, from the bustling Times Square to crazy boat rides in Miami or just exploring the wonder of the Chesapeake Bay Bridge. So far, we have visited New York, Maryland, Florida, Virginia, Texas and Delaware.”

Baptiste is quick to note that during his tenure as a Thomas Edison State University student working toward his associate and bachelor’s degrees, he was “providing for three beautiful daughters, two of whom are now pursuing their college degrees and the third is in high school.

“As a parent, I knew my daughters have watched me juggle school and work, and they recognize the importance of being disciplined with their education. This past May, I watched with pride and a sense of fulfillment as my middle daughter graduated high school with honors (*magna cum laude*). When asked what motivated her to achieve honors status, her answer included that she was watching me.”

To learn more about the School of Business and Management, please visit tesu.edu/business.







CHANGING COURSE

If years of progressive nursing experience taught Mary Jo Loughlin anything, it was to trust those who recognized her potential before she did.

Mary Jo Loughlin, DNP '22

Mary Jo Loughlin began her 34-year career as a licensed practical nurse (LPN). Today, the chief nursing officer and senior vice president of Patient Care Services for Hunterdon Healthcare System extolls the value of a personal support system and a patient-first mentality.

"When I graduated high school in the 1980s, no one in my class was going into healthcare. Everyone was pursuing a career at a New York City-based firm," noted Loughlin, who earned her Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP) degree from the W. Cary Edwards School of Nursing and Health Professions in March 2022. "I knew I wanted to connect with and help people, I just wasn't sure of my path."

Initially aiming for a career in the hospitality field, she enrolled in Raritan Valley Community College's (RVCC) hotel/restaurant management degree program when she came across fellow students doing anatomy coursework. She found the content so fascinating that she switched majors and earned her diploma in nursing with honors from Somerset County Technical Institute in Bridgewater, N.J. She was soon hired as a LPN at Hunterdon Medical Center, Flemington, N.J., in its 32-bed medical/surgical unit. It was not long before a nurse manager recognized Loughlin's inner spark and persuaded her to return to RVCC to earn her associate degree in nursing.

"I'm extremely fortunate that I've had cheerleaders support me in each phase of my career, and nurse managers who saw potential in me that I didn't recognize myself. A group of us eventually enrolled in the Bachelor of Science in nursing program at Gwynedd Mercy University. This meant carpooling 50 miles between the medical center and Lower Gwynedd, Pa., three nights a week for four years. We were taught there that the patient is at the center of everything, which reinforced my ethos surrounding healthcare. We would have study sessions during the commute and eventually managed to haul each other across the finish line," remembered Loughlin, who earned her Master of Administrative Science degree from Farleigh Dickinson University in 2008.

The accessibility she found at TESU stands in stark contrast to her experiences as a nursing student.

"I've never been a traditional student,

which is why I immediately loved TESU. The online DNP program in Systems-Level Leadership offered a level of flexibility and cost-effectiveness that other institutions did not match. As a nurse leader, I had the option of attending for three years, taking one class at a time; or, completing my studies in a more intensive year-and-a-half long program."

When she entered the three-year program, she had been operating at the

exacerbated by the pandemic. Between expansions to staff and turnover, this has resulted in nearly 50 new nurses onboarding at the hospital within the past year.

"I meet every one of them and make sure they know that I started as an LPN in the same facility. I also ensure they have the resources they need and an environment in which they can thrive and provide optimum care for our patients. I encourage them to join our committees

"I'VE NEVER BEEN A TRADITIONAL STUDENT, WHICH IS WHY I IMMEDIATELY LOVED TESU."

Mary Jo Loughlin

healthcare leadership level for so long that she was skeptical about what more her courses could teach her.

"As it turns out, not only did the experience make me a more well-rounded leader and communicator, but also the networking component was huge. Our cohort was uniquely synergistic, and I learned so much from them," she said. "I would share my experience in value-based purchasing and reimbursement structures with cohort members whose areas of expertise spanned research or education. It was through this reciprocity that I learned volumes about the ways we can all contribute to the body of knowledge in our field."

As an executive team member at Hunterdon Healthcare System, Loughlin is responsible for finances, human resources and operational management centered on patient care and nursing performance as well as quality and patient safety metrics. Her focus is often on nurse staffing and providing an environment where they can succeed. Those endeavors have important human resource implications since the predicted nursing shortage has been further

or professional organizations so that they can begin influencing patient care at the highest levels," she noted. "In April, I created a resource nurse position specifically to support and mentor new nurses during the evening shift. This more seasoned employee moves through different units answering questions and touching base with them. This has resulted in new nurses fresh from orientation feeling less overwhelmed and more confident in their work."

Loughlin and her husband, Pete, have been married for 29 years. The couple has two sons and lives in Somerset County, N.J. "Pete has been amazing, supported me at every stage and provided relief during moments when I felt completely overwhelmed. One of the great things about the nursing profession was I never had to give up my career while balancing other responsibilities. I adjusted my schedule based on my family's needs and feel that I've ultimately set a good example for my sons."

To learn more about the programs offered at the W. Cary Edwards School of Nursing and Health Professions, visit tesu.edu/nursing.

RUNNING TOWARD DANGER

❖ Armand Cayer, BS '21 Current MBA in Healthcare Management Student

During a lifetime, some unexpectedly find themselves stepping up in a crisis to help others, and then there are those who have made it their life's work. Armand Cayer is in the second group.

"Over the course of my career, I have responded to the 9/11 Terror Attacks, Superstorm Sandy, the Miracle on the Hudson, a Papal visit, the Hoboken train derailment and a humanitarian

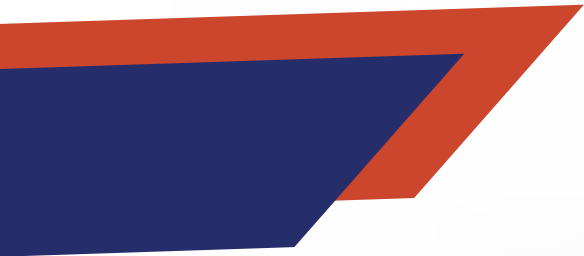
mission to the U.S. Virgin Islands post Hurricanes Irma and Maria," recalled Cayer, who obtained his EMT (emergency medical technician) and paramedic certification.

Today, Cayer is the EMS (emergency medical services) coordinator responsible for the Advanced Life Support Division at University Hospital in Newark, N.J. It is a position that requires he write policy, send

communications to internal and external stakeholders, provide oversight for training and ensure clinical compliance in the care delivered through evidence-based practice.

But with all those experiences and skills, Cayer takes





challenges and offered support,” noted Cayer.

Cayer believes his TESU degree provides a competitive advantage to further his career through formal education. He explained that the field of emergency medical services is only 50 years

member of the National Emergency Medical Services Managers Association.

“With the reasonable cost of a TESU education and such high value, I have elected to remain at the University for my graduate studies and have decided that the Master of Business Administration (MBA) degree in Healthcare Management is aligned with my future goals. And, since TESU has a fully accredited program, the decision was an easy one to make.”

pride in noting his “greatest career accomplishment is when new or younger staff members approach me for career advice. To me, this signifies that my commands trust me, respect my opinions and have a mechanism in place for obtaining their own aspirations.”

Cayer’s journey to earning his Bachelor of Science degree in Homeland Security and Emergency Management from TESU took several detours.

“After a few years of bouncing part time between community colleges, a friend suggested that Thomas Edison State University would help me achieve my educational goals,” Cayer explained.

Once enrolled, Cayer discovered that the University’s program and approach were a perfect fit.

“TESU accepted many of my transfer credits and awarded me credits for most of my professional certifications,” he recalled. “The remainder of my credits were achieved online or through Guided Study courses closing the gap toward earning my degree. Having taken a road less traveled, the University’s mentors, advisors and administrators understand the challenges of adult learners and nontraditional students.

“In fact, being a student at TESU allows you to adjust your course mapping around your life. Furthermore, I felt that every phone call answered, or email received, was by a partner in my education. Most notably, during the height of the pandemic I was called by a dean who was interested in my



“BEING A STUDENT AT TESU ALLOWS YOU TO ADJUST YOUR COURSE MAPPING AROUND YOUR LIFE.”

Armand Cayer

old and, as the industry matures, the requirements for senior leadership are constantly elevated. So, he continued, the institutional credibility of Thomas Edison State University validates his degree as a trusted and reputable source for education.

While studying for his BS degree at TESU, Cayer was named a few times to the President’s List, a yearly recognition bestowed on undergraduate students who exhibit a commitment to academic excellence, and was inducted into the Order of the Sword & Shield National Honor Society, for members of the homeland security and emergency management field.

“Through this accomplishment, I have had many networking opportunities leading to a safer and more resilient country,” said Cayer, who is also a

Cayer lives in Wantage, N.J., with his wife, Angela, and son, Loren. He also has two grown children, Angelina and Paolo, who have moved away and started their own careers in New York and Ohio, but, he noted, “we remain close. Family is important to us, and we celebrate each other’s accomplishments.”

In his spare time, Cayer’s interests do not stray far from his strong sense of service to the public good.

“I find community important and place a value on social programs,” he explained. “As such, I volunteer as a deputy EMS coordinator for Sussex County and coach youth

football. Having more than 15 years of coaching experience, I’m investing in the next generation of people who believe that serving others is more important than serving one’s self.”

Like many class of 2022 TESU graduates, Cayer attended the Commencement ceremony at the CURE Insurance Arena on Oct. 1 in full regalia – however, he reflected, “my decision to ‘walk’ was not based out of my own desire, but in honor or memory of those who invested in my education and successes.”

To learn more about the programs in the John S. Watson School of Public Service, visit tesu.edu/watson. To learn more about the MBA degree and the six program tracks available, visit tesu.edu/business/mba.

THE YEARNING TO LEARN

❖ Mariana Beshai-Ascander, MSM '21

Mariana Beshai-Ascander's desire to help others was cultivated in her formative years and modeled by her parents.

Mariana Beshai-Ascander's Master of Science in Management (MSM) degree is helping her build bridges in her community.

"I saw firsthand the struggles people faced in the area of Jersey City where

I grew up," noted Beshai-Ascander, a December 2021 MSM in Public Service Administration and Leadership graduate. "In my private life, I've always provided support to others - whether through helping them to complete paperwork, create resumes to land jobs or by locating community resources that best matched their needs. My continued work in the public sector has broadened that capacity to help."

She selected the TESU program with the encouragement of her husband and parents because she wanted to become an effective manager in the public sector. She is utilizing the knowledge gained in her studies to encourage and motivate her staff in her current role as coordinator of Employment and Training for the New Jersey Department

of Labor and Workforce Development (NJDOLE).

"I wanted to be effective in my job while gaining knowledge that will help further my career," she noted. "Doing so will also have an impact on the individuals our staff members serve. My TESU degree provided me with a better understanding of what motivates leaders to make certain decisions. It also gave me an expanded perspective on many aspects of my role - including human resource management and financial administration, and a better understanding of the nonprofit organizations we partner with daily."

Beshai-Ascander focuses her efforts on two of her employer's programs: The Pathways to Recovery program that provides employment assistance to those

"MY TESU DEGREE PROVIDED ME WITH A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF WHAT MOTIVATES LEADERS TO MAKE CERTAIN DECISIONS. IT ALSO GAVE ME AN EXPANDED PERSPECTIVE ON MANY ASPECTS OF MY ROLE...AND A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF THE NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS WE PARTNER WITH DAILY."

Mariana Beshai-Ascander

impacted by the opioid epidemic so they can reenter the workforce; and the Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) designed for low-income wage earners who are 55 years of age and older. The SCSEP program assists older adults by providing them with training and hands-on job experience in nonprofit organizations to help them obtain the necessary skills





needed to enter the workforce and maintain their self-sufficiency.

“They are complex and intense programs to help run alongside my supervisor, but doing so is extremely rewarding,” she noted.

A U.S. Army veteran, who served as a combat medic during Operation Iraqi Freedom, Beshai-Ascander credits that experience with helping her in her current position.

“My military service taught me how to be flexible, whatever my role, and the importance of being empathetic toward everyone,” explained Beshai-Ascander who also serves as a Mental Health First Aid instructor for adults, seniors and youth.

The Middlesex County, N.J., resident said her newly minted master’s degree has strengthened her determination in making a difference.

“My degree helped me gain confidence and makes others aware that I not only have the experience, but also the education and knowledge to be an effective leader. The initials ‘MSM-PSL’ after my name add a layer of credibility,” she said. Her long-term career goal is to

oversee program areas for the NJDOL.

Beshai-Ascander is supported in her endeavors by her husband, children and her best friend, Sherry Fouad, who she considers “a sister,” along with her parents, Khamis and Nabila Beshai, who she describes as “my rocks.” She has a great sense of accomplishment in becoming the first person in her family to earn a master’s degree.

“My parents are my role models and my strength,” she noted. “I want to make them proud, so they know all their sacrifices for our family were not in vain.”

She explained that her experience at TESU was different from her Africana studies and psychology undergraduate degree work at Rutgers University in that it was the first time she took courses completely online. However, the bonds she said she formed with fellow John S. Watson School of Public Service students were just as strong.

“I had some great exchanges with classmates who made me feel that I was never alone through the struggles we all faced during the pandemic or the workload we shared,” said Beshai-Ascander, who said what she valued

most was working at her own pace and independently tracking assignment deadlines. “My experience allowed for greater flexibility, which is what I needed as a full-time working mom, raising young children. For students who are looking for amazing mentors and requiring flexibility in their studies, I recommend TESU.”

Beshai-Ascander said that she comes from a “tight-knit Egyptian family.” Her agricultural engineer father and accountant mother, immigrated to the United States to provide a better life for her and her three siblings. She describes her husband, Ramy Ascander, as an amazing and supportive husband who encourages and motivates her in all she does. “He is God’s blessing to me,” she said of her spouse, with whom she shares two children, Naomi, 10, and Maximus, 8.

“My family is truly my life and means more than anything in the world to me,” she noted.

To learn more about the academic programs in the John S. Watson School of Public Service, visit tesu.edu/watson.



••• **Edgar Newell, BS '22**

TESU coursework did not compete with Edgar Newell's leadership role for the largest healthcare system in the state – it propelled it.

A degree has given Edgar Newell an incentive to continue his studies while managing the clinical engineering endeavors that support millions of patients per year.

An assistant vice president of Clinical Engineering for RWJBarnabas Health in

West Orange, N.J., Newell earned his BS degree in Technical Studies at TESU in March. He advanced to the University's Master of Science in Healthcare Management program before the ink was even dry on his undergraduate diploma.

"My career has exploded forward and my

degrees are another step in my journey," noted Newell. "The Bachelor of Science degree helped in this progression and validates me in my current position."

In that position, Newell is responsible for overseeing the health system's Clinical Engineering endeavors and biomedical

services in support of its 37,000 employees and 3 million patients per year. Those responsibilities encompass establishing system-wide standards and processes for medical equipment while ensuring that regulatory obligations are being met, developing productivity standards that measure departmental performance and implementing cost-effective solutions for equipment acquisition and maintenance. In tandem with those endeavors, he oversees the department's operational budget lines and serves as a liaison with the health system's biomedical equipment vendors.

"A BS degree was always my goal. I had enrolled in a degree program at a different school but had to withdraw because I needed to work full time to support my family. A major barrier at the time was the inability to adjust class time around my work schedule," said Newell, who selected the Heavin School of Arts, Sciences, and Technology's online program because it meshed with his previous education and work experience.

Newell began his career with Robert Wood Johnson University Hospital as a biomedical technician. He was promoted to a supervisory position in 2012 and became director of the department in 2014.

"I became assistant vice president of Clinical Engineering in 2021. In the interim, the institution continued to grow. After Robert Wood Johnson Health System and Barnabas Health merged forming RWJBarnabas Health,

precise location of equipment, individual assets and personnel crucial to emergency response capabilities, patient care, environmental monitoring, workflow management and operational efficiencies.

While he and his colleagues were advancing his employer's capabilities in these areas, Newell was finding that TESU's online curriculum and coursework fit both his schedule and professional objectives.

"I have been able to apply what I learned in my classes to my work life. This is especially important as professional situations arise, and I find myself adjusting more fluidly, knowing the right answer and how to articulate it to my colleagues," he said. "It's often afterward that I realize this ability was due to some element I gleaned from my coursework."

He also found that he was able to earn credit toward his degree for his professional training and the suite of certifications he possessed as well as transfer courses from previous institutions attended.

"I will be honest, as an applicant, I was very concerned that many of my course credits would be 'thrown out' during the transfer process. But that was not the case at all, and I had several productive exchanges and outcomes with the TESU's admissions staff and academic advisors as I transitioned through admissions to enrollment," he noted.



Newell with his family.



I HAVE BEEN ABLE TO APPLY WHAT I LEARNED IN MY CLASSES TO MY WORK LIFE. THIS IS ESPECIALLY IMPORTANT AS PROFESSIONAL SITUATIONS ARISE, AND I FIND MYSELF ADJUSTING MORE FLUIDLY, KNOWING THE RIGHT ANSWER AND HOW TO ARTICULATE IT TO MY COLLEAGUES.

Edgar Newell

my responsibilities continued to expand. In 2020, I began overseeing all clinical engineering and biomedical service endeavors spanning 11 hospitals, more than 300 doctor/outpatient locations and our retail pharmacy," he noted. "By 2021, I was overseeing all biomedical services and support for our Real-Time Location System."

Increasingly essential to contemporary healthcare environments, real-time location systems (RTLS) track the

The only moment that hung in the balance for him was waiting for his Capstone project to be graded.

"My one anxious episode was waiting for my final paper in my Current Trends and Applications (APS-401) course to be graded in order to complete my degree," he recalled. "I was so apprehensive while waiting for a response from our mentor because I had spent so much time writing and researching my final submission." His doubts were quickly

dispelled, however, when he learned that he had satisfied all the requirements for graduation.

A New Jersey native, his positive influences include his parents and his wife, Amanda, who he said is responsible for the success he's enjoying today. "She has been in my corner and has encouraged me to become the best version of myself," said Newell, of their 23-year union.

The couple lives in South Brunswick, N.J., and has two children: Ryan, age 18, and Lizzy, age 15, along with the family dog, Diamond. Newell enjoys cooking, crafting, playing tabletop games, traveling, hiking, backpacking, camping and following the Philadelphia Eagles and Phillies sports teams.

To learn more about the undergraduate programs in the Heavin School of Arts, Sciences, and Technology, visit tesu.edu/ast.

Grads... by the numbers

DEGREES AND
CERTIFICATES AWARDED

2,172

OLDEST GRAD

71

FEMALES



880

MALES

1,108



AVERAGE AGE OF GRADS

37



Graduates from every
county in New Jersey

2022



#TESUgrad

❖ New Cloud Computing Degree Program Launched

TESU'S NEWEST AREA OF STUDY OFFERS PLENTY OF SILVER LININGS

The Heaven School of Arts, Sciences, and Technology announced the launch of a Bachelor of Science (BS) degree in Cloud Computing program. The University is the first New Jersey state institution to launch a BS degree in this area of study that is completely online.

“This workforce-responsive program is ideal for those interested in ramping up their expertise and advancing in their career or immediately entering a rapidly expanding field with an in-demand credential,” noted Dr. John Aje, dean of the School.

The area of study is designed to meet the escalating demand for cloud computer professionals and provide students with a strong foundation in information technology and cloud computing technologies that prepares them for industry-recognized certifications through the Computing Technology Industry Association (CompTIA). Core areas encompass networking, security and architecture, and support and prepare students to begin entry-level and mid-level positions in several cloud



computing areas such as SysOps, support, operations, architecture and development.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment in associated IT careers is projected to grow 13 percent through 2030 (faster than the average compared to other occupations) adding nearly 670,000 new jobs to the workforce.

“Our objective was to enable our students to master cloud computing and related technologies quickly while also

offering them the flexibility to progress through the bachelor’s program at a pace that fits their life and learning style,” said Aje. “With talent shortages in the field and the need to protect an increasingly hybrid workforce, employers across multiple sectors are clamoring for the level of expertise that this curriculum will deliver.”

To learn more, visit www.tesu.edu/ast/programs/bs/cloud-computing.

❖ New Jersey State Budget Appropriation Marks a “Watershed Moment” For Students

Gov. Phil Murphy and the New Jersey State Legislature took a bold step in June toward supporting nontraditional students with tuition assistance geared specifically for Thomas Edison State University students as part of the fiscal year 2023 New Jersey state budget.

The budget includes a fiscal year appropriation of \$1.5 million from the State General Fund to the Higher Education Student Assistance Authority in the Department of State to provide tuition assistance for students.

“This is a watershed moment for our students,” said Dr. Merodie A. Hancock, president of TESU. “I want to thank the appropriation’s sponsors, the legislature and the governor for their action. With this investment, New Jersey takes a leading role in addressing the higher

education need-based aid of adult students.”

The tuition assistance funding will allow the University to establish a separate and unique Tuition Aid Assistance program, Grant Opportunity (GO-TESU), which will enable the University to open the doors for more adult learners seeking to change their lives and further their careers.

“Thomas Edison State University is a leader in providing online education for adult learners,” said N.J. Sen. Troy E. Singleton, District 7, who helped champion the additional funding for TESU. “This appropriation addresses a lack of financial support provided under the existing Tuition Aid Grants and other forms of traditional tuition assistance. It is our hope that this

funding will provide new opportunities to even more people seeking to achieve their higher education goals.”

N.J. Sen. Shirley Turner, Asw. Verlina Reynolds-Jackson and Asm. Anthony S. Verrelli, of District 15, applauded the decision and its implications for the state’s working adults.

“Fifty years ago tomorrow, the New Jersey State Board of Higher Education created Thomas Edison State University as one of the first public institutions to forego traditional conventions and bring higher education to the state’s working adults. Today, with this budget, we again forge ahead with thinking outside traditional financial aid conventions to create a pathway to education for adult learners,” the legislators said in a joint statement.

❖ **NJBIZ Names TESU Among ‘Healthcare Heroes’ and ‘Best Places to Work in N.J.’**

NJBIZ magazine named both Thomas Edison State University and one of its alumni among 53 statewide honorees as “2022 HealthCare Heroes.” TESU was also named one of the 125 “Best Places to Work in New Jersey” by the publication.

TESU and its W. Cary Edwards School of Nursing and Health Professions was honored in the Healthcare Heroes Education category, while alum Robert Budsock '07, '15, president and CEO of Integrity House, was selected in the Public Health category. Budsock earned a Bachelor of Science in Human Services degree as well as a Master of Science in Management from the University.

According to *NJBIZ*, “The HealthCare Heroes program was created to recognize excellence, promote innovation and honor the efforts of individuals and organizations making a significant impact on the quality of

healthcare in New Jersey.” Honorees are chosen by a panel of independent judges and includes both individuals and organizations across 12 categories.

Based upon participation with the Best Places to Work survey, from BridgeTower Media firm’s Best Companies Group, the 2022 *NJBIZ* Best Places to Work employers were voted as such by their employees. Nearly 200 Thomas Edison State University employees participated in the survey to share their opinions about the culture, work environment and benefits of working at the University.

“Thank you to our staff members who also helped during the pandemic, from supporting city of Trenton vaccine clinics to organizing vaccine and booster clinics at TESU,” said Thomas Edison President Merodie A. Hancock, PhD. “It is an exciting time for TESU – we are 50 years young and as bold as ever.”



Dr. Merodie A. Hancock and alum Robert Budsock at the Healthcare Heroes program.

❖ **TESU Joins Amazon As Educational Partner**

CAREER CHOICE PROGRAM ALLOWS AMAZON EMPLOYEES TO ENROLL IN TESU COURSES

Thomas Edison State University joined more than 140 colleges and universities nationwide to partner with e-commerce giant Amazon to expand career advancement opportunities for its 750,000 hourly employees.

Amazon’s Career Choice is an education benefit that empowers employees to learn new skills for career success at Amazon or elsewhere.

“Amazon’s Career Choice program aligns with our mission to prepare our workforce for the jobs of the future,” said Dr. Merodie A. Hancock, TESU president. “We are honored to be chosen and excited about the opportunity to expand access to education for Amazon’s frontline workers while helping to upskill and drive the New Jersey economy.”

The partnership supports N.J. state and

local government objectives to create a broader and more transferable skills sets for working adults by combining on-the-job training and college learning into a degree pathway, saving students time and money while actively building the workforce. With Career Choice, Amazon employees can now enroll in any of the more than 100 areas of study at TESU to earn a degree completely online. The University’s proximity to key Amazon distribution centers as well as its reputation as a leader in online education contributed to the decision to partner.

“Thomas Edison State University’s expertise in educating adult learners makes it an excellent addition to the Career Choice program,” said Colin Newman, director of public policy for Amazon. “We are pleased to add an



additional public New Jersey institution of higher education to the network. These partnerships are part of our continued investment in the Career Choice program.”

Since launching in 2012, Career Choice has helped provide education for more than 50,000 Amazon employees. In the United States, the company is investing \$1.2 billion to upskill more than 300,000 Amazon employees by 2025 to help move them into higher-paying, in-demand jobs.

For more information visit tesu.edu/amazon.

TESU Salutes RNs with Tuition Reduction

Thomas Edison State University announced the launch of its Salute to RNs Tuition Program to thank students who remain dedicated to keeping our communities healthy while they seek a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) degree.

As part of the campaign, University leadership worked with its Board of Trustees to reduce tuition for all W. Cary Edwards School of Nursing and Health Professions' in- and out-of-state nursing students who enroll in the RN-BSN program's courses this year. This will reduce tuition rates to \$311 per credit for students in the program.

"TESU is always working to create pathways that support our adult

learners," said Dr. Merodie A. Hancock, president of Thomas Edison State University. "From our accelerated terms and flexible start dates to the career relevancy of our programs, we are committed to identifying opportunities to reduce tuition costs for one of the most deserving segments of our student population."

The reduction in tuition is an advantage for nurses interested in rounding out their education with a pivotal credential in the field. TESU is keeping the new tuition program in place for 48 months as long as students register for at least 12 credits per year.

"An obstacle to degree completion for adult learners is most often a financial

one. Consequently, the Board was pleased to support the Salute to RNs Tuition Program structure," said Lydia Stockman, RN, MHA, FACHE, chief administrative officer for Inspira Medical Centers Mullica Hill and Woodbury, N.J., and member of the TESU Board of Trustees. "As a nurse myself, I join the University in a desire to help these students expand their expertise and advance in a field that urgently needs them."

To learn more, visit www.tesu.edu/nursing/programs/bsn-msn.



foundation news

Donor Cords Make the Difference

Jacqueline A. Lynch, BA '22, learned that inspiration can come in many forms even during the most challenging times. She recently shared her motivations for paying tribute to her mother, resuming her degree journey and proudly wearing a TESU Philanthropy Cord.

My mother passed away in May 2021, and as I lived with my grief, I spent a lot of time thinking about how much she gave up and how much she missed out on her own dreams. It was in this moment that I realized that it was time for me to pursue my dreams and focus on the goals I had put off for too long.

With a recommendation from a friend, I found Thomas Edison State University and resumed my journey to finish the degree I started 28 years ago. As a 46-year-old married mother of three with a stressful full-time job, I was nervous and excited at the same time. But I did it - I earned 39 credits in 300 days. While I was warned by my academic advisor that taking three 400-level courses at the same time as my Capstone course was a bit aggressive, I dug deep and found a way to focus on the end goal. My last semester was my best, and I am proud to have earned the TESU President's Award, which recognizes undergraduate students who display superior academic achievement during their degree journey.

In grieving for my mother, I learned so much. I realized how strong, smart and brave I can be. I realized there are no limits except the ones we put on ourselves, and I experienced something I haven't felt in a very long time. On the last day of the term, I celebrated by taking a trip that has been on my bucket list forever - just like my degree. But there was one more item I needed to cross off my list: I purchased the green TESU Philanthropy Cord that I proudly wore during Commencement. It was my way of supporting future students and saying "Thank You" to this wonderful University that has given me so much.

To learn more about TESU Philanthropy Cord, visit tesu.edu/alumni/support/cord.



MEET A TESU GENIUS

Salvatore Salpietro, BA '08

NOT ALL WHO WANDER ARE LOST. MANY ARE BUSY ACCUMULATING CREDITS AT TESU.

Like most adult learners, Salvatore “Sal” Salpietro, BA '08, knew he was destined for bigger things, he just needed the right vehicle to get there.

“Before I was a student at Thomas Edison State College [now University], I was working full time and focused on saving money,” noted Salpietro. “I was enrolled at Ocean County College (OCC), N.J., but wasn’t sure where my next chapter would lead me.”

While at OCC, he took advantage of the institution’s summer abroad program in Rome, and said the experience changed his entire trajectory. He later leveraged his dual citizenship to apply for job openings in Italy and soon landed a position as an IT technician at The American University of Rome.

“I became focused on earning my undergraduate degree, and my employer provided an opportunity to cover the cost of my education without relying on outside sources,” said Salpietro, a TESU Genius Program participant who began his studies at the University in 2003.

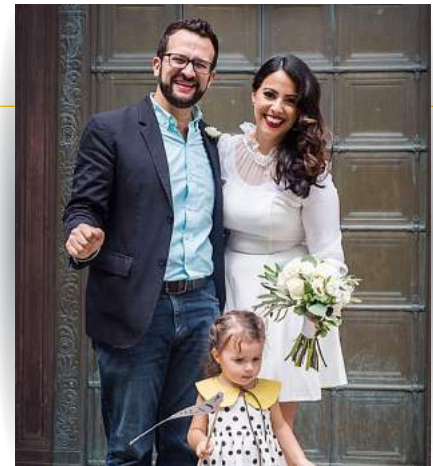
He began searching for a U.S.-based university that would accept his previously earned credits and the credits

he was accumulating at the American University of Rome.

“Once I examined my options, I couldn’t believe that I found a school that satisfied my unique wish list. During this time, I worked for the U.S., Australian and German embassies; the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations; and Penn State University’s Italy Campus – all while completing my bachelor’s degree at Thomas Edison.”

After living in Italy and, later, the U.K., he moved back to the New York area and went to work for a tech startup before co-founding two more startups. Today, as chief partnership officer for Fundraise Up, his objective is to help nonprofits optimize their online presence and increase visitor engagement. The company’s platform has already assisted UNICEF, American Heart Association and World Health Organization (WHO) Foundation with their digital fundraising efforts.

Salpietro continues to engage with TESU because “there is no other university like it,” he said. “The TESU community is an assemblage of adventurers. Its current and prospective students are explorers at heart who can travel, discover and study from anywhere they happen to be.”



As a participant in the five-step Genius Program, Salpietro and nearly 80 of his fellow TESU alumni play a significant role in advocating for the institution and persuading others to continue their education.

“As a member of the program, I am proud to tell everyone about TESU,” he said. “Not only did it allow me to get my education on my own terms as I satisfied my curiosity in a global context, but it also allowed me to do so in the most efficient and cost-effective way possible.”

To learn more about TESU’s Genius Program, visit www.tesu.edu/alumni/support/genius.

Be a TESU Genius!

Alumni and friends of TESU are invited to join the Genius Program. Simply complete five steps to be eligible for the prize!

See complete details at tesu.edu/genius.

Keep Us Posted!

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

Alumni Facebook Group: tesu.edu/FacebookGroup

Student and Alumni LinkedIn Group: tesu.edu/LinkedInGroup



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