

11-10-2020

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Recommended Citation

(2020) "DePaul's Academic All-Stars," *DePaul Magazine*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 412029 , Article 6.
Available at: <https://via.library.depaul.edu/depaul-magazine/vol1/iss412029/6>

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DePaul's Academic All-Stars

By
Abigail
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DePaul's commitment to academic excellence is on display through the breadth and depth of our faculty's activities and research. Please meet some of DePaul's academic all-stars who are redefining excellence.

Kelly Richmond Pope

Associate Professor of Accounting Kelly Richmond Pope figured out a while ago that one of the best ways to teach her students about white-collar crime and fraud was through movie clips.

“I always liked using an unexpected approach in the classroom, and that was film and TV,” says Pope, who worked in the forensic accounting practice of KPMG before joining the full-time faculty at DePaul in 2006. In time, she “realized that I could probably make the type of content that I needed instead of having to borrow somebody else’s.”

Beginning in 2011, Pope began traveling around the country shooting on-camera interviews with white-collar felons, whistleblowers and victims of fraud. The result was her 2012 documentary, “Crossing the Line: Ordinary People Committing Extraordinary Crimes,” which received both the American Accounting Association Ethics Committee’s Teaching Award and the Mark Chain/FSA Innovation in Graduate Teaching Award sponsored by the American Institute of CPAs (AICPA) and is used in colleges, universities and corporations throughout the country.

“When you start getting into these stories, you actually see how what happened to them can happen to anybody,” she says. “We all make missteps, and sometimes we just don’t think about them. Well, for these guys, their missteps got bigger and bigger and bigger.”

“THE MEDIA SENSATIONALIZES FRAUD OR CRIME. BUT WHEN WE ONLY SEE THE SENSATIONAL PART, WE ARE NEGLECTING THE MORE IMPACTFUL PIECE, WHICH IS HOW DID THIS HAPPEN IN THE FIRST PLACE?”

—KELLY RICHMOND POPE

In 2012, Pope heard about the ultimate fraud: how a comptroller from the small town of Dixon, Ill., had embezzled \$53.7 million over two decades to support her lavish lifestyle, including her stable of championship American quarter horses. Pope’s documentary “All the Queen’s Horses” tells the story of what is thought to be the largest municipal fraud in U.S. history. Released in 2017, it went on to win numerous awards.

“I wanted to make ‘All the Queen’s Horses’ to make sure the real story within the story is told,” she says. “The media sensationalizes fraud or crime. But when we only see the sensational part, we are neglecting the more impactful piece, which is how did this happen in the first place? And how did all these people miss it?”

“Kelly is brilliant,” says Lawrence O. Hamer, a former colleague at DePaul who is now dean of the College of Business at Purdue University Northwest.

“What makes Kelly unique is how she looks at things in ways that most people don’t. She looks for connections,” he adds. “She is also, as far as I know, one of the only accounting professors to teach herself how to make documentary films and to make them so exceptionally well.”

In addition to teaching courses at DePaul on everything from forensic accounting to ethical leadership, Pope writes a blog for Forbes.com and co-hosts a true-crime podcast on WGN radio with Bill “Professor Fraud” Kresse. She also gave a TED Talk on how whistleblowers shape history.

As a recipient of a grant from DePaul’s Academic Growth and Innovation Fund, Pope has created an engaging digital experience called Red Flag Mania that involves students in solving a real-life financial crime.

“I’m a strong believer that learning should be immersive,” says Pope. “I think one of the reasons why students can become disengaged in class is a boring delivery. We have to meet them where they are in terms of the way they consume information.”

When it comes to storytelling, Pope relies on her old standby: numbers.

Pope says, “I tell my students often, ‘Numbers tell the best stories.’”



Patty Gerstenblith

Patty Gerstenblith

Since 2008, DePaul has been home to a one-of-a-kind Center for Art, Museum & Cultural Heritage Law (CAMCHL) within DePaul's College of Law. Its founder and director, Patty Gerstenblith, is a one-of-a-kind educator who has helped build a program that has drawn a small, but impressive cadre of students interested in cultural heritage and preservation law.

Gerstenblith, a distinguished research professor of law who joined the DePaul faculty in 1984, was appointed by President Bill Clinton as a public representative on the President's Cultural Property Advisory Committee in the U.S. Department of State and served as its chair under President Barack Obama. She has also advised Congress on cultural property protection legislation and has trained federal judges, FBI agents and Customs and Border Protection professionals on enforcement of such legislation.

"I've been active in the academic field and in the political sphere, which makes me something of an activist scholar," she says.

Gerstenblith began her academic career as an archeologist. After earning a PhD in art history and anthropology from Harvard University, she spent time on excavations in Turkey, Cyprus and Israel.

The increase in looting of ancient artifacts around the world sparked her interest in law. "I've been concerned for many years about the preservation of cultural heritage and, in particular, of archeological sites. I went into law because the legal system has a big impact on discouraging looting, which is carried out to provide antiquities to sell on the international art market," says Gerstenblith.

"When a site is looted, it's not only the archeological remains that are lost, but also the remains in relation to

each other, which enable us to reconstruct and understand the past more fully," says Gerstenblith.

For **Sarah Ebel (LAS '05, JD '14)**, CAMCHL offered the perfect convergence of her interests. She was working as a collections manager at a small historic house museum in the Chicago suburbs when she became interested in governance and intellectual property issues related to museums and archives. She decided to explore law school.

"The art law program at DePaul was really impressive, and it combines where I had been with where I wanted to go," says Ebel, now the assistant general counsel of The Field Museum in Chicago. The center offered access to internship and externship placements in cultural institutions, government agencies and nonprofit organizations around the globe and a summer program in Siena, Italy, run in partnership with the Tulane Law School and the University of Siena.

Gerstenblith also left a lasting impression. "What I really enjoyed about Patty as a professor was that she has really deep knowledge of the law and also practical experience, which was very appealing to me as someone who wanted to go into a general counsel position," adds Ebel. "She also just works incredibly hard for her students. Through her, I got two very important internship placements, one of which led directly to my job. So, I'm very grateful for that."

For her part, Gerstenblith is grateful to DePaul.

"DePaul has been a great home for me. Particularly in the earlier years when I was first starting to build this specialization, the deans were always very supportive of my efforts," she says. "Now I'm able to return [the kindness] by bringing things like media attention and attracting students from throughout the country to DePaul."



W. LaVome Robinson and Leonard Jason

W. LaVome Robinson and Leonard Jason

In the face of a deeply troubling trend of rising youth suicide, two DePaul professors have responded with a unique solution.

The Success Over Stress Violence Prevention Project, the brainchild of longtime DePaul psychology professors and research collaborators W. LaVome Robinson and Leonard Jason, gives children living in violent communities the tools they need to mitigate stress, build resilience and reject suicide. Such a project comes at a pivotal time. According to a study by JAMA Pediatrics, youth suicide is on the rise, with suicide rates for Black children ages 5–12 roughly two times higher than those of similarly aged white children.

“In low-resourced communities, children often witness violence that can lead to more violence. Children in these environments do what they do because they’re trying to survive,” says Robinson.

While there are many programs to address youth violence, few have been as rigorously evaluated as Success Over Stress. “People are asking, ‘What do we do about gun violence? What do we do about school violence?’ There are a lot of people doing good work but not a lot of empirically validated solutions. We aim to change that,” says Jason, who also directs DePaul’s Center for Community Research.

The aim of the curriculum-based Success Over Stress is to “help children recognize stressors in advance, to anticipate the stressor and prepare for the stressor so they don’t get overwhelmed and do impulsive kinds of things,” says Robinson.

The project is a recipient of a \$6.6 million grant from the National Institute of Mental Health, the largest in the university’s history. The funds will support a five-year, real-world trial to train school social workers to deliver the curriculum to ninth graders in Chicago Public Schools. Success Over Stress investigative partners include Sally Lemke, director of community-based practices with Rush University Medical Center; Professor Kate Keenan and Professor Donald Hedeker, both at the University of Chicago; and Assistant Professor Christopher Whipple of Penn State Harrisburg.

During the school day, children will meet in intimate groups to share their feelings. Social workers will help them understand stress and its causes, and teach them coping strategies that range from relaxation training and problem-solving to positive thinking. The hope is to expand the program to more schools.

What separates Success Over Stress from many other violence prevention programs is its reliance on listening to students. “A lot of programs and researchers come in and say, ‘We have the solution and know what’s best for you.’ Instead, we’re trying to augment the natural resilience the children already have,” says Jason.

Supply Chain Humanitarian

“I SAW WHAT HAPPENS WHEN A COUNTRY IS NOT PREPARED. I DECIDED THEN THAT MY BIGGEST PRIORITY WAS TO MAKE LIVES SAFER. EVEN IF I HELP SAVE ONLY ONE LIFE THROUGH MY RESEARCH, THAT WOULD BE WORTH IT.”

—NEZIH ALTAY

Nezih Altay

Disasters ranging from brush fires to COVID-19 have given academics a chance to emerge as leaders and problem solvers. Nezih Altay, a professor of operations management at the Driehaus College of Business, uses his knowledge of supply chain management to aid communities in need of disaster relief. In 2019, the American Logistics Aid Network recognized him for his work with its Humanitarian Logistics Research Award.

“First and foremost, I do this work because I care about society,” says Altay, faculty director of DePaul’s Master of Supply Chain Management program. A native of Turkey, Alta knows firsthand how disruptive a disaster can be in the days, months or even years that follow.

In 1999, four days before Altay’s wedding, a major earthquake struck Turkey. It changed his life and work priorities.

“I had never experienced a disaster before,” says Altay. “After the earthquake, I saw what happens when a country is not prepared. I decided then that my biggest priority was to make lives safer. Even if I help save only one life through my research, that would be worth it.”

Once he and his wife, a chemical engineer, returned to the United States so that Altay could continue his graduate studies, they tried to help their native country by raising relief money. But corruption, disorganization and lack of information got in the way. Frustrated and angered, Altay started reading about disaster management. “I basically trained myself,” he says.

Later, while teaching at the University of Richmond in Virginia, Altay met Walter Green III, an associate professor of emergency services management. The pair co-wrote the 2006 paper “OR/MS Research in Disaster Operations Management,” which remains the most cited paper in its field.

Altay joined DePaul’s faculty in 2009. Over the past two decades, his application of operations and supply chain management principles has broadened to include not only natural disasters, but also development aid and human trafficking. Currently, he is working closely with the Cook County Sheriff’s Office on sex-trafficking issues and with Northwestern University on labor trafficking.

“Years ago, I came to the realization that I could help make a company more profitable by solving a production problem, but that won’t do anything to help the larger public,” he says. “Now my research centers exclusively on alleviating suffering, which fits perfectly into DePaul’s mission because that was what St. Vincent was trying to do.”



Nezih Altay