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As some of you may know, in October of last year I announced that I would be stepping down as dean of SNL. In the 10 years that I served as interim dean and then as dean, I have been most proud of you, our graduates, and the collective work and achievements of our faculty and staff. Both in Chicago and throughout the country and even internationally, I have come to know so many of you and the amazing careers you have developed for yourselves, the volunteerism in which you engage and the ways you have embraced lifelong learning.

Here are some notable examples, among many others: alumni recently volunteered to serve as mentors through SNL’s Adult Men of Color Initiative. In Nairobi, Kenya, where we have nearly 150 alumni, several of our graduates have developed a leadership guild with the goal of offering professional development activities in leadership and management for those early in their career or religious life, serving both men and women. Back in Chicago, Cynthia Gutierrez (SNL ’16) is not only building a career at Fifth Third Bank, but also decided to give back to her community by running for public office; she won her election for city treasurer of Berwyn in February. Lisa Vargas (SNL ’07) has gone on to pursue a Doctor of Nursing Practice degree through Rush University’s family nurse practitioner program and graduated in May. So many more of you have completed graduate degrees and continued to enhance your skills and knowledge.

Collectively, our faculty have built a wonderful writing program and enhanced our online program, as well as our assessment center. We are leaders nationally in adult learning, international study abroad programs for adults, service learning for adults and other “high-impact practices.” We recently learned that thanks to the collective efforts of our faculty, staff and advisers, SNL improved its graduation rate to the point that we now far exceed the national average graduation rate for adult part-time students.

Higher education is facing many challenges as the number of traditional-age students continues to decline. SNL also faces enrollment challenges and, like other institutions, is facing greater federal regulation. As a result, we have spent the last year responding to these changes and challenges. We’ve developed a new bachelor’s program. We will continue to develop degree programs that will be market-responsive.

I will take a one-year sabbatical to develop new classes and work on research I’ve been itching to do. I plan to return to the faculty to teach and mentor students, something I have missed as dean. Among other work, I will continue to think and write about adult students, their learning needs, and innovative and progressive strategies for serving this diverse population.

I leave you in good hands with the faculty, staff and advisers in SNL and with the interim dean. I have always loved bell hooks’ insistence that “education should be a radical space of possibility.” May SNL continue to be that space for our students.
Full-time faculty spend a lot of time outside the classroom working with communities, collaborating with fellow academics, and writing and publishing their scholarship. Many of them apply to receive grants to make this work possible.

International Collaboration
SNL has a long-standing commitment to collaborating with other institutions to enhance adult education. Associate Professor Michelle Navarre Cleary recently received the University Research Council’s Global Engagement Grant to help establish the International Working Group on Competency-Based Learning in Higher Education. The grant allowed Navarre Cleary and Catherine Marienau, professor and coordinator of the Master of Arts in Educating Adults, to travel to All Hallows College in Dublin, Ireland, to attend a workshop, symposium and dialogues particularly focused on the success of the adult program at All Hallows College.

Exercises in Biodiversity
The university’s Quality of Instruction Council recently awarded Professor Kevin Downing a grant to teach a new class through SNL’s liberal studies program. The biodiversity course will incorporate virtual and augmented reality components designed to enhance laboratory exercises and will improve the overall quality of the online learning experience for students. Downing’s grant will also allow him to investigate the efficacy of immersive learning environments.

Inequality of Life Expectancy in Chicago
Akilah Martin, associate professor and senior director for mentoring and student services, received the Provost’s Collaborative Research Grant to investigate the inequality of life expectancy in Chicago. Partnering with DePaul faculty members Maria Ferrera and Judith Singleton, as well as members of the Chicago Department of Public Health, Martin’s team will focus on two Chicago areas, Pilsen and Washington Park, and examine why there is a 12-year variance in life expectancy between the neighborhoods.

Semiotics in Adult Education
Professor Ruth Gannon-Cook and Kathryn Ley of the University of Houston–Clear Lake won the Association for Educational Communications and Technology 2016 Division of Distance Education’s Journal Article Award for their work for “Overlooking the Obvious: How to Use Semiotics and Metaphors to Reinforce E-Learning.” The article, which appeared in the December 2015 issue of Participatory Educational Research, examines the historical and cultural influences of semiotics on human learning and how meaning-making processes have positively influenced student learning in higher education courses taught online.

Poetry in the Everglades
Ann Folwell Stanford, a Vincent de Paul distinguished professor, was an artist-in-residence at Florida’s Everglades National Park in July 2016. During the residency program, artists use their media to record and interpret the cultural and physical landscape of the park, as well as bridge the connection between nature and art.
SNL is once again leading innovation in adult learning. In collaboration with the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP), the college has launched its first cohort of Chicago police in a bachelor’s degree completion program with a concentration in public safety and security management. The first cohort began their coursework in fall 2016.

Initial conversations between DePaul and the FOP began a couple of years ago. According to Suzanne Depered, associate vice president of DePaul’s graduate and adult admission, the president of the FOP was interested in figuring out how the FOP could work with DePaul because of the strength of the university’s reputation.

Depeder’s team held focus groups with Chicago officers, sergeants and lieutenants to learn more about what degree programs interested them. Discussion centered on their schedules, the location of classes, the duration of the degree program, their ability to take classes with their colleagues and previously attained college credits. “Just in order to get into the police academy, officers have to have a minimum of an associate’s degree or the equivalent credits,” Depeder explains. “In order to move up in the academy, officers have to have a bachelor’s degree.”

From there, Depeder met with DePaul’s deans, including SNL Dean Marisa Alicea, to create programs designed to meet the needs identified in the focus group sessions. “We decided that one of the programs we would offer initially would be the SNL competence-based program, because so many who were coming from the police academy already had an associate’s or equivalent. All they needed was their junior and senior year in order to earn their degree,” Depeder says.

According to Dean Alicea, SNL’s competence-based program made it possible for faculty to develop a curriculum specifically designed for the cohort, allowing them to earn their degree in two years. “Given that they’ve
got a good portion of the degree already completed, what we’ve done is create an eight-quarter program they will go through together as a cohort,” explains Lori Neblung (SNL ’06), SNL academic advisor, full-time faculty member and the cohort’s faculty mentor. “The courses are designed specifically with them in mind. These are not courses that we offer to other students with the exception of maybe one or two,” Neblung adds. Because SNL is able to award credit for prior experiential learning, faculty were also able to assess the learning outcomes of police academy trainings and award credit for those trainings as well.

SNL was able to schedule classes and class locations to fit the cohort’s demanding and constantly changing work schedules. “They meet for class on Wednesdays. We offer the same content in the mornings on DePaul’s Loop Campus and evenings at the police academy,” Neblung says. “Someone might come to the morning class one week and if their shift changes, they’ll come to the night class the following week. Some come to class right off of their shift. They get off at eight in the morning, grab a cup of coffee and come to class at nine. They’ll be here for a couple of hours, go home, get some sleep and go back to work.”

For Neblung, teaching the cohort’s first class and getting to know them was a wonderful experience. “I’ve been teaching here for eight years, and these folks have just blown me away,” she says. “They’re well-read, very smart and well-educated. I’ve never had a group of students who’ve been more consistently on time with assignments. They’re very authentic and reflective in their essay writing. The two takeaways I got from most of their writing are that family is huge and community is critical.” While Neblung will remain as their faculty mentor throughout the cohort’s program, she misses having class with them.

A second police cohort launched in spring 2017. DePaul is also offering other FOP cohort programs throughout the university: a Master of Jurisprudence with a focus in criminal justice in the College of Law, a Master of Public Administration in the School of Public Service and a Doctorate in Educational Leadership in the College of Education.

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COMMUNITY WORK INSPIRES CHANGE

Associate Professor Gabriele Strohschen and students met with 8th District Illinois State Representative La Shawn Ford to plan a series of community dialogues on the themes of unity and social justice. In October 2016, they held their first panel for community activists to discuss social justice, current issues in Chicago and how to achieve change.

KYLE NASH RECEIVES EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING AWARD

Kyle Nash, part-time faculty member, received an Excellence in Teaching Award from DePaul in 2016 during the university’s 119th Academic Convocation. Nash specializes in end-of-life care, humanism and professionalism in medicine, and spirituality and medical healing.

5TH ANNUAL MONTH OF WRITING

October 2016 was SNL’s 5th Annual Month of Writing (MOW). MOW launched with the Craft of Composing Panel, during which DePaul-affiliated writers answered questions and shared their own writing experiences and processes. Forty-six members of the community wrote a total of 422,160 words during MOW. Christine Doty received a scholarship award for writing the most words during the challenge.
DePaul TEDx Talks

Three members of the SNL community gave presentations at TEDx DePaul. Elisabeth “Biz” Lindsay-Ryan (COE MA ’00), part-time faculty member, spoke about talking to kids about race and difference. Dorothy Griggs (SNL ’13, MA ’16) focused on the idea that people do not need to define themselves by what others think of them. Associate Professor Derise Tolliver Atta discussed the importance of self-discovery and how to achieve it.

Seminar on Human Rights

Susanne Dumbleton, professor emeritus and former SNL dean, gave a five-session seminar at Chicago’s Newberry Library. Her seminar, “Fair Play: Three Modern Heroes in the Fight for Human Rights,” examined the works of Burmese politician Aung San Suu Kyi, Kenyan environmental activist Wangari Maathai and death penalty opponent Sister Helen Prejean, C.S.J. (DHL ‘00).

Promotions and Tenure

Ruth Gannon-Cook was promoted to professor. Her teaching and research draw upon her interests in instructional technology.

Akilah Martin was promoted to associate professor with tenure. She focuses on enhancing soil and water quality through education and awareness campaigning.

Arieahn Matamonasa (SNL ‘98) was promoted to associate professor with tenure. Her research pertains to multicultural issues in psychology, the treatment of Native American populations, the bond between humans and animals, and animal-assisted therapies.
From janitor to real estate mogul to TV show host, Sean Conlon (SNL ’16) details his journey to success

There is a compilation post on Instagram containing pictures of Sean Conlon. One photo is of him in Ireland, a week before he immigrated to the United States in 1990, staring at the camera with a look of confidence and determination. Another shows him outside of a Chicago apartment building wearing paint-splattered pants and a Bears shirt, standing on top of a dumpster pushing down trash. The last picture is a publicity shot taken at the 2017 Winter Television Critics Awards, where he spoke to a crowd of hundreds about CNBC’s hit show “The Deed: Chicago,” which he hosts.

Raised in the small village of Rathangan in County Kildare, Ireland, Conlon grew up reading as much as he could. “The local library eventually had a chat with my mother. They said, ‘He’s reading too many books and he’s writing to the National Library asking for more books,’” Conlon laughs. “Most of my inspiration came from books.”

In his late teens, Conlon studied at the Dublin Institute of Technology, but financial necessities forced him out after a year. He moved to London and worked for Lehman Brothers, which was one of the largest global banks at the time. “That all sounds very easy, but I probably applied to 50 places before I got a job at Lehman, and it was a very low-level, back-office job,” Conlon remembers. When he was 20 years old, he decided to immigrate to the United States.

“In a lot of the world, we truly believe America is a frame of mind, not a place, and you can achieve extraordinary things even if you’re ordinary,” he says. After Conlon arrived in Chicago, he worked as a janitor in an Andersonville apartment building. And while he says he was exhilarated by so much possibility, he struggled. “I was incredibly lonely. I was thousands of miles away from my family and everything that I ever knew, and I was doing a job that I didn’t like,” he says. “The only thing that kept me going was my drive, that someday I could be something and change my parents’ lives and do things for them that they never got to do.”
That drive pushed Conlon to enroll in evening classes to acquire his real estate license. For a while, he worked all day as a janitor and sold real estate at night, working an estimated 100 hours a week. “I sold homes because I wasn’t initially qualified to do anything else, and I thought, ‘Well, if I work harder than anyone else, there’s no limit on what I can be as a real estate broker.’ And it was true.”

In 1993, Conlon joined a prominent real estate firm in Chicago, and in a remarkably short amount of time, he became one of the top real estate brokers in North America. In the early 2000s, he opened his highly successful company, Conlon & Co., a real estate merchant bank. “There’s no question that the company is a product of my philosophy, which is there’s no magic, it’s just really hard work,” Conlon says. “You have to be able to get knocked down and get back up.”

After one of his mentors, Chicago Alderman Ed Burke (LAS ’65, JD ’68), encouraged him to enroll at DePaul to get his bachelor’s degree, Conlon began taking classes at SNL in the early 2010s. He admits that it took a while to get used to learning again and to grasp academic writing. But with the guidance of Susanne Dumbleton, professor emeritus and former dean of SNL, and Don Opitz (CSH ’91), associate dean and associate professor, he thrived. “The learning that I was doing there was applicable to the real world,” he says. “What I liked in the end was that so many things were practical applications.” Conlon is very proud of earning his degree in 2016 and credits his sister, Fiona Conlon, for helping him through the program. “She pushed and drove me. Fiona kept me totally focused on DePaul. I wouldn’t have finished the program without her.”

Almost immediately after graduating from DePaul, Conlon started filming CNBC’s television show “The Deed: Chicago.” As the host of the Chicago episodes, Conlon helps people who get into distressing real estate deals by lending them his own money and helping them fix the deal. “It’s not like those complete makeover shows. There’s a dark, tough side to it,” he explains. “These are real people who get into a real problem and I go and help them. I’m more about the people than the real estate. You can apply all the logic to location, but when you’re doing a property rehab or flip, it’s the people.” “The Deed: Chicago” premiered in March.

Despite his tremendous accomplishments and success, and all by age 47, Conlon says he has not yet achieved his ultimate dream: to run his wildlife foundation with Fiona, and aid animal welfare throughout the world. “I’m going to go save dogs,” he says. “Someday, when I get through all of this stuff and get to my next level, that’s what I’ll do. That’s the plan.”

“The only thing that kept me going was my drive, that someday I could be something and change my parents’ lives and do things for them that they never got to do.”
Daniel Ivanov (SNL '16) immigrated to the United States from Bulgaria in 1998 when he was 11 years old. Settling with his mother, Margarita Ivanova (SNL '06), and sister, Kris Kirilov (SNL '10), was difficult for Ivanov, who did not speak English or know anyone. “It was really tough in the beginning,” he explains, “but I learned the language, I fought through it all—culture barriers, making new friends and getting accustomed to a new country.”

Through sheer hard work and determination, Ivanov graduated from Lincoln Park High School and its honors program. He was accepted into the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and DePaul, but ultimately chose to stay in Chicago and pursue a degree in information systems at the College of Computing and Digital Media (CDM). At the time, his sister was a student at DePaul studying technology, and she completed her bachelor’s degree in computing through SNL in 2010. She went on to earn her master’s degree in psychology from Roosevelt University and now owns a career counseling practice. Coincidentally, Ivanov found himself in an academic path similar to his sister’s.

Overwhelmed by balancing being a full-time student and full-time employee, he stopped going to school after a couple of years to focus on work. “I was an employee at a retail store. I worked five days a week, and on the two days I had off, I was in school from nine a.m. to nine p.m.,” he recalls. Ivanov also says that after taking some programming courses, he was uncertain about continuing his studies in information systems. “Just like any undergraduate student, you think you want to do something but you have no idea what you’re getting into.”

When he was 25, Ivanov decided to go back to DePaul to finish his degree so that he could have better employment opportunities. Instead of returning to CDM, he enrolled in SNL after receiving encouragement from his mother and sister, who had both by then graduated from the college. At first, Ivanov was intimidated by the prospect of returning to the classroom, but his mother and sister helped him by giving him insights from their time as SNL students. In retrospect, Ivanov says that they had always been sources of motivation for each other during their schooling. “I was just getting into CDM, and I remember my mom coming home with tons of paperwork and working on her advanced project,” he says. “Her kids were going to school and she wanted to get her degree. It was always a goal of hers.” His mother earned her DePaul degree in 2006 at age 50.

In fits and starts, Ivanov finally finished his degree by completing his advanced project on digital marketing. Ivanov is thankful for his professors, including Dorothy Balabanos (LAS MA ’15) and Arieahn Matamonasa (SNL ’98), for their support and guidance. He is also grateful for the academic and career direction he received from his professional adviser, Dan Kurcz (MBA ’03). “Dan and I still talk and he’s always there to help, guide and steer me in the right direction,” Ivanov says.

Ivanov, who has been working for Oracle Marketing Cloud’s email marketing team for the past three and a half years, is confident that having his degree will help him further his professional career. Eventually, he would like to become a business owner and open his own digital marketing agency.
For many undergraduate students, scholarship support and financial aid packages are the deciding factors in where they choose to go to college. For adult students, outside support is especially important as they try to balance their work, academic and family responsibilities.

SNL Dean Marisa Alicea understands the struggles students face when trying to finance their education. “I get calls and requests from students all the time asking if there is any funding or scholarships they can apply for,” she says. “Over the years, I have been pleased with the growing number of gifts to our college’s scholarship funds, which has helped some of these students. Bert Scott and Trish Parson’s contributions represent the largest gifts the college has received, and we will remain eternally grateful.”

Bertram Scott (SNL ’80, DHL ’09) established scholarships to help SNL students because without the tuition reimbursement he received from an employer, he would not have been able to attend DePaul. Patricia Parson (SNL ’78) established a scholarship for SNL students out of gratitude for the chance she had to finish her degree while raising two young children as a single mother. Those scholarships have helped students like Stacey Harvey, Jorge Martinez and Lisa Kaufholz continue their education.

After moving to Chicago’s Lincoln Park neighborhood from California in 2002, Harvey was used to seeing DePaul everywhere and felt an affinity with the university’s Vincentian values. She later enrolled in SNL and focused on the sciences. “DePaul pushed me to excel through a vast majority of classes, enriching my scholastic knowledge, and ultimately prepared me towards my journey in becoming a certified registered nurse anesthetist,” she says. Harvey credits the Kathleen Y. Scott Memorial Endowed Scholarship as a driving force to help her through her degree program. “Our work experiences can only take us so far in life. Everyone should have the ability to prove their knowledge and the opportunity to achieve it.”

“Completing a degree at DePaul is an emblem of hard work, dedication and compassion to service,” he says.

“Our work experiences can only take us so far in life. Everyone should have the ability to prove their knowledge and the opportunity to achieve it.”

Kaufholz enrolled in SNL’s online program when she was living in North Carolina, and continued her coursework after moving back to Chicago a few years ago. “My focus area is applied behavior analysis,” she says. Kaufholz plans to pursue a master’s degree after graduating from DePaul. “As a single mother of two special-needs children, my goals can seem unaffordable and impossible at times,” she says. “Receiving the Patricia Mason Parson Endowed Scholarship helped to lessen the financial burden of reaching my goal of working with families and children with autism.”

Bertram L. Scott and Elizabeth A. Fender Endowed Diversity Scholarship has been important in my educational experience because it gave me the encouragement to finish my degree.”

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