

WILMU[®]

A NAME ROOTED IN SERVICE: THE FARNAN SCHOOL OF LAW

On May 1, 2026, Wilmington University dedicated the Farnan School of Law in honor of The Honorable Joseph J. Farnan Jr. and his more than five decades of service to the University.

FARNAN SCHOOL OF LAW



Alumni Spotlight



Melissa Hopkins '21

M.S. in Management

Ms. Hopkins was named CEO of the Delaware Alliance for Nonprofit Advancement (DANA) in June 2026. One of DANA's longest-serving staff members, she also served as executive vice president and chief external affairs officer. DANA advocates for and provides resources to Delaware's nonprofit sector.

**Wilmington University alumni are making an impact
in their careers, communities and beyond.**

Have news to share? A new role, award or personal milestone?
We'd love to hear your success story.



**Share your update at
wilmu.edu/Alumni.**

“With every issue, we strive to show who we are as a University by reflecting the talent, determination, values and sense of possibility that define our community.”

—Dr. LaVerne Harmon



Dear Friends,

This issue of WilmU Magazine reflects a period of growth for Wilmington University, with new academic opportunities, institutional milestones and stories from across our community.

Our cover story honors The Honorable Joseph J. Farnan Jr. and his relationship with the University, which spans more than five decades. The naming of the Farnan School of Law recognizes his service to Wilmington University and his belief in expanding access to legal education.

The Farnan School of Law also marks another milestone with its inaugural commencement. The ceremony celebrated the first graduates of its Juris Doctor program, as well as faculty, staff and members of the legal community who helped bring the program to this point.

Other features reflect the University's academic growth and accomplishments, including new colleges, innovation in teaching, alumni achievement and student-athlete development. Updates from departments and programs offer additional perspectives from students, faculty and staff. Together, these stories demonstrate the reach and impact of a Wilmington University education.

With every issue, we strive to show who we are as a University by reflecting the talent, determination, values and sense of possibility that define our community. It is a privilege to share the stories, achievements and experiences that bring Wilmington University's culture to life. Enjoy the issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "LaVerne Harmon". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name and last name clearly legible.

Dr. LaVerne Harmon
President



President

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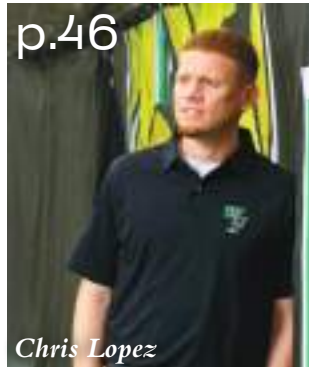
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CONNECT WITH US



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Don't forget to connect with Wilmington University on **FACEBOOK**.

THE NEWS

Wilmington University President Dr. LaVerne Harmon Receives Two Prestigious Statewide Honors

Dr. Harmon received major distinctions recognizing her leadership, service and impact in higher education and across Delaware.

Named to Delaware Women's Hall of Fame

DR. HARMON was inducted into the 2026 Delaware Women's Hall of Fame, one of the state's highest honors for women whose leadership and service have made a lasting impact on Delaware.

Gov. Matt Meyer announced the four inductees on July 31. Dr. Harmon was inducted alongside Mary C. Dennison, a pioneering educator and civic leader who was honored posthumously; Judith Drexler, who transformed services for vulnerable children as the first director of

Delaware's Department of Services for Children, Youth and Their Families; and Terri Kelly, former president and CEO of W.L. Gore & Associates, who led one of Delaware's most innovative global companies.

The induction is presented an-

nually by the Office of Women's Advancement & Advocacy, a division of the Delaware Department of Human Resources, in partnership with the Delaware Women's Hall of Fame Committee.

"These four extraordinary women didn't just achieve success in their own fields — they opened doors for others, strengthened our communities and helped shape the Delaware we know today," Gov. Meyer said in a statement. "Their leadership reminds us that progress is built by people willing to serve, innovate and create opportunities for those who follow. It is an honor to recognize their remarkable contributions and welcome them into the Delaware Women's Hall of Fame."

The committee selected Dr. Harmon in recognition of the historic milestones and institutional



The Hall of Fame inductees are displayed at an exhibit inside ChristianaCare's Center for Heart & Vascular Health lobby area.

COURTESY OF THE DELAWARE WOMEN'S HALL OF FAME



Mary C. Dennison



Judith Drexler



Dr. LaVerne Harmon



Terri Kelly

achievements highlighted in her nomination. She became the first African American woman to lead a Delaware college or university.

Under her leadership, Wilmington University launched the Farnan School of Law, established the College of Sciences and Engineering, expanded initiatives supporting the nursing and healthcare workforce pipeline, and increased its presence in Brandywine Hundred through the purchase of additional buildings and the completion of a law school building and Convocation Center.

Dr. Harmon also created the University's Leadership Institute, established the Student Accessibility Services Office and led the transition of WilmU Athletics from the NAIA to NCAA Division II.

Compassion remained central to her approach to leadership. She authored "The Heart of Leadership: A Personal Reflection," which places compassion at the center of effective leadership. Proceeds from the book support the Wilmington University Linda Thomas Scholarship, named in memory of her sister.

Selected as Delaware Business Times' Inaugural Person of the Year

Dr. Harmon also was selected as the Delaware Business Times' inaugural Person of the Year, an honor introduced in the publication's Delaware

222 supplement.

"The Delaware Business Times created the Person of the Year to feature and spotlight one person who has done the most to influence Delaware's economy in a particular year," says Katie Tabeling, editor of the Delaware Business Times. "In a state with 222 impactful leaders, we decided to highlight one of them who stood head and shoulders above the rest."

Delaware 222 recognized 222 of the state's most influential business, nonprofit and civic leaders. Dr. Harmon's selection from among that group underscored the significance of her work and Wilmington University's economic impact on The First State. The publication considered leaders who delivered strong results, introduced game-changing products or services, led successful transformations, or expanded their organizations' reach and impact on Delaware's economy.

Under Dr. Harmon's leadership, Wilmington University expanded educational access for students of all ages and backgrounds, many of whom live and work in Delaware. Through new and enhanced programs, WilmU prepares educators, healthcare professionals, public safety officials, information technology specialists and business and community leaders whose work strengthens the state's workforce and quality of life.

"In our first year naming a Person of the Year, our team selected

Dr. Harmon not only because she is blazing a trail with innovative programs — such as the state's first nurse anesthesiology program and a new, high-demand law school — but also because, behind the scenes and throughout her career at WilmU, she has helped shape the University's mission of creating affordable education and upskilling options for Delawareans of all ages," Tabeling adds. "As an example of the promise WilmU offers, Dr. Harmon worked her way up from being assistant to the president to president herself, reflecting the same commitment to accessibility and advancement that defines the University's mission."

Dr. Harmon's recognition was announced at the inaugural Delaware 222 reception at the Delaware Art Museum, where she thanked the Delaware Business Times and Today Media teams and acknowledged the leaders named to the Delaware 222 list.

Together, the honors recognized Dr. Harmon's leadership and Wilmington University's significant economic impact across Delaware. By expanding access to education, developing programs aligned with workforce needs and preparing graduates for high-demand careers, the University helps strengthen the state's talent pipeline and provide skilled professionals to Delaware's schools, hospitals, courts, businesses and public agencies. **WU**

Farnan School of Law Dean Jan Jurden Honored with Official Portrait at Delaware Superior Court



Dean Jurden's portrait will hang in a reception area at the Leonard L. Williams Justice Center in Wilmington.

COURTESY OF DELAWARE COURTS

In April, the Delaware Superior Court, Delaware Superior Court Historical Society and Delaware State Bar Association unveiled official portraits honoring retired President Judge **JAN R. JURDEN**, dean of Wilmington University's Farnan School of Law, and the late Judge John A. Parkins Jr.

The ceremony took place in courtroom 7E at the Leonard L. Williams Justice Center in Wilmington, where members of the judiciary, the bar, family members, and colleagues gathered to recognize two former Superior Court judges whose service left a lasting mark on Delaware's legal community.

For Dean Jurden, the portrait honors a judicial career defined by leadership, service, and a commitment to the people who come before the courts. "To have a portrait placed in the Superior Court chambers is such an honor," Dean Jurden said in her remarks at the unveiling. "I receive it with deep gratitude and appreciation for all who made this journey possible."

"Hanging portraits of our past judges in our courthouses is a revered tradition in the Delaware Courts," Superior Court President Judge Eric M. Davis said in a statement from Delaware Courts, noting that Dean Jurden and Parkins each left a

meaningful mark on the judiciary.

Dean Jurden joined Superior Court in May 2001 and made history in January 2015 when she became the first woman to be named President Judge of Superior Court. During her tenure, she served on the Complex Commercial Litigation Division, launched and presided over the Superior Court Mental Health Court, oversaw the Conflict Attorney Program, and presided over the Veterans' Treatment Court.

Her leadership extended across some of Delaware's most significant legal matters. She presided over high-profile civil and criminal trials, sat on the Delaware Supreme Court by designation on several occasions, and guided the Superior Court through the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

For Dean Jurden, the portrait is a profoundly personal honor, one she accepted with humility. In her remarks, she also reflected on the many people who helped shape her judicial career. "Any work I've been fortunate enough to do has never been done alone," she said. "It has always depended on gifted colleagues, dedicated court staff, mentors, friends, and family members who offered guidance, support, and grace."

She described the law as "a profession of service" and said the recognition recalled the people and institutions that helped sustain her throughout her years on the bench.

Dean Jurden's career has earned recognition across Delaware's legal community. She was inducted into the Delaware Women's Hall of Fame in 2019, received the Honorable Aida Wasserstein Award in 2022, and earned the Delaware State Bar Association's Outstanding Service to the Courts and Bar Award in 2011, among other accolades.

Before joining the bench, Dean Jurden practiced law at Young Conaway Stargatt & Taylor LLP from 1988 to 2001. A U.S. Army veteran, she earned her law degree from Dickinson School of Law and her undergraduate degree from Muhlenberg College. She stepped

For Dean Jurden, the portrait is a profoundly personal honor, one she accepted with humility.

down from Superior Court on Feb. 28, 2025, and was named dean of WilmU's Farnan School of Law in 2025.

Dean Jurden's recognition reflects the kind of leadership that continues to shape law students at Wilmington University. "Dean Jurden brings distinguished experience, judgment, and integrity to our School of Law," says Wilmington University President **DR. LAVERNE HARMON**. "Her words at the unveiling reflected the humility, compassion, and gratitude that define her leadership. She reminds our students that the law is a calling rooted in fairness, responsibility, and service to others."

The ceremony also honored Judge Parkins, who served on Superior Court from 2008 until his retirement in 2019. A U.S. Army veteran,



Dean Jan Jurden

Parkins built a respected career in public service and private practice before joining the bench. Colleagues remembered him for his sharp legal mind, wit, and warmth.

Chicago-based artist Sergei Chernikov painted the portrait of Dean Jurden. In accordance with court guidelines, Dean Jurden's portrait will hang in a reception area

at the courthouse until her official retirement from the Delaware Bar.

For WilmU, the recognition carries special meaning. Dean Jurden's portrait now joins a courthouse tradition that preserves the legacy of Delaware judges whose work continues to influence the courts, the profession, and the next generation of lawyers. **WU** —*Maria Hess*



Dr. Stefanie Whitby



CACC AD OF THE YEAR

Dr. Stefanie Whitby: “It’s a team effort”

In typical fashion, **DR. STEFANIE WHITBY** deflected personal recognition and credited her team after being named the Central Atlantic Collegiate Conference (CACC) 2025–26 Athletics Director of the Year in February.

“This recognition reflects the work of our team,” she says. “Our coaches are exceptional, and our staff brings the same level of care and professionalism every day. They make all of us better, and I’m grateful to represent them.”

That humility is classic Dr. Whitby — and exactly what has come to define Wilmington University Athletics since she took the helm in 2018. In the years since, the Wildcats have earned 23 CACC championships, six men’s Restaino Cup honors, and a reputation for doing things the right way — focusing on people as much as performance.

Her selection by the conference’s Directors Council caps one of the most successful years in WilmU’s sports history. The University posted its best-ever finish in the NCAA Division II Learfield Directors’ Cup standings, maintained a department-wide GPA of 3.23, captured five CACC championships, and sent eight teams and one individual to NCAA championship competition — producing eight All-Americans along the way.

In making the announcement, CACC Commissioner Dan Mara said, “Dr. Whitby is a talented leader and administrator. Since assuming leadership of the WilmU Athletics Department, she has guided a strong era for the Wildcats, with a focus on student-athlete welfare and academic achievement while producing championship teams.”

Inside WilmU, that commitment is evident in hundreds of small decisions that

add up over time. Dr. Whitby’s teams have achieved a departmental GPA of 3.0 or higher every semester during her tenure, while she has overseen 10 NCAA regional or super-regional championships hosted by the University — logistical undertakings that require months of planning.

DR. TINA BARKSDALE, senior vice president and chief Student Affairs officer, says that level of consistency springs from Whitby’s values. “I’m incredibly proud to see Dr. Whitby recognized as the CACC Athletics Director of the Year,” Barksdale says. “This honor reflects her leadership, clear vision, and deep commitment to our student-athletes. She leads with passion and heart, and she keeps their support and well-being at the center of everything we do, on the field and beyond.”

Dr. Whitby serves on the NCAA Division II Men’s and Women’s Tennis Selection Committees, oversees CACC men’s and women’s track and field, and was named one of Delaware’s Most Influential People in Sports by The News Journal and Delaware Online in 2025.

An All-Big East track and field athlete at Villanova University, Dr. Whitby understands firsthand what it means to balance academics and athletics. After earning her bachelor’s in Psychology, she completed an M.Ed. in Education Counseling from Temple University and an Ed.D. in Organizational Leadership from Wilmington University — the institution she now helps lead to new heights.

For Dr. Whitby, success has always been collective. It’s not just about trophies or standings; it’s about the culture, and a program that cares deeply about people, progress, and purpose. **WU** —Bob Yearick

A WilmU Graduate's Mission to Build Joyful Schools

DR. SALOME THOMAS-EL has spent nearly four decades proving that school leadership begins with relationships. Known nationally as “Principal El,” the Wilmington educator, speaker, author and Wilmington University graduate has built a career around a simple but powerful belief: Every child needs someone “crazy about them.”

That philosophy is also at the heart of his newest book, “Meet Their Needs, and They’ll Succeed,” released earlier this year. The book, his sixth, continues a message that has defined Dr. Thomas-El’s work as a teacher, principal and mentor: Joyful schools are built when educators and leaders intentionally cultivate strong, caring connections with students.

Dr. Thomas-El’s path to leadership was shaped by the educators and family members who saw his potential early and helped him imagine a future beyond the limits others might have placed on him. Born and raised in Philadelphia, he was the second youngest of eight siblings and was raised by a mother whose determination left a lasting impression.

He often credits teachers with changing the course of his life. Because his mother didn’t drive, teachers helped get him to and from college each year — a gesture he remembers not only as practical support, but as proof that they believed in him.

He attended East Stroudsburg University, in part because he wanted to experience a world beyond the city

where he grew up. He jokes that his dream of playing professional basketball ended when teachers told him he “couldn’t jump over a credit card,” adding, “I turned that humor into motivation, and while I couldn’t make the NBA, I could earn an MBA — and much more.”

His educational journey led him to Wilmington University, where he pursued a doctorate in Educational Leadership and Administration. Dr. Thomas-El chose WilmU because of its strong reputation among education leaders he respected. Just as important, he says, the University supported working adults with families. As a working parent of two young daughters at the time, flexibility mattered.

His years at WilmU, from 2016 to 2019, left a lasting impression. He describes the experience as transformational, citing outstanding professors, a diverse student body, and a culture that broadened his thinking.

Dr. Thomas-El began his career in education in 1987. Since 2010, he has led Thomas Edison Charter School in Wilmington, where chess became a tool for teaching strategy, resilience and possibility. Under his leadership, the students captured national attention. In 2014, four students tied for first place at the Elementary Chess Championship in Dallas, competing against hundreds of teams and thousands of students from across the country. In 2016, the school won its second national



chess title in three years at the Junior High National Chess Championship in Indianapolis.

Dr. Thomas-El says chess teaches children — especially those facing difficult circumstances — how to recover from mistakes, think strategically, and believe they can compete on any stage.

That same idea runs through his



Dr. Salome Thomas-El

year-round speaking engagements. A nationally recognized presenter who has addressed more than 100,000 educators, Dr. Thomas-El speaks about school culture, resilience and educator retention. His keynotes often center on what he calls the “4Cs of School Success”: being crazy about students, curious about their lives outside school, consistent as

adults in their lives, and committed to creating a culture grounded in joy, love and resilience.

He has appeared on Good Morning America, NPR, CNN, C-SPAN and Oprah Radio, and his book “I Choose to Stay” was optioned for film by Disney. Yet despite the national profile, his message remains personal and practical. He doesn’t

speak in abstractions; it’s about lived experience.

Today, his career stands as a reminder that the most effective educational leadership is not only about policy, programs or performance. It’s about belief — belief in children, in teachers, and in the power of joy and human connection. **WU**

—Bob Yearick

Michelle Ward

WHERE VOWS MEET LESSONS

MICHELLE WARD can hold a room. As an adjunct instructor and coordinator for Wilmington University's Partnership Community and Affairs Department, Ward brings wedding-day presence to the Wilmington University classroom.

That's because when she's not at WilmU, she serves her community as a professional wedding officiant. And when she's

at work, she brings the same care to serving students, whether she's teaching, mentoring, or leading a class discussion.

Ward has served as a wedding officiant for five years. During that time, she has officiated many weddings — two for Wilmington University students: **JESSICA JOHN**, who earned her bachelor's in Marketing and graduated in 2025; and **HAYLEIGH HAMMEL**, an Elementary Education alumna (2021) and teacher at the Capital School.

"In both settings, the work started the same way: listen first, then build an experience that fit the people in front of you," Ward says.

The feeling is mutual for John and Hammel.

"Michelle came highly recommended to us on social media, so we scheduled a meeting with her," says Hammel. "During that first conversation, I realized she was my professor during my freshman year in 2016, which immediately sealed the deal for me. Her First-Year Experience course was my very first class at WilmU, and I remember coming in as a freshman with little direction and not much excitement about school. Michelle completely changed that for me. I remember thinking that if all my professors were like her, I would have an amazing experience — and she truly shifted my outlook. It was an absolute honor to have someone who played such a meaningful role in my academic journey officiate my wedding."

John echoes the sentiment. "As an instructor, Michelle created an environment where I always felt supported, encouraged, and confident in my learning," she says. "She took the time to genuinely care about her students, and that same level of care carried over into our wedding experience. Having Michelle as both my University instructor and my wedding officiant was truly a full-circle moment for me. Michelle took the time to genuinely get to know us and our story, which made our ceremony feel incredibly personal and heartfelt. Her words were thoughtful, sincere, and perfectly captured our love and commitment."

As an officiant, Ward specializes in ceremonies tailored to each couple's story. She meets with them, asks questions that move beyond logistics, and writes ceremonies that reflect their values and the life they hope to build together. While she always aims for warmth and authenticity, creating personalized services isn't easy; in fact, it's a high-pressure job.



Above, Ward leads the ceremony for Hayleigh and Colby Mitchell, and right, she officiates Jessica and Kaleb Steele's nuptials.

There are no templates here. Ward has to emulate a couple's voices while keeping guests engaged.

"No two love stories are the same," she says. "It brings me great joy to truly get to know each couple and create a ceremony that is written just for them."

With a background that includes General Biblical Studies at the Texas Bible Institute, bachelor's and master's degrees in Marketing from WilmU, and professional experience with Disney, Ward brings a blend of faith, knowledge, storytelling and professionalism to her officiant work. The wife and mother of four has developed a perspective that has deepened her understanding of what meaningful moments can carry.

The same skills that help her guide couples through ceremonies also lead students through lessons: clear communication, confident public speaking, and the ability to read a room and adjust in real time.

Her own experience as a WilmU student strengthened those skills. It pushed her to communicate with confidence in front of diverse audiences, she says. As an adjunct, Ward learned to listen closely, adapt to various personalities and needs, and create an environment where people feel seen, valued, and comfortable. That approach helps her in ceremonies, too, particularly when family dynamics can lead to unexpected emotional scenarios.

Officiating, Ward says, has sharpened her ability "to stay present under pressure." Weddings rarely unfold exactly as planned. A microphone cuts out. A flower girl freezes. A gust of wind sends pages flying. The officiant's job is to keep the moment grounded.

For her, the ceremonies reinforce what she has always believed about teaching: people remember how you make them feel. Whether guiding a couple through vows or a student through a challenging concept, she wants the experience to feel intentional, well-prepared, and personal. In the end, Ward says, both roles honor people's stories and help them navigate life-changing moments with clarity, confidence, and a whole lot of heart. **WU** —*Maria Hess*



A WILMU JACKET, A LIFETIME OF STORIES

In this personal account, alumna Debi Brown reflects on the well-worn Wilmington University jacket that accompanied her through decades of learning, service and adventure.

In the spring of 1990, I was sitting in an English class at Wilmington College's New Castle campus on a cold, rainy day. I couldn't shake the chill, so during a break, I wandered into the bookstore. There it was — a navy, oversized Wilmington College (it was "college" then) windbreaker for \$35.

At the time, \$35 wasn't an easy splurge. I was married, with a young son at home, and every dollar was spoken for. Still, I decided to buy it — not as a luxury, but to get through class without shivering. I never imagined that jacket would stay with me for decades, carrying me through so many of life's milestones.

THROUGH EDUCATION AND CAREER

That jacket was with me as I balanced work and studies, finishing my associate degree in Respiratory Therapy at California College for Health Sciences back when Delaware had no formal respiratory therapy programs. My classes arrived by snail mail, and I completed my clinical skills training with local instructors while working full time at Milford Memorial Hospital and Kent General Hospital, now part of Bayhealth. I also worked part time at Beebe Medical Center, now Beebe Healthcare, and later at Christiana Hospital, part of ChristianaCare.

The jacket was there through some of the most difficult seasons of my life.



While completing my master's degree at WilmU, I searched for my father during a cold rainstorm after he went missing. He was later found at Killens Pond, where he had taken his own life, likely carrying wounds from his military service that never fully healed. Just a year later, I unexpectedly lost my mother as well. Looking back, I still don't know how I managed to keep moving forward during that time. What I do know is that my professors showed extraordinary kindness and support, helping me persevere through challenges that seemed impossible to carry alone.

That jacket kept me dry after rainy daycare pickups and warm on evening runs with coworkers after long hospital shifts.

Over time, I proudly wore it to celebrate my Bachelor of Science degree in 2007 and my MBA in Health Care Administration in 2009, both from WilmU. I was also honored to receive the Service Award at graduation. I later finished my career at Lee Health in Fort Myers, Florida, after 41 years of service in respiratory therapy.

Looking back, WilmU was more than a place where I earned my degrees — it was a place that encouraged me to believe that my goals were achievable, no matter my age or circumstances.

ADVENTURES NEAR AND FAR

That jacket has weathered more storms than I can count — Sandy, Irma, Idalia, and the devastating Ian among them — often zipped tight as I ran into the hospital to care for patients.

It has followed me far beyond those rainy hospital entrances. I wore it through Europe, from Paris and Monet's Gardens to the Rhine River and Dover, England. It came with me to Hawaii, where I hiked rainforest trails, visited Pearl Harbor, stood on volcanic ground, and climbed to Diamond Head. In Alaska, it was there when I met my first grandchild, Ian, explored Denali National Park, and biked through Anchorage.

In Greece, it wandered cobblestone



*Kilauea Hawaii
Volcanoes National Park*



*A riverboat in
Chagres National
Park headed to
Emberá Puru Village
(Panama)*

DEBI BROWN, a retired respiratory therapist, lives in Fort Myers, Florida, with her husband, Ray. She volunteers with botanical gardens and animal services, fosters kittens, runs Frays and Fabulous, LLC, and is the author of “My Little Rusty Oliver.”

streets and sailed between islands with me. When the zipper finally broke, I added an evil-eye charm — a small repair that became part of its story. In South America, it traveled by dugout canoe to an Emberá Indian Village.

It has also come with me through the Caribbean, from Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao to Saint Martin, St. Thomas, Barbados, Jamaica, Grand Turk, Grand Cayman, Puerto Rico, Saint Kitts, Saint Lucia, Trinidad, and many more stops along the way. I recently added Italy, Nebraska, and Iowa to my list of adventures. I now have just eight states remaining on my journey to visit all 50 states, and I’m already looking forward to my next trip to Japan.

A JACKET’S SECOND LIFE

When I retired in 2020, my jacket came with me to volunteer shifts at Lakes Park Botanical Gardens, through kitten-fostering seasons, and on local adventures.

It has even seen me launch Frays and Fabulous, LLC, my online Etsy business upcycling clothing into new designs — a dream I envisioned decades ago during my undergraduate program, when I set a goal to start a business at age 65.

Retirement didn’t slow me down. Through volunteer work and the encouragement to continue pursuing

Keewaydin Island (Florida)



lifelong goals, I also became a children’s author, publishing “My Little Rusty Oliver.” Like my business, writing a book was another dream that began years earlier when I first wrote down my goals during a Wilmington University writing course. Looking back, it is remarkable how many of those dreams eventually became reality.

The core fabric of this jacket is still strong, even after countless washes. To most, it’s just a well-worn piece of

university apparel. To me, it’s a life jacket — one that has kept me warm through challenges and achievements and has accompanied me to nearly every corner of the globe.

Some people collect souvenirs. I collected goals. One by one, I turned them into memories.

The list isn’t finished. One final dream remains from that original list of goals: to visit China at age 92. And yes, the jacket will be packed for that adventure, too. **WU** —Debi Brown

Uncovering Stories *in the* Archives



"Welcome to Wilmington College," 1970s



Long before Wiley D. Wildcat was the official mascot of Wilmington University, there was the Wilmington Wildcat. Compared to Wiley, the Wilmington Wildcat was small in stature but just as fierce in stirring up pride, loyalty, unity, and belonging in the campus community. The Wilmington Wildcat made its first appearance in the college newsletter, Archway, April 1970.



Every university has stories waiting to be discovered. Wilmington University is no different.

Some stories are found in a faded photograph tucked inside an envelope. Sometimes they are recorded on an old VHS tape, scribbled in the margin of an inter-office memo, or packed away in a long-forgotten box. Other stories live in the memories of the faculty, staff, students and alumni who experienced them firsthand.

Many records from Wilmington

University's past survived because someone decided to keep them. Others remain hidden in offices, file cabinets, storage closets, and personal collections — still waiting to be re-discovered.

During its first year, the Wilmington University Archives and Special Collections Department brought many of those missing pieces together by identifying, preserving, and sharing the records, objects and memories that tell Wilmington University's story.

The First Chapters

Before it was Wilmington University, it was first Wilmington College.

Long before Wilmington University became the institution it is today, a series of firsts shaped its future: its first students, first commencement ceremony, first accreditation, first athletics teams, and first mascot. What we now recognize as milestones were once simply part of the day-to-day work of building a new college.



First Commencement, 1972: Wilmington College's first commencement ceremony marks the beginning of a tradition that continues more than five decades later.



STEPHANIE PEDITTO, CLASS OF 1973

Students on the Wilmington College campus during the early 1970s. Personal photographs, like this one, capture a side of University history that rarely appears in official records.

Every item in the Archives tells part of that story. Early institutional records, publications, and memorabilia document a young Wilmington College as it was finding its unique identity. Photographs shared by alumni add another perspective by capturing student life, activities, traditions, and everyday moments that are not typically found in official records. Together, these materials provide a more nuanced understanding of the decisions, experiences, and people that helped shape the University.

Those perspectives become clear when comparing different archival records side by side. A photograph of students in their dorm room, paired with original architectural drawings of the residence halls, provides documentation of buildings that no longer exist while also offering a glimpse into the lives of the students who once called them home.

The Stories Behind the Objects

While the archival collections are interesting on their own, it is often the stories behind the objects that add context and make them more meaningful. Those stories cannot be captured in a single document or photograph. Instead, they emerge through collaborations and conversations held between the people and the collections.

One of the Archives' most valuable collaborations during its first year was with the Alumni Relations Department. Staff from the Alumni Relations Department served as a bridge between the Archives Department and Charter Class alumni, as well as other graduates interested in donating memorabilia and other materials from Wilmington College's early years. Conversations with alumni often de-

veloped into something more significant than simply adding an item to the collection. They sparked memories, renewed connections, and inspired alumni to share personal stories from the University's earliest years.

Changing the Conversation

Since Archives and Special Collections is a new department, much of the first year was spent raising awareness of the Archives and its mission across the University community. Through presentations, meetings and conversations, faculty and staff were encouraged to think differently about the records and historical materials in their care. That awareness soon began making a difference.

Not every important discovery begins with a donation. Sometimes it

starts with a simple question: “Should we keep this?”

Throughout the year, departments across the University paused to ask that question as they reorganized offices, cleaned out storage rooms, and sorted through decades of materials. What first appeared to be just old files, outdated media, or forgotten keepsakes often became another missing piece of Wilmington University’s history and found a permanent home in the Archives.

As awareness grew, so did the collections. Transfers from University departments and generous donations from alumni nearly doubled the Archives’ holdings during its first year, preserving additional records, photographs, publications, and artifacts that help tell Wilmington University’s story.

Piece by Piece

Archival work is often similar to assembling a puzzle.

A photograph helps identify a person or event mentioned in another collection. A yearbook can fill in a missing date or name. A newspaper clipping adds context to a memory shared decades later. Individually, each item tells only part of the story. Collectively, these items fill in the gaps and provide a more complete history of Wilmington University.

The first year of the Wilmington University Archives and Special Collections Department has been filled with generous donations, unexpected discoveries, and meaningful conversations.

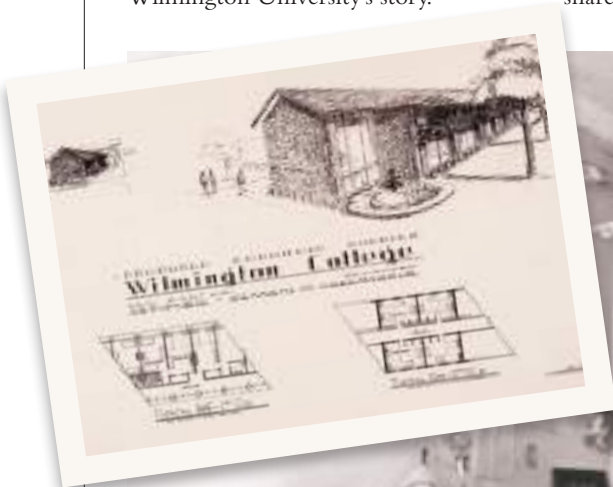
Many stories have already been shared, but many more are still waiting

to be heard.

Wilmington University’s history isn’t finished. As the University continues to grow and experience new “firsts,” the Wilmington University Archives and Special Collections Department looks forward to preserving today’s history while continuing to uncover the stories that connect generations of the Wilmington community. **WU**

—Adrienne Johnson

The history of Wilmington University belongs to all of us. If you would like to donate photographs, publications, memorabilia, University records, or other materials that help tell the University’s story, the Wilmington University Archives and Special Collections Department would welcome the opportunity to hear from you. Contact us at archives@wilmu.edu.



Residence life during the 1970s and the original architectural drawings of the proposed dormitory complex, 1970 (inset). The photograph documents a part of campus that no longer exists while preserving a glimpse of everyday student life.

Avie Silver:

Drawing on publishing experience and an MBA to help create a sustainable future for local news

When it comes to connecting local news to the community, Wilmington University alumna **AVIE SILVER** has been on the cutting edge.

In 2004, she was on the opening staff at Spark, a free weekly publication for younger readers. She later joined the launch team for the Delaware Business Times, which Today Media started in 2014 to provide local business coverage. Today, she's with Spotlight Delaware, a nonprofit newsroom that provides free, independent reporting to address gaps in news coverage across the state.

Silver is not a reporter. She helps generate revenue through advertising, sponsorships, and strategic partnerships. "My favorite part is the relationship," says Silver, who dislikes the word "sales." "People became my friends."

Her current position as director of strategic partnerships draws on more than two decades of experience in publishing, sales, and nonprofit fundraising. An MBA from Wilmington University helped her see how those experiences fit together and how to apply them strategically.

The Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania, native has a knack for being at the right place at the right time. She majored in Communication at the University of Pittsburgh, where she became involved in the city's underground music scene. "I lived through the musical subculture of the '90s and early aughts," she says. "Journalism was never on my mind."

After graduation, Silver spent a year with AmeriCorps. She remained

in Pittsburgh for two years before returning to the Philadelphia area. While exploring marketing careers, she interviewed with the newspaper preparing to launch Spark, a publication for younger readers with the feel of an alternative city paper. Having read similar publications in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia, Silver was excited about the project and became one of Spark's first employees.

Before Spark launched, Silver spent three months learning how its parent newspaper operated. She trained with the advertising department, accompanied drivers on distribution routes and visited the press room.

"They really immersed me in what a newspaper was," she says.

Silver didn't need a primer on Spark's target audience. As a Trolley Square (Wilmington) resident, she was surrounded by a post-college age group.

Once Spark was up and running, she met the people behind Delaware's restaurants, clubs, and small businesses. She earned clients' trust by telling them when an advertising purchase wasn't a good fit and when it could meet their goals. The job also helped her become part of the local community.

After nine years at Spark, she moved into pharmaceutical sales. Although the job had a larger paycheck, there were fewer opportunities to build the relationships she valued. The position ended in layoffs within a year, and Silver briefly worked as a contract carpet salesperson while searching

for another role. She found it at the American Heart Association.

As part of the Philadelphia Heart Walk team, Silver worked with businesses and medical institutions to recruit participants and raise money. The American Heart Association later asked Silver to return to Delaware and oversee three Heart Walks, one in each county. A job at Mobius New Media expanded her knowledge of website technology and digital marketing. She then joined the staff at Delaware Business Times, which once again put her on a startup staff.

Silver stepped away from paid employment to raise her children. The pause gave her time to reconsider what she wanted from the next stage of life. "After having kids, you wonder, 'Where's your career?'" she says. "I needed a confidence boost. I really needed to level up a little bit,





Avie Silver

at least for myself.”

Silver enrolled in WilmU’s online MBA program. The format allowed her to pursue the degree while managing her children’s schedules. During the pandemic, her kids attended school through Zoom, which made the flexibility even more important.

She particularly enjoyed her capstone project. She and three classmates competed against other teams to effectively manage a simulated shoe company. They determined prices and marketing budgets and considered expansion opportunities.

The group met regularly on Zoom to study the results and adjust their strategy. “By week three, you really start to understand it,” she says. “You see it all work together.”

While completing the MBA and

raising her children, Silver followed the Local Journalism Initiative, which started Spotlight Delaware. Concerned about declining local coverage and the number of people relying on social media for news, she participated in focus groups. In September 2025, she joined the organization part-time. She moved into her full-time position in January 2026.

Spotlight receives support from grants, donations, and members. Silver’s role is to diversify the revenue. “At some point in time, there’s going to be a funding cliff, which is what all nonprofits have to think about,” she says. “My job is to help balance that and enable us to be continuously sustainable.”

Rather than present every prospective partner with the same sales pitch, Silver considers what the organization is trying to accomplish.

An event sponsorship may make sense for one business, while another might benefit from a clearly labeled sponsored story.

The approach reflects Silver’s relationship-based style and the strategic thinking she strengthened at WilmU. A partnership must meet the advertiser’s needs, generate revenue for Spotlight, and support the newsroom’s long-term stability, she says.

It must also preserve the boundary between news and sales that Silver learned to respect at Spark. “You don’t want me to tell the writers what to write,” she says. “And you don’t want them to write favorably about you because you’ve paid for it, because then you lose the value of what it is.”

The boundary is not an obstacle to Silver’s work — it’s central to her role and Spotlight’s credibility. **WU**

—Pam George

A Q&A WITH DR. DANNY WALKER: *Rethinking Learning in the Age of AI*

Artificial intelligence has created one of the most profound challenges facing higher education. If students can submit polished essays or other written assignments that were AI-generated in seconds, what do those submissions tell us about what they learned?

For many faculty members, that question has become a source of frustration — even alarm. For **DR. DANNY WALKER**, chair of Philosophy and Arts at Wilmington University's College of Education and Liberal Arts, it became the beginning of an unexpected journey.

Dr. Walker discovered that he and other educators were asking the wrong questions. Instead of trying to catch and prevent students from using AI, could they redesign learning so that AI requires students to engage and think more deeply while using it? That journey led to the creation of Willo, an AI learning assistant now running in multiple courses across Wilmington University. In this interview, Dr. Walker talks about how his own thinking evolved into the creation of Willo and why he believes the future of education depends more on redesigning learning than resisting technology.

Many may assume you embraced AI immediately because of the work you're doing now. Was that actually the case?

Not at all. My first reaction was probably the same as many professors. I was worried. When generative AI first became available, I spent months reading about the potential negative impacts of AI misuse in higher education and observed many of those challenges firsthand in the online courses I teach, which represent the predominant instructional model at Wilmington University and in my department.

I immediately began experimenting with AI detection software like Turnitin,

looking for ways to preserve the academic integrity of assignments I had trusted for years. Looking back, I realized I was trying to save a system that was no longer able to provide the evidence of learning that I felt was needed to accurately assess student work. I ultimately realized I was asking the wrong questions. Instead of asking, "How do we catch students using AI?" or "How do we adapt AI to our existing assignments?" I should have been asking, "How do we redesign learning so that AI helps students think instead of enabling them to avoid thinking?" In simple terms, "How do we effectively educate students in an AI world?"

That may seem obvious to you now, but probably not at the time?

It wasn't. It required admitting that some of my own assumptions about teaching were no longer valid. In the past, a well-written paper was considered reliable evidence of learning. Because AI can now produce polished writing with little or no intellectual effort from students, I realized that the quality of the final paper can no longer be relied on as evidence of genuine thinking.

Once I grasped that, I was able to refocus on what really mattered: engaging and challenging students to think for themselves in ways that confirm their

reasoning process. I'm convinced that if we as educators don't adjust to this new reality, we run the risk of graduating most students who cruised through their academic journey on autopilot, many receiving high scores but never learning to think critically or creatively or to experience the struggle required to develop the competencies that higher education should instill.

If traditional assignments no longer provide reliable evidence of learning, what do instructors do?

At first, I thought the answer was simply better feedback. As I began experimenting with generative AI, despite its early limitations, I was impressed with its ability to communicate conversationally with students and provide detailed analysis and feedback. The first project I created was an AI feedback assistant for Intro to Critical Thinking (PHI 100). I loaded a custom AI with course content, directions, and a rubric and prompted it to provide feedback for improvement. Students completed a draft and then received immediate coaching from the assistant, with opportunities to revise their work before submitting it to the instructor. The results were encouraging. Students revised more, reflected more, and overwhelmingly valued receiving feedback while the assignment was still fresh in their minds. We successfully piloted this approach with more than 800 students for about a year.

Was there something that still wasn't quite right?

Yes. As students became more adept at using AI, we were faced increasingly with the question of whether their first drafts were their own authentic writing. The problem was that students could still ask AI to write the first drafts before bringing them to the feedback assistant. The feedback was excellent, but the learning might already have been outsourced. Our only strategy for dealing with this involved the use of AI detection software, like Turnitin. However, because these

tools hadn't proven to be reliable enough for us to be confident about their results, instructors ended up spending more time playing AI detectives than teachers.

That realization convinced me that AI really wasn't the core problem—and AI isn't going away. In fact, it's rapidly improving, and usage among students is increasing. The real problem now is that our assessments aren't designed for this new AI world. So, I ultimately changed my direction. Rather than trying to force AI into traditional assignments, I decided to use AI's strengths to redesign our approach to learning.

Is that what led to the creation of Willo?



Yes. Willo is a secure, web-based AI-guided learning assistant that students log into through a university website while completing course assignments. Think of it as having a patient tutor sitting beside every student as they work. Unlike most AI tools, which are designed primarily to provide answers, Willo is designed primarily to ask questions. Students carry on an ongoing conversation with Willo as they complete an assignment. It coaches rather than answers, challenges assumptions, provides feedback, encourages revision, and prompts students to explain and defend their reasoning. The goal isn't to prevent them from using AI; it's to ensure that they are still doing the intellectual work that leads to genuine learning.

Where did the name come from?

A colleague suggested that a name would help students relate to it, so we did some brainstorming. "Willo" seemed like a natural fit because of its connection to WilmU, and since the goal is to encourage thoughtful reasoning, a wise owl felt like the perfect mascot. After all, our Athletics mascot is Wiley the Wildcat. It only seemed fair that academics should have Willo the Wilosopher. (*Note: Academic Affairs is now collaborating with colleagues to develop Willo's brand identity and consider longer-term trademark opportunities.*)

What makes Willo different? If you're no longer relying primarily on the finished paper for grading, what evidence does Willo help students provide that instructors can assess?

That became one of the most important design questions. If students are going to use AI, instructors need a way to observe the thinking that happens along the way, not just the polished results at the end. That's where the chat history comes in.

Every conversation students have with Willo is automatically saved as a chronological record of their learning process. Think of it as a transcript of their intellectual journey. Instructors can see the student's initial ideas, the questions Willo asked, how the student responded, where they struggled, how their reasoning evolved, and what changes they made before submitting the assignment.

Just as important, Willo continually evaluates the student's work against the assignment rubric. As students complete each section, Willo provides a suggested score for every rubric criterion, explains why they earned that score, and offers specific suggestions for improvement. Students can immediately see where they are doing well and where their reasoning needs to be strengthened. As they revise, they can watch those scores improve in real time.

So, students aren't just getting answers. They're getting continuous coaching while instructors view the entire learning process.

Right. Instead of guessing whether a well-written paper reflects genuine learning, instructors have access to a transparent record of how students developed their ideas. The final assignment still matters, but now it's accompanied by evidence showing how students questioned assumptions, responded to feedback, revised their thinking, and ultimately arrived at their conclusions. That's a much richer picture of learning than a final paper alone can provide.

Can you give readers an example of what that coaching looks like?

I remember one student in my Critical Thinking class who revised the same assignment multiple times because Willo kept asking for clearer reasoning instead of accepting the first answer they gave that was, perhaps, a bit superficial. It challenged the student's assumptions, asked for evidence required by the rubric, and invited the student to consider competing viewpoints. By the end of the conversation, the submission was much stronger, and the student's thinking was much deeper.

Also, we have learned that students value not just the quality but the immediate feedback. They literally have a coach providing tutorial analysis and advice 24/7. I often picture a Wilmington student finally sitting down at 10:30 on a Saturday night. With Willo, the student receives instant guidance on assignments. The instructor may not be available in the moment, but Willo is there, and learning doesn't stop.

Some readers will still wonder whether AI will inevitably become another shortcut that makes learning easier rather than deeper.

That's a fair concern. Throughout history, new educational technologies, from calculators to word processors to the internet, have reduced some of the work students once had to do. But the more important question is whether they also reduce students' thinking.

More than 2,000 years ago, Socrates was skeptical of writing because he feared it would replace the kind of dialogue he believed was essential to learning. Ironically, AI now allows us to bring that dialogue back to the center of education. However, Willo must be intentionally structured that way. Properly designed, Willo doesn't simply provide answers. If a student's reasoning is weak, it asks another question. If there's a logical gap, it doesn't fill it in. It challenges the student to examine the gap, defend a position, reconsider assumptions, and refine their thinking before moving on. The goal isn't efficiency. The goal is to keep students intellectually engaged in the work of thinking.

If AI can coach students around the clock, help them think better, and provide a rubric-based score, where does that leave instructors? Is AI eventually going to replace them?

I don't think so. In fact, I believe that in today's world, AI makes good instructors even more important. Teaching has never really been about just delivering information. Since the advent of the internet, finding information is no longer an issue. The real value of a professor is helping students develop judgment, ask better questions, recognize weak reasoning, encourage curiosity, and create learning experiences that challenge them to grow.

Willo was never designed to replace instructors; it was designed to extend their reach. Think of it as a teaching assistant that's available whenever the instructor can't be. It can provide immediate coaching outside the classroom, but it can't replace the insight, mentorship, and judgment that engaged instructors bring to the learning process. True, routine tasks like grammar checking

IN HER OWN WORDS: DR. GENESIS JOHNSON ON THE POWER OF SCHOLARSHIP SUPPORT

DR. GENESIS JOHNSON's story shows the difference a Wilmington University scholarship can make.

She recently earned her doctorate in Educational Leadership, building on the bachelor's and master's degrees she previously completed at WilmU. Her journey was shaped by responsibility, resilience, and a commitment to education.

In remarks delivered at Wilmington University's Annual Scholarship Golf Classic, Dr. Johnson reflected on the challenges she faced, the support that helped her continue, and the gratitude she carries for the donors who believed in her.

These are her words.

My name is Genesis Johnson, and I am a proud Wilmington University scholarship recipient.

I stand before you today filled with gratitude and humility. I know that your lives are full, your responsibilities are many, and your time is valuable. Yet, because of your generosity and your belief in the power of education, you

have made it possible for students like me to continue pursuing dreams that might otherwise feel out of reach. Thank you for investing in Wilmington University — and, through that investment, in me.

I am a proud alumna of Wilmington University, having earned both my bachelor's and master's degrees here. I've spent the past 10 years as a teacher, and caring for others has always been at the center of who I am, whether I am caring for my students or my family. In the summer of 2023, I took the next step in my journey and began pursuing my doctorate in Educational Leadership.

But my journey has not been a simple one.

In June 2024, my life changed in an instant when I was granted emergency custody of my newborn granddaughter. She was born six weeks prematurely and experienced withdrawal symptoms during her first months of life. I had to make a decision: bring her home with me or allow her to enter state custody. There was no real choice. I brought her home.

or following assignment directions will become easier to automate, but teachers still retain control over the final grade. Also, they have more opportunity to spend time doing the things that matter most: mentoring students, designing meaningful learning experiences, facilitating discussions, and helping students develop wisdom, not just knowledge. In my experience of using and closely observing Willo's use by other instructors, it can deepen an instructor's role in supporting student learning.

How has the project evolved from a classroom pilot into a broader initiative?

One of the most rewarding parts of this work has been seeing it grow beyond a single course. As the pilot produced encouraging results, I had opportunities to share its progress, refinements, and outcomes through Academic Council, Faculty Senate, and Teaching Excellence Day. Those conversations helped build broader interest and support across Academic Affairs.

Academic Council has since aligned

Willo with the University's strategic priorities related to student engagement and retention. Working with Educational Effectiveness, we identified High Touch courses as the next priority for expansion.

At the same time, we want to grow carefully. Before Willo is opened to faculty more broadly, we need to continue refining how its effectiveness is evaluated within the course. Responsible expansion will also require close collaboration with Information Technology, Online Learning and the Center for Teaching Excellence so faculty have the education, development and support they need.

The goal is purposeful growth. We want to build a strong framework that allows Willo to expand across colleges in a way that supports student learning and success.

Where do you think it goes from here?

I don't believe the future belongs to educators who try to pretend AI doesn't exist or hope they can somehow ban it from higher education. But I also don't

believe it belongs to those who simply surrender to it by looking the other way or allowing AI to do the intellectual heavy lifting for students. Both approaches miss the real opportunity.

The future belongs to educators who are willing to rethink how learning happens. Our challenge isn't to compete with AI or to be afraid of it, but to design learning experiences where AI can become a catalyst for curiosity, reflection, revision, and deeper reasoning rather than a substitute for thinking. If we do that well, students won't just complete course content. They'll develop the habits of mindful critical thinking, sound judgment, creativity, and intellectual resilience that will serve them long after today's AI tools have been replaced.

AI may change the tools we use, but it doesn't change our mission. Our responsibility has always been to help students learn how to think, not simply what to produce. If anything, in an increasingly AI-driven world, that mission has become even more essential. **WU**



Dr. Genesis Johnson

ALEX FEENEY

Since then, the challenges have continued. In November 2024, I underwent surgery to remove a tumor from my liver. More recently, my husband was diagnosed with kidney failure and must begin dialysis as he awaits a transplant. These

medical challenges brought significant financial strain. There were times when I truly questioned whether I could continue my education.

At home, I also care for my 12-year-old twins, one of whom is autistic. I am a mother of four adult children, including a set of triplets.

I'm proud to share that I have completed the doctoral program and successfully defended my dissertation, officially becoming Dr. Johnson.

Your generosity is not just financial support; it is hope, opportunity, and a reminder that someone believes in us. Because of donors like you, I was able to continue, persist, and finish what I started.

Earning my doctorate has opened doors for me to step into leadership roles where I can create meaningful change in education, ensuring equity, access, and opportunity for every student. And I promise you, I will carry your investment forward.

Thank you for seeing the value in education. Thank you for believing in perseverance. And most importantly, thank you for believing in students like me.

Because of you, this journey did not end in obstacles; it ended in achievement. **WU**

EDUCATION MAJOR PLACES AT NATIONAL TEACHING CONFERENCE

“We’re building a legacy of future educators who will inspire, lead and make a lasting impact,” says WilmU Graduate Program Coordinator **DR. ASHLEY WILSON**.“

That commitment is already taking shape through students like **AUSTIN COLAZZO**, an Elementary Education (K-6) major in WilmU’s College of Education and Liberal Arts, who earned fifth place in the Collegiate Creative Lecture competition at the National Educators Rising Conference in Portland, Oregon.

The national conference brings together middle school, high school and college students who are interested in careers in education. Participants take part in competitive events, leadership development sessions and workshops designed to strengthen their teaching skills.

Colazzo was one of five collegiate students from Delaware to place in a national Educators Rising Collegiate Conference competition. His achievement came during



ASHLEY WILSON

Wilmington University’s first year participating in both the Delaware and National Educators Rising Collegiate conferences.

Chair of Interdisciplinary Studies and Literature **DR. KATE COTTLE** served as Colazzo’s mentor for the competition, helping him prepare for both the state and national levels. Dr. Wilson served as his advisor as he represented the University.

“Dr. Wilson asked me to mentor Austin for this year’s speech competition, and because he was the first Wilmington University student to compete, it was an exciting opportunity,” says Dr. Cottle. “His idea of using

nontraditional assessments to reach all kinds of learners resonates with many educators. Austin understands how to read an audience, adjust his pacing and connect with people — qualities that will serve him well as a teacher. I’m proud of his accomplishment as one of the top five collegiate competitors nationally.”

Colazzo’s placement gave Wilmington University a strong first showing in the Educators Rising collegiate program and reflected the preparation, creativity and commitment he brings to his future classrooms. **WU** —Maria Hess

TWO MILESTONES, ONE DAY

In May 2026, as many Wilmington University graduates walked across the commencement stage to receive their diplomas, **KAITLYN SOMMER** was walking down a different aisle. Her wedding date had been planned months before the University finalized the commencement schedule, and the two celebrations fell on the same day. Sommer faced a decision familiar to so many nurses: balancing life's most meaningful moments with deep professional commitment.

Sommer earned her master's degree in Nursing Leadership through countless hours of study between clinical shifts, demonstrating the perseverance shared by many of our graduate nursing students. Along the way, she developed the leadership skills our healthcare system needs most — guiding teams through

uncertainty, advocating for patients and colleagues, and leading with confidence, compassion and integrity.

Sommer was unable to attend commencement, but her achievement was no less significant. She didn't have to choose between celebrating her marriage and celebrating her academic success. She accomplished both during one extraordinary season of life, honoring each milestone in its own special way.

In collaboration with the President's Office, Wilmington University surprised Sommer by presenting her with a framed diploma at her wedding reception, ensuring that her academic achievement was celebrated alongside one of life's most memorable occasions.

Marked by both a wedding celebration and an academic milestone,



Sommer's story reflects the determination, dedication, and resilience of WilmU graduates who continue to move forward through life's most defining milestones. **WU** —Aaron Sebach

Wilson Elected President of NCAA's FARA

Wilmington University's Faculty Athletics Representative **DR. MATT WILSON** is stepping onto a national stage. Recently elected to a one-year term as president of the Faculty Athletics Representatives



Association (FARA), Dr. Wilson says the role reflects his "deep commitment to helping student-athletes thrive both in the classroom and in competition."

A member of WilmU's faculty since 2007 and its FAR since 2018, Dr. Wilson has become a central figure in shaping the academic experience of student-athletes. FARA represents faculty athletics representatives across all three NCAA divisions — professionals who serve as watchdogs for academic integrity and as advocates for student-athlete well-being.

Wilmington Director of Athletics **DR. STEFANIE WHITBY** calls Dr. Wilson "an invaluable member of our Athletics Department," praising his innovative academic-support initiatives and his leadership in diversity, inclusion, and

community engagement.

Only the second person to serve as Wilmington's FAR, Dr. Wilson has also left his mark beyond the campus. He has chaired the CACC's FAR group, served on the NCAA Division II nominating committee, and previously led WilmU's Faculty Senate. His academic background includes an Ed.D. in Higher Education Leadership and Innovation from Wilmington University, along with degrees from Ohio Valley University and Lubbock Christian University.

As he begins his national leadership role, Dr. Wilson says he looks forward to collaborating with colleagues across the NCAA to strengthen the student-athlete experience and uphold the academic values at the heart of collegiate sports. **WU** —Bob Yearick



President Dr. LaVerne Harmon speaks at the Farnan School of Law dedication.

A Legacy of Service: Wilmington University Names Farnan School of Law

BY MARIA HESS



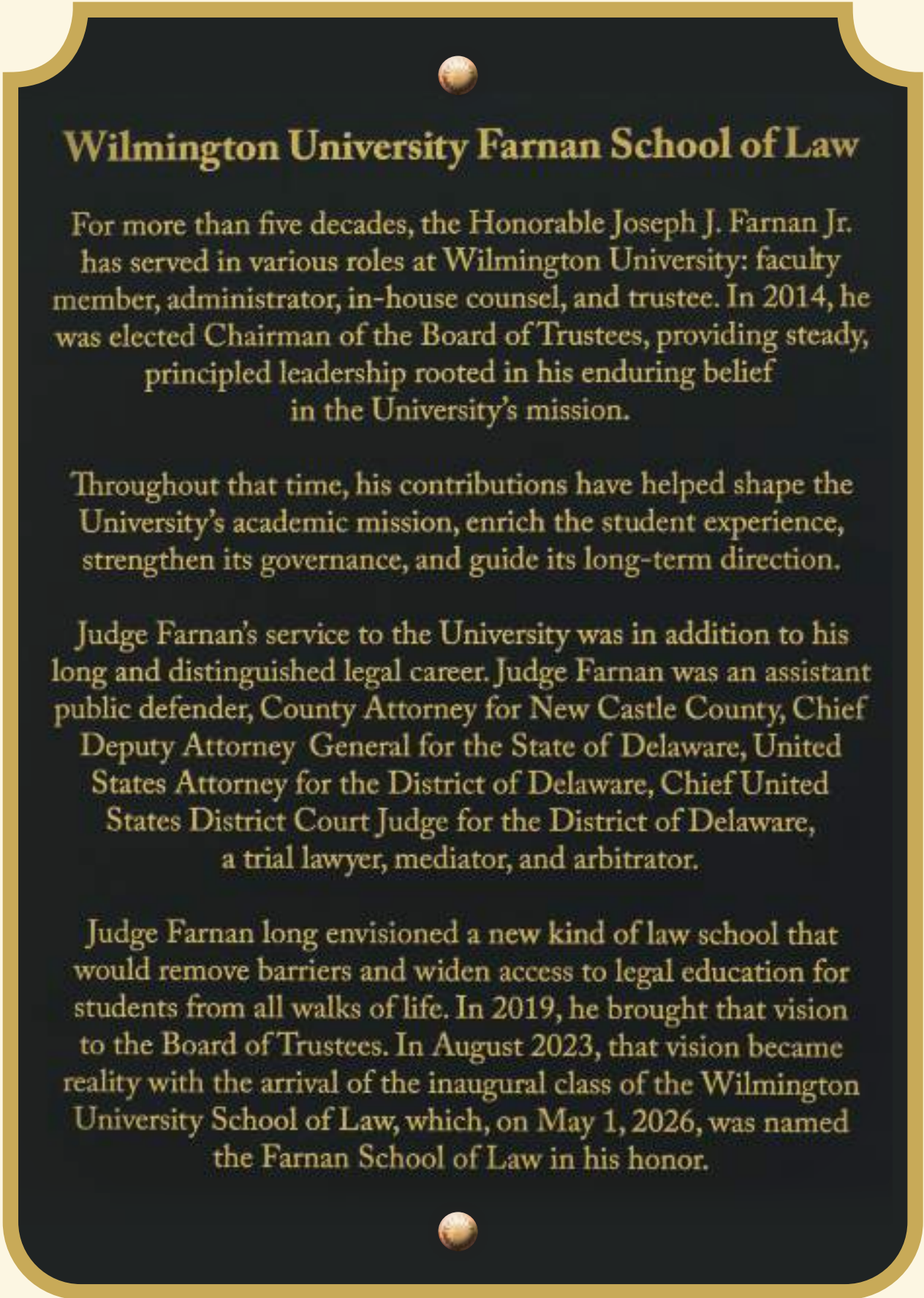
PAUL PATTON

On May 1, 2026, Wilmington University dedicated the Farnan School of Law in honor of **The Honorable Joseph J. Farnan Jr.** and his more than five decades of service to the University.

Long before Wilmington University established a law school, **THE HONORABLE JOSEPH J. FARNAN JR.** was helping shape the institution it would become.

His relationship with the University began in 1970, when he joined then-Wilmington College as a Political Science faculty member. Over more than five decades, he taught

students, served in academic and student life leadership roles, established the College's Criminal Justice program and provided legal counsel during consequential periods in the institution's growth.



Wilmington University Farnan School of Law

For more than five decades, the Honorable Joseph J. Farnan Jr. has served in various roles at Wilmington University: faculty member, administrator, in-house counsel, and trustee. In 2014, he was elected Chairman of the Board of Trustees, providing steady, principled leadership rooted in his enduring belief in the University's mission.

Throughout that time, his contributions have helped shape the University's academic mission, enrich the student experience, strengthen its governance, and guide its long-term direction.

Judge Farnan's service to the University was in addition to his long and distinguished legal career. Judge Farnan was an assistant public defender, County Attorney for New Castle County, Chief Deputy Attorney General for the State of Delaware, United States Attorney for the District of Delaware, Chief United States District Court Judge for the District of Delaware, a trial lawyer, mediator, and arbitrator.

Judge Farnan long envisioned a new kind of law school that would remove barriers and widen access to legal education for students from all walks of life. In 2019, he brought that vision to the Board of Trustees. In August 2023, that vision became reality with the arrival of the inaugural class of the Wilmington University School of Law, which, on May 1, 2026, was named the Farnan School of Law in his honor.

A plaque at the Farnan School of Law commemorates the May 1, 2026, naming of the school in honor of Judge Joseph J. Farnan Jr.

On May 1, 2026, Wilmington University honored that legacy by formally naming its law school the Farnan School of Law.

The distinction recognizes Judge Farnan's service to the University in addition to his long and distinguished legal career. He was an assistant public defender, County Attorney for New Castle County, Chief Deputy Attorney General for the State of Delaware, United States Attorney for the District of Delaware, Chief United States District Court Judge for the District of Delaware, a trial lawyer, mediator, and arbitrator.

Beyond his distinguished legal career, the naming also reflects Judge Farnan's years of service to Wilmington University and his role in advancing the idea that education, including legal education, should be available to talented and determined students from all walks of life.

"I'm honored and humbled by this recognition, and I share it with the many people whose vision, dedication

and hard work built this law school," Judge Farnan says.

Judge Farnan's commitment to educational access has remained a constant throughout his association with Wilmington University. As the institution evolved from a small college into a comprehensive university, he helped extend educational opportunities to traditional students, working adults and others seeking new pathways to personal and professional advancement.

His service continued through the Wilmington University Board of Trustees. Judge Farnan joined the Board in 2001, was elected vice chair in 2012 and became chairman in 2014, a position he continues to hold. During that time, he has helped guide the University with careful judgment, institutional knowledge and a strong commitment to its mission.

That commitment helped lead to the creation of Wilmington University's School of Law.

In 2019, Judge Farnan proposed

to the Board of Trustees the idea of developing a law school program that would create a new pathway to legal education. He envisioned a school that would broaden access while maintaining the academic rigor and professional preparation required of future attorneys.

That idea took root, and in August 2023, the originally named Wilmington University School of Law welcomed its inaugural class.

"Judge Farnan has always understood how education can open doors for students," says Wilmington University President **DR. LAVERNE HARMON**. "The Farnan School of Law reflects that commitment and honors a leader whose wisdom, service and belief in our students have helped shape Wilmington University."

The Farnan School of Law carries forward the values that have defined Judge Farnan's more than five decades of service to Wilmington University: service, opportunity and a belief in the transformative power of education. **WU**



Farnan School of Law



Katryna Cera-Proulx

*For Katryna Cera-Proulx,
a teenage volunteer position became a calling.*



A Career Built on Connection

W

hen **KATRYNA CERA-PROULX** was 15, her parents decided to divorce. Looking for a healthy distraction versus a path to partying, she volunteered at the Corbit-Calloway Memorial Library in Odessa, located near her Middletown home. “I never left,” she says.

In 2010, she joined the staff and gradually took on responsibilities in circulation, children’s programming, and other roles. In 2021, she was named director. Regardless of the job title, her library work combines two things she values: helping people and creating connections.

The Path to Delaware

Cera-Proulx was born in Montreal to a French-Canadian mother and Colombian father. He had immigrated to the United States as a teenager in 1979 and later moved to Canada for a job. There were more moves to follow. The family lived in Miami and North Carolina before he accepted a position with the DuPont Co., and they relocated to Delaware. She was 9.

Being raised by immigrant parents gave Cera-Proulx a different perspective from many

other classmates, one for which she is thankful, she says. Although French was her first language, she attended a Spanish-language school in North Carolina. After arriving in Delaware, she entered an English-only classroom. Because she initially fell behind in her studies, her teachers encouraged the family to speak English at home. Even now, she says, her sentence structure may reflect the interplay of English and Spanish. Her grandmother, who does not speak English, now lives with her, so Cera-Proulx speaks Spanish every day.

Because she is trilingual, she considered a career in international business after graduating from Middletown High School. At Delaware Technical Community College, she explored early childhood education and nursing. Meanwhile, Karen Quinn, then the library’s director, repeatedly told Cera-Proulx she would make a good librarian. As the young adult gained experience with programming, inventory, and other operations, the idea took hold.

“Oh my gosh, I *could* be a librarian,” she says. Her career path became clear.

The Right Approach

Cera-Proulx needed a bachelor's degree before pursuing the master's degree required for professional librarianship. Wilmington University's flexible course options made the school the ideal choice. She majored in General Studies, worked at the library, and helped her father raise her sister, who is 10 years younger. (Her mother had returned to Canada.) A traditional daytime schedule would have been difficult to manage.

The Ada Leigh Soles Memorial Professional Librarian and Archivist Scholarship helped pay for

her undergraduate education. The state program supports eligible Delaware library and archive employees pursuing a bachelor's, master's, or doctoral degree related to the profession.

Cera-Proulx earned a master's degree in Library and Information Science from the University of South Florida. Before the pandemic, she completed one semester toward earning a doctorate in Education in Organizational Leadership, Learning, and Innovation at WilmU.

She hopes to return to her studies, since directing a library

requires expertise in administration, fundraising, delegation, and management as well as librarianship, she says.

One college course that influenced her leadership wasn't an obvious one. In a yoga class, which explored the philosophy behind the practice, the instructor discussed priorities. She used the example of choosing to play ping-pong with her son instead of immediately washing the dishes. The dishes could wait. Cera-Proulx applied the lesson to library service. "This patron is here. I'm going to talk to this patron, see how this patron is doing, see if they need anything. I'll finish this administrative work later, because it'll be there," she says.

Quinn taught Cera-Proulx that serving the public doesn't always mean locating a book or answering a research question. A visitor may need a cool place to sit on a hot day. Someone grieving a parent may need a listener. The idea of service reflects a role that public libraries have played for generations.

The Past and the Future

Unlike private subscription libraries, the free public libraries that emerged in the 19th century did not require visitors to pay dues or make a purchase. By the late 19th and early 20th centuries, many had added children's rooms, lectures, and community activities.

Founded through a bequest from Dr. James Corbit, the Corbit-Calloway Memorial Library opened in 1848 as Delaware's first free public library open to all, including women and children. The current building was built in 1968 and expanded in 1986. Today, the 6,100-square-foot library houses nearly 55,000 items and



Katryna Cera-Proulx



Katryna Cera-Proulx, along with board members Scott Davis and Sital Soni, shows Sen. Lisa Blunt Rochester plans for the new library.

receives more than 35,000 visits annually.

Along with books, today's libraries also offer internet access and classes. For instance, Corbit-Calloway offers or has hosted story times, STEM activities, pottery, yoga, book clubs and community events. Staff members also connect patrons with legal, social-service, and other outside resources.

Cera-Proulx draws on her personal experiences when working with patrons, especially those who speak English as a second language. Her immigrant background and experience adapting to new schools and languages help her understand what it feels like to be an outsider, she says. Patrons from diverse backgrounds have told the staff that

they feel welcome at the library. Cera-Proulx considers that one of the library's most meaningful accomplishments.

But keeping pace with area growth has been a challenge.

A \$10 million campaign seeks to fund a renovation and expansion, including study rooms, flexible meeting areas, upgraded infrastructure, a technology center, and dedicated spaces for children, teens, and adults.

The enhancements would keep the library relevant to future generations. Quinn, who now works in Children's Services at the library, sees grandparents return with grandchildren after bringing their own children to her story times years ago. Cera-

Proulx wants to experience that same cycle. She loves when parents send her photographs of children continuing a STEM project at home. One mother sent an image of her triplets standing beside the sunflowers they had planted during a library activity.

As the Middletown, Odessa and Townsend area — dubbed MOT — expands, Cera-Proulx is determined to keep the welcoming atmosphere that her predecessors fostered. She has no desire to move on from the Corbit-Calloway. Instead, she wants to guide the expansion, welcome new residents, and continue watching new generations discover the library.

"I have found my place," she says. **WU**

SCIENCE, ENGINEERING *and the* FUTURE OF WORK



WilmU's new **COLLEGE OF SCIENCES AND ENGINEERING**

*brings fast-growing disciplines under one academic home as demand rises for graduates with interdisciplinary **STEM** skills.*

BY EILEEN SMITH DALLABRIDA

The launch of Wilmington University's new College of Sciences and Engineering marks more than academic reorganization. It's a reflection of where higher education — and the economy — is heading.

"This is about creating a clearer academic home for students," says **DR. MILTON MULDROW**, who was named dean of the new college after serving as director of Natural Science. "Science, mathematics, computer science, and engineering work best when they're not operating in silos. The integration helps students see how what they're learning connects to real-world problems."

Planning for the college has been underway for several years, driven by University leadership's recognition that STEM disciplines are central to workforce development, research, and global competitiveness.

A decade ago, when Dr. Muldrow arrived at WilmU, science offerings were limited, and no degrees were offered.

Today, students can pursue undergraduate and graduate degrees in fields ranging from biotechnology to chemistry. The new college formalizes that growth, bringing related disciplines under one academic umbrella and establishing science and engineering as a core pillar of the University.

The timing is strategic. Government projections indicate that science and engineering jobs will outpace growth in other sectors through at least 2033, fueled by demand in technology, healthcare, clean energy, and artificial intelligence. Computer-related roles lead the trend, with cybersecurity projected to grow by 33% and software development by 17%. Industrial engineering is expected to grow 12%, while mechanical engineering is pro-

jected to grow 11%.

"If you look at our economy and the convergence of fields, it's turning very sharply in the STEM direction," Dr. Muldrow says.

Delaware is well positioned to provide STEM career opportunities. The First State's long association with the DuPont Co. and the biopharmaceutical industry established a deep scientific footprint, while a robust banking and finance sector has driven sustained demand for computer science and data analytics expertise. The new college is designed to meet regional, national and international workforce needs.

"The College of Sciences and Engineering reflects a clear understanding of today's workforce realities and where opportunity is growing," says



Dr. Milton Muldrow

The college emphasizes **HANDS-ON EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING**.

Undergraduate and graduate students engage in research, often one-on-one with faculty or through internships. “The best way to learn about research is to do research,” says Dr. Muldrow.



Senior Vice President and Chief Academic Officer **DR. DENISE WELLS**. “Delaware’s strength in life sciences, clean energy, technology, and data-driven fields calls for interdisciplinary preparation, and this College is designed to meet that demand — regionally and beyond.”

Artificial intelligence, Dr. Muldrow adds, is accelerating — not diminishing — opportunity for STEM professionals. “There are a lot of headlines about AI dinging opportunities in the sciences,” he says. “But it’s not replacing humans in the innovation pipeline, particularly in biology; it is augmenting and speeding it up. AI is driving demand for people who understand the science behind the systems, the data, and the ethical and policy implications.”

One of the defining features of the new college is its integrated structure. Students studying Biology, Chemistry, Engineering, and related fields will encounter coursework that overlaps disciplines and mirrors how problems are solved outside academia.

“That integration prepares students for careers that increasingly demand interdisciplinary skills,” Muldrow says. “In the real world, challenges don’t come labeled as ‘biology’ or ‘computer science.’”

The college also emphasizes hands-on experiential learning. Undergraduate and graduate students engage in research, often one-on-one with faculty or through internships. “The best way to learn about research is to do research,” Dr. Muldrow says. The

college will also move farther in an area not normally associated with Wilmington University: research and innovation. With a cadre of successful scientists, WilmU will now be a hub of scientific discovery in areas such as biology, biomedical science, chemistry, and computer and data science.

With the new college comes an expansion of academic pathways. WilmU is introducing new Data science programs and graduate degrees in Biology, along with associate degrees in Biology and Chemistry. A pre-med track is also in development, reflecting student interest and workforce demand.

Beyond campus, the college is strengthening outreach efforts by offering courses in high schools and working directly with students — particularly in the City of Wilmington — to build early pathways into STEM fields.

“I’ve long wanted to do more with high schools, making students who are excited about science aware of opportunities to earn degrees and perform research,” Dr. Muldrow says, pointing to a Howard High School of Technology student who later blossomed at WilmU through the NASA Delaware Space Grant program. That program, where Dr. Muldrow currently serves as associate director, allows students to participate in NASA-supported aeronautics and space research.

Students will benefit from a mix of in-person and virtual learning. WilmU’s Brandywine campus offers state-of-the-art laboratories for in-person science and engineering instruction, while





DR. MULDROW HAS PLAYED A CENTRAL ROLE *in expanding the University's science offerings. As chair, he launched Environmental Science, Chemistry, and Biology programs.*



virtual options provide flexibility for working adults.

Dr. Muldrow's approach to education is rooted in a lifelong curiosity about the natural world. Growing up in Baltimore, he gravitated toward science early. "In elementary school, I was always picking up rocks, checking books about dinosaurs out of the library, and learning all I could," he recalls.

He earned a bachelor's in Biology from St. Francis University, followed by a National Science Foundation Graduate STEM Fellowship that took him to the University of Missouri–St. Louis, where he completed a master's in Biology. His thesis focused on tropical forest restoration in the Florida Keys.

Dr. Muldrow also worked as a biologist and program analyst at the National Science Foundation, where he helped write an early report on climate change. His work included recommending funding for undergraduate research experiences, leading NSF-supported marine research projects in Florida, and producing educational materials on climate science.

He later earned a Ph.D. in Environmental Science and Public Policy from George Mason University, where he studied shifting baselines in coral reef conservation, a theme that spans natural science, policy, and long-term societal impact. He is the author of "Synthetic Biology: Life's Extraordinary New Worlds," an audiobook on the emerging field that combines biology and engineering.

Since joining WilmU, Dr. Muldrow has played a central role in expanding the University's science offerings. As chair, he launched Environmental Science, Chemistry, and Biology programs, helping build a pipeline of graduates entering some of Delaware's fastest-growing employment sectors. Today, as dean, he is focused on scale and sustainability.

That includes developing internship partnerships, expanding undergraduate and graduate research, and ensuring that programs remain aligned with industry needs. The effort also supports innovation through curricula and applied research.

"I've spoken with students, and they're very excited by the opportunity to earn degrees and certificates through the new college," Dr. Muldrow says. "They see where these fields are going, and they want to be part of it."

"Dr. Muldrow brings a deep understanding of the convergence shaping science, engineering, and mathematics," says Dr. Wells. "Under his leadership, the College prepares students not just for their first job, but for careers that will continue to evolve with technology, data, and discovery."

As science and engineering continue to shape the future of work, WilmU is helping students to be career-ready at the center of that transformation. **WU**

To learn more about the College of Sciences and Engineering, visit wilmu.edu/sciences-engineering.



Dr. Milton Muldrow



DR. SALLIE REISSMAN's *connection to the University began as a student and continues through her leadership of the new College of Professional and Continuing Education.*

A Promise, A Degree *and* A Career

BY BOB YEARICK

The path that led **DR. SALLIE REISSMAN** to Wilmington University — then Wilmington College — began with a promise. It was 1991, and she was raising two young daughters and working part-time at an Italian restaurant in Wilmington while her husband worked at DuPont. At the same time, she was facing heartbreak: Her mother was dying.

“Before she passed away, I made her a promise,” says Dr. Reissman. “I said, ‘I finally know what I want to do in life; I’m going to be a teacher.’” When her mother left each of her children an inheritance, it became the means to fulfill that promise.

First, though, she had to pick a college. So, one day, with her two daughters — a 3-year-old and an infant — in tow, Dr. Reissman drove around New Castle County searching for a school that would fit the lifestyle of a working mother. One of her first stops was Wilmington College’s New Castle campus. There, she met admissions advisor **DENNIS HUFFMAN**, who is now senior director of Instructional Locations.

The University’s open enrollment policy and streamlined admissions process made higher education feel within reach. For Dr. Reissman, the decision to enroll came quickly.

PHOTOS BY PAUL PATTON



Dr. Sallie Reissman



The college serves adult learners, career changers, and working professionals seeking stackable credentials, short-format courses, and applied programs that meet regional employer needs.

And so began a mutually beneficial relationship with WilmU that has stretched into four decades — and counting. Through those years, she has helped strengthen the University's reputation for flexible, career-focused education that meets students where they are, not where tradition says they should be.

That commitment has led to her newest role: dean of the College of Professional and Continuing Education (COPCE), the University's recently established home for flexible, workforce-aligned learning. The college serves adult learners, career changers, and working professionals seeking stackable credentials, short-format courses, and applied programs that meet regional employer needs. Under Dr. Reissman's leadership, the college has expanded its portfolio of microcredentials, strengthened partnerships with Delaware

employers, and increased access for students balancing education with work and family responsibilities.

COPCE's mission aligns with Dr. Reissman's commitment to remove barriers, honor lived experience, and design programs that create real opportunities. She sees the college as a place where students can take meaningful steps forward without having to pause their lives.

That's exactly what she did when she enrolled as an Elementary Education major, balancing family, work, and academics as she sat in classes two nights a week for six years. Despite the packed schedule, she says, "It was lovely. I had amazing teachers, and I just fell in love with the place."

She received her bachelor's degree in 1997 and immediately landed a job as a third-grade teacher at Lancashire Elementary School in North Wilmington, where she had been a student teacher.

Meanwhile, she continued her education, enrolling in WilmU's master's program in Applied Technology in Education.

Her debut as an educator brought the first of what would be many honors; she was named Delaware's First-Year Teacher of the Year and was rewarded with a trip to Washington, D.C., for a celebration with winners from other states.

At the same time, she was directing the WilmU Wildcat Summer Camp for kids. Dr. Reissman became the camp's first director in 1995, while she was studying for her master's. She got the job when one of her professors recommended her because, she says, "I was a good student, I was mature — I had kids of my own — and I had prior camp experience."

She remembers those camp days fondly. "We started it that first year with only six children, including my two girls. The camp expanded over the years as the college grew to a university, and eventually we were serving 60-plus children, ages 8–12, from June through August. We had swimming at Penn Acres pool, tennis and drama lessons. It truly was an amazing camp for employees, who sent children for free."

In January 2001, she joined WilmU full-time as its first instructional technologist, helping faculty use technology more effectively in their classrooms.

In 2009, the demands of that job prompted her to step aside as summer camp director. The camp continued with the staff she had hired until 2019, when COVID effectively ended it. (The University still offers generous support to employees with young children for summer camp programs.)

As the University expanded its online learning initiatives, Dr. Reissman found herself helping to shape how faculty taught

hybrid and online courses. Over the years, her responsibilities continued to grow. She became director of Distance Learning, senior director of Online Learning and Educational Technology, and assistant vice president and dean of the College of Online and Experiential Learning. In 2022, she was named assistant vice president of Academic Affairs. She held the role as dean of the College of Online and Experiential Learning, then, as dean, was appointed to lead the new college.

Dr. Reissman attributes much of her success in academia to WilmU administrations who have encouraged her, trusted her, and given her autonomy.

“I’ve always been encouraged to be creative,” she says. “New challenges were often presented as, ‘Could you do this?’ The challenge was never easy, but it

was always fun. As a result, I’ve had an incredible career.”

“Sallie brings something rare to this role: lived experience paired with vision,” says Senior Vice President and Chief Academic Officer **DR. DENISE WELLS**. “Under her leadership, COPCE isn’t just another division — it’s a bridge between community and workforce, opening doors for learners at every stage, from non-credit exploration to degree completion. Her energy is contagious, and it’s exactly the kind of leadership that will carry our access-and-opportunity mission forward.”

Throughout her years at WilmU, Dr. Reissman has embraced the digital age and used it to help staff and students. She has contributed to the expansion of online learning, introduced new multimedia resources for

instructors, and helped launch TEDx Wilmington University. Now, she and her colleagues in the COPCE are developing programs to help working adults build skills for today’s workplace.

In the meantime, she hasn’t neglected her own education. “I continue to skill up and stay abreast of the latest technology,” she says.

Today, Dr. Reissman’s memorable journey seems to have come full circle. Her daughters, Hailey and Sabrina, now in their 30s, both work at the University of Pennsylvania, and Dr. Reissman is the grandmother of two girls who are approximately the same age as Hailey and Sabrina were back in 1991, when they accompanied their young mother on her successful search for a college that believed in her. **WU**



Dr. Reissman credits WilmU’s support and trust for her success.

SPORTS

LEADERSHIP BEYOND THE GAME

CHRIS LOPEZ, Wilmington University's student-athlete academic adviser, and two Wildcat student-athletes gained valuable lessons when they attended the NCAA Student-Athlete Leadership Forum in Dallas last fall.

Joining Lopez were two representatives of WilmU's Student-Athlete Advisory Committee (SAAC): softball player **HALEY GRYG** and baseball player **CHASE FLEMING**.

The four-day forum brought together 240 student-athletes, coaches and administrators from across the country for an intensive exploration of leadership.

"It was rewarding from start to finish," Lopez says. "Every session had something you could take away and apply, whether you're a student-athlete, coach or administrator."

The theme, "Adjust Your Sails," centered on learning how to adapt when life takes an unexpected turn.

Attendees explored subjects including self-reflection, empathy and communication. While those ideas resonated with him, Lopez says, "The biggest thing I took away was the people and relationships we built there. Hearing others' stories and learning from their experiences challenged me to keep growing as a young professional."

Lopez, who joined WilmU Athletics in November 2024, can relate to the pressure that comes with being a student-athlete. He was a Wildcat relief

pitcher from 2014 to 2016 and was part of the first team in school history to win the NCAA Division II East Region and advance to the College World Series.



Lopez is applying the lessons he learned in Dallas by working to expand leadership opportunities through SAAC, team discussions and everyday interactions.

"Encouraging self-reflection, empathy and open communication creates better leaders, teammates and people," he says. "Those qualities will have a lasting impact on our student-athletes."

Fleming and Grygo also found the trip to Dallas helpful. Fleming, who pitches and plays first base, says the forum emphasized core values like being a good teammate, striving to achieve team goals and including everyone in that effort.

"It was cool to meet student-athletes from all over the country and talk school and sports with them," he says.

Grygo, who plays third base, says the forum emphasized that "while change and uncertainty can be difficult, our values can serve as an anchor, helping us navigate challenges with confidence and purpose."

During the flight home, she says, "I remember reflecting on everything I had learned and feeling excited to bring those lessons back to my team." **WU**

—Bob Yearick

Chris Lopez



ELLA ROYER:

Unstoppable On and Off the Field

When **ELLA ROYER** arrived at Wilmington University from Alberta, Canada, she was unsure how quickly she'd find her footing, both academically and as a member of the Wildcat women's lacrosse team. Four years later, she leaves as a record-setting NCAA Division II scorer who balanced elite athletic ability with academic accomplishment, earning a bachelor's degree in Behavioral Science and a certificate in Criminal Justice while building a second family far from home.

For Royer, the academic mission was always central. "Earning a degree was obviously the most important

part about coming to WilmU," she says. "However, the past four years have given me so much more than that."

And her academic journey is not over. "I'm planning on continuing my education and getting a Bachelor of Education back home," she says.

The 5-foot-2 midfielder quickly became one of the most feared scorers in Division II history, despite facing defenses that focused on her. Says her coach, **KEVIN DAY**: "Ella's stats speak for themselves, but what I would like everyone to realize is that she broke scoring records while spending most of her career in a face-guarded situation. Most teams would put a player on her tightly to try to



Ella Royer

“
Playing lacrosse here
has been a life-
changing experience.
I've made friendships
that will last a lifetime.
”

deny her the ball, but her speed and IQ allowed her to get away from those defenders, and her teammates were always keeping an eye out for when she came screaming through the critical scoring area.”

Day says Royer's impact extended beyond the playing field. "Ella was a pleasure to have on the team for four years," he says. "Not only because of her ridiculous athletic ability, but because she's a hard worker and is



Ella Royer dodges a defender on her way to the goal in a CACC contest against Holy Family University.

one of those players who makes her teammates want to work harder. Although she came in with some crazy skill to start, she remained very coachable and continued to get better every time she stepped on the field."

Off the field, Royer found a community that shaped her personally and academically. "Playing lacrosse here has been a life-changing experience," she says. "I've made

friendships that will last a lifetime. As someone from so far away without a huge support system in the area, my teammates and their families became my family."

She credits the Wildcat lacrosse program with teaching her leadership, resilience, and the ability to balance academics with her athletic pursuits.

Her next chapter includes continuing her work with the Robin

Hood Association, a nonprofit that supports individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities, where she has already spent four years. She's also still competing, now with the Mimico Mountaineers women's box lacrosse team in Ontario.

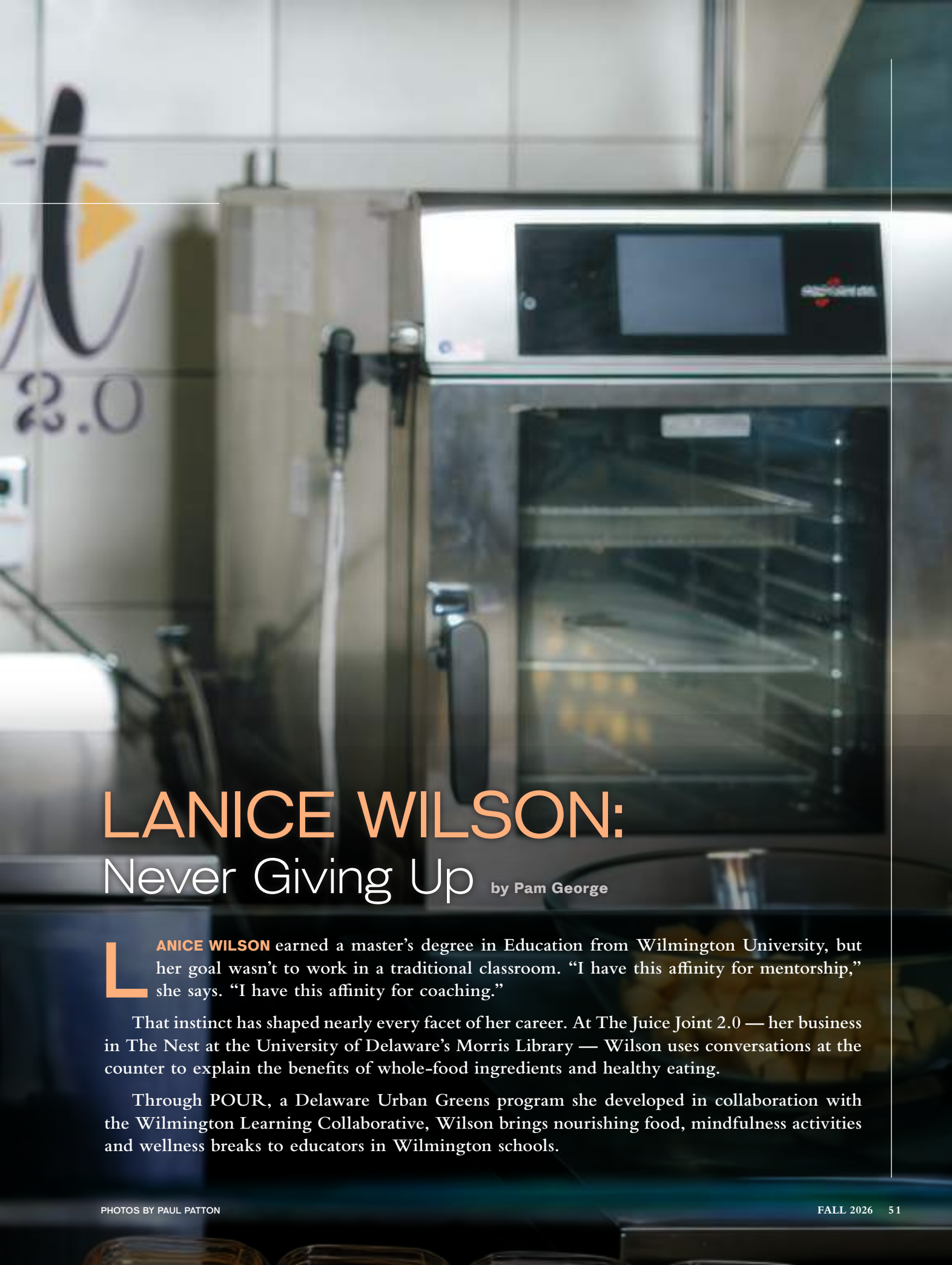
"I have learned so much at WilmU, academically but also just about life," Royer says. "I'll take that with me into my next chapter." **WU**

—Bob Yearick

ALUMNI



Lanice Wilson



LANICE WILSON:

Never Giving Up

by Pam George

LANICE WILSON earned a master's degree in Education from Wilmington University, but her goal wasn't to work in a traditional classroom. "I have this affinity for mentorship," she says. "I have this affinity for coaching."

That instinct has shaped nearly every facet of her career. At The Juice Joint 2.0 — her business in The Nest at the University of Delaware's Morris Library — Wilson uses conversations at the counter to explain the benefits of whole-food ingredients and healthy eating.

Through POUR, a Delaware Urban Greens program she developed in collaboration with the Wilmington Learning Collaborative, Wilson brings nourishing food, mindfulness activities and wellness breaks to educators in Wilmington schools.



For Wilson, chance encounters offered opportunities to teach. Once, when two women asked for free cups at The Juice Joint 2.0, she explained diplomatically that even small supplies carry a cost for independent businesses — before handing them the cups.

Her instinct to guide others developed long before she became an entrepreneur. Born and raised in the Bronx, she moved to Delaware more than two decades ago with an associate degree, ambition and a determination to continue her education.

Wilson knew a bachelor's degree would help her advance in corporate marketing. As a working single parent, she needed a program that fit her schedule, and WilmU's night, weekend and accelerated courses gave her the flexibility to continue her education.

At WilmU, she found the support she needed to succeed.

"If I didn't understand something, I wasn't afraid to ask questions," she says. "I always felt like that was encouraged."

After earning a bachelor's in General Studies, she returned to pursue graduate work.

Her interest in juicing began while visiting her daughter in California. Back in Delaware, she began making juices for friends and family. She

decided to turn her passion into a business, and The Juice Joint opened on the Wilmington Riverfront in July 2020.

The pandemic and the shift to remote work affected the business. Surrounding offices remained largely empty, and foot traffic fell below projections. Wilson closed the location in late 2022.

At first, she viewed the closing as a failure. Then she realized the experience was a lesson, not a loss, and she wasn't ready to give up.

After operating at Chancery Market and changing the name to reflect a new start, The Juice Joint 2.0 moved to Union Street in November 2023. An opportunity at The Nest, a group of dining options surrounding the central area of UD's Morris Library, followed.

By then, she had enough business experience to recognize that operating two locations didn't make financial sense. She closed the Wilmington site in favor of the Newark location, which offers steady foot traffic and wellness-minded customers.

The menu includes cold-pressed juices, enhanced waters and lemonades, sea moss-infused blends, herbal teas, smoothies and açai bowls.

Wilson's commitment to mentoring extends beyond her business. She founded Delaware Urban Greens

in honor of her father, Frederick N. Wilson, who died from COVID in April 2020. Known as the "unofficial mayor" of his Harlem neighborhood, he improved parks, installed urban gardens, wrote grants and helped prepare residents for employment.

Through Delaware Urban Greens, she continues her father's legacy of community service. The nonprofit operates a community refrigerator inside the Walnut Street YMCA, and Wilson delights in hearing children eagerly ask whether pears or apples are available. Their interest in fresh fruit excites her.

Healthy habits are taking root, she says.

Her work outside the business reflects the same commitment to service. She also runs POUR — formerly Nourish & Nature — through Delaware Urban Greens in partnership with the Wilmington Learning Collaborative. Offered in nine Wilmington schools, the program gives educators an opportunity to focus on their own well-being. During the 2025–26 school year, POUR provided wellness retreats for more than 1,000 educators and staff members.

The name reflects Wilson's belief that people who pour into others also need someone to pour into them. It is an extension of the familiar expression: You can't pour from an empty cup. People must care for their own physical and emotional needs before they can effectively care for others.

Her work centers on helping people refill that cup — through a healthy smoothie, a refrigerator stocked with whole foods or a few quiet moments during the school day. Each opportunity allows her to teach, coach and nourish.

"I love it," she says. "I love it so much." **WU**

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\$1.73 Million
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for student scholarships,
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resources over the last
five years.



598
STUDENTS

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2,724
DONORS

gave back over the last
five years, including 315
new donors who made
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1,205
ENGAGED ALUMNI

help strengthen the Wildcat community
through event attendance, volunteerism,
and other involvement opportunities.



80,754
TOTAL ALUMNI

with thousands more students pursuing
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DR. PAUL CLEMENTS:

Called to Care by Bob Yearick

Growing up in Pennsville, which he describes as “Exit 1 off the New Jersey Turnpike,” **DR. PAUL CLEMENTS** admired his father, who was a chemist for DuPont. Young Paul also had an affinity for beakers and Bunsen burners, so following in his dad’s footsteps was a definite possibility.

Then, as a junior college student, he landed a job as a unit clerk in the ICU and emergency room of a South Jersey health system, and he saw nurses in action. When he rotated into the psychiatric unit, it shifted his career focus; nursing wasn’t just interesting — it felt like a calling.

Answering that call decades ago set

him on a path that would eventually lead to some of the most difficult and emotionally demanding corners of forensic nursing.

Dr. Clements earned his associate degree in Nursing from Cumberland County College in Millville, New Jersey, in 1990, then immediately began looking for a bachelor’s program that would allow him to continue working. He chose then-Wilmington College and made the drive across the Delaware Memorial Bridge two nights a week for four-hour classes while working three 12-hour shifts each week at ChristianaCare in New Castle.

“I loved the curriculum,” Dr. Clements says. “It was robust and real-world. It was well worth the long drive.”

The surroundings were modest — classes met in trailers — but the program’s flexibility and rigor suited him, and Dr. Clements graduated in 1992 with the foundation for the rest of his professional life.

“WilmU’s BSN program was the basis of everything that followed in my nursing career,” he says. “The support, flexibility and real-world focus of the program not only gave me the confidence to pursue graduate studies at Penn but also shaped my identity as a nurse, scholar and educator.”

On a whim, he applied to the University of Pennsylvania for graduate school, got in, and completed his MSN, Child and Family Psychiatric Mental Health Nursing, in just 10 months. Emboldened by that success, he applied to Penn’s Ph.D. Nursing program. Out of 238 applicants, only 14 were selected. He was one of them.

For his dissertation, Dr. Clements interviewed children who had witnessed the homicide of a family member. The work demanded both clinical precision and emotional stamina, foreshadowing a professional life centered on helping people navigate the aftermath of trauma and violence.

As a forensic psychiatric nurse, he began working on cases involving murders, kidnappings and human trafficking. Over the decades, he has consulted with more than 2,000



AS A FORENSIC PSYCHIATRIC NURSE, Clements began working on cases involving murders, kidnappings and human trafficking. Over the decades, he has consulted with more than 2,000 families of murder victims.



Dr. Paul Clements

PHOTO COURTESY OF PAUL CLEMENTS

families of murder victims. He has responded to crime scenes, advised hospital systems, guided emergency medical personnel and child protective agencies, and helped school systems respond to the violent deaths of students.

"I deal with hardcore situations," Dr. Clements says. "They often involve the death of children or the death of parents in the presence of children."

It's work that takes a toll. He has cried with clients and has sat with families during their most devastating moments. He has learned that empathy, while essential, cannot overwhelm the responsibilities of his role.

"As much as I have empathy, I've found over the years that it's not about me," he says. "I have to deal with my own traumas, so you can't absorb

these things. But that doesn't mean you don't care."

Dr. Clements' academic career has been equally expansive. After spending 10 years at Drexel University, he joined the University of Nevada, where he directed its doctoral nursing program. Four years ago, he was recruited to Texas A&M University, where he now serves as coordinator and clinical professor for the doctoral nursing program, working remotely from his home in Greenville-Spartanburg, South Carolina, and traveling to the College Station, Texas, campus three times a year.

A distance educator for nearly three decades, Dr. Clements has helped launch two doctoral programs at A&M — the first of their kind — one in Forensic Nursing and a second in extreme and austere environment nursing. The latter focuses on

emergency healthcare in alpine, arctic, maritime, and urban conflict settings. In addition, he and his colleagues have partnered with NASA to explore healthcare for space tourism and space hospitality, anticipating the possibility of a space hotel by 2035.

With expertise that includes vulnerability risk assessment, work-place violence prevention and trauma-informed care, Dr. Clements has published numerous peer-reviewed textbooks and more than 150 professional papers. He has lectured in 32 countries. In Bolivia, he has worked with judges, prosecutors and forensic psychologists to improve assessment and intervention for children who have experienced sexual violence.

Last year, he was elected president of the American Academy of Forensic Nursing and received the 2025 DAISY Award for Extraordinary Nurse Educators. Those honors were the latest in a long list of professional recognitions, including Distinguished Fellow of the International Association of Forensic Nurses, Distinguished Fellow of the Academy of Forensic Nursing, Fellow of the National League for Nursing Academy of Nursing Education, and Fellow of the American Academy of Nursing.

Away from work, Dr. Clements leans on a supportive family — his brother, sister, and his mother, who encouraged him from the beginning. He and his partner of 20 years take frequent trips abroad, and he finds balance in lighter passions: "Star Trek," superheroes, and two shelter dogs.

Through it all, he remains grateful to WilmU. "What I learned there has stayed with me," he says. "It continues to influence how I teach, mentor and lead today." **WU**

STAY INVOLVED

WITH YOUR ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

Celebrating the achievements of our alumni, from career milestones and promotions to publications, awards, and honors, WilmU graduates continue to make their mark across every field. Learn more and get involved with your Alumni Association by visiting  WILMU.EDU/ALUMNI.

1983


MARK BRAINARD

B.A. in Behavioral Science, of Newark, was named a CEO of the Year Milestone honoree by

Delaware Business Times. (Dr. Brainard is president of Delaware Technical Community College.)

1985


HUGH

BROOMALL DBA, of Wilmington, was named interim superintendent of Red Clay Consolidated School District.

1989


CHRISTOPHER

STARR B.S. in Communication Arts, of Hockessin, presented a solo exhibition, For

Granted, at the Delaware Division of the Arts' Mezzanine Gallery.

1992


JOHN GABBARD

B.A. in Behavioral Science, of Sneads Ferry, North Carolina, was elected mayor of Dana Point, California.

1994


GWYN PARRIS-ATWELL

M.S.N. in Family Nurse Practitioner, of Alloway, New Jersey, was elected vice-chair of the Salem Community College Board of Trustees.


MARK SPRAGUE

B.S. in Aviation Management (Flight), of St. Petersburg, Florida, was named director at St. Pete-Clearwater International Airport.

1997


DAWN MUTCHKO

D.N.P. in Nursing Practice, of Absecon, New Jersey, was inducted as a Fellow of the American Association of Nurse Practitioners (FAANP).

1998


DUDLEY DURHAM

M.Ed. in Elementary and Secondary School Counseling, of Middletown, was the recipient of the Cecil College

Foundation's Mary Maloney Distinguished Service Award.


STUART MASON

M.Ed. in Elementary Studies, of Butler, New Jersey, was named Morris County, New Jersey's High School

Athletic Director of the Year.

1999


TIMOTHY
HAMBERGER

M.Ed. in School Administration, of Wilmington, was inducted into the Delaware

Baseball Hall of Fame.



2000



BRYAN MATTHEWS
Ed.D. in Educational Leadership and Innovation, of Galena, Maryland, was appointed president of Washington College.

2003



AIMEE HASTINGS
M.S.N. in Nursing Leadership, of Middletown, was named the 2026 Delaware School Nurse of the Year.



AMANDA IRWIN M.S. in Human Resource Management, of Rehoboth Beach, was promoted to president and CEO of Mountaire Farms.

2004



MICHELLE FARLOW
DNP, of Snow Hill, Maryland, received the 2025 Best Nurse Award from Coastal Style Magazine.

2005



KIMBERLY ANN HALL
Ed.D. in Educational Leadership, of Newark, was appointed principal of Penn London Elementary School in Avon Grove, Pennsylvania.



CHRISTOPHER WATERS M.S. in Public Administration, of Wilmington, received the 2025 Rising Star Award in Social Innovation for Teaching.

2006



CAMMIE MCCLAFFERTY
MBA, of Wilmington, was named a 2025 Influential Women honoree by Influential Women,

an organization dedicated to recognizing female leaders across professional sectors.



LANICE WILSON
M.Ed. in School Counseling, of Newark, owner of The Juice Joint 2.0, received a 2025 Best of Delaware award

from Delaware Today magazine.

2008



RANDI PRO Ed.D. in Educational Leadership and Innovation, of Middletown, was named Paul M. Hodgson Vocational

Technical High School's Teacher of the Year for 2026.

2009



ANGELA FELICIANO
M.Ed. in School Leadership, of Pennsauken, New Jersey, was named the New Jersey Education

Association's 2025-26 Educational Support Professional of the Year.

2010



KELLY BENCH
M.Ed. in Applied Educational Technology, of Middletown, earned a first-place award for innovative use of

gamification in teaching and learning.



NEIL BURTI Ed.D. in Educational Leadership and Innovation, of Marlton, New Jersey, was appointed

Superintendent of Mount Laurel Public Schools.

2011



HORACIO GARCIA
B.S. in Accounting and Finance, of Dover, was honored on the Top 40 Under 40 Class of 2026

list by Delaware Business Times.



JULIA JOHNSON
B.S. in Accounting, of Selbyville, was hired as finance director for Rehoboth Beach.

2012



MICHAEL BRODZIK Ed.D. in Educational Leadership and Innovation, of Elmer, New Jersey, was named

Wilmington University's assistant chair of the Master's in Education and School Leadership program.

2013



MARK DEEMILIO
M.Ed. in School Leadership, of Oxford, Pennsylvania, was appointed Principal of Avon Grove Middle School.

**JENNA DIELEUTERIO**

M.Ed. in Reading, of Wilmington, was named the Delaware 2026 Teacher of the Year.

2014

**SAMANTHA HEMPHILL**

B.S. in Business Management, of Frederica, was named deputy public advocate at the Delaware Division of the Public Advocate.

**KIMBERLY HUGHEY**

M.S. in Administration of Justice, of Middletown, was promoted to deputy chief of the Bureau of Community Corrections.

**STEPHEN SCHEIB**

M.Ed. in Instruction, of Dover, won the University Professional and Continuing Education Association's Excellence in Teaching Award.

**SUSAN CASE SWEENEY**

Ed.D. in Organizational Learning, Leadership, and Innovation, of Wilmington, was named vice president and chief human resources officer at Tredegar Corporation.

2015

**STACEY GRAVES**

D.N.P. in Nursing Practice, of Newark, received the DAISY Award for Extraordinary Nurse Educators in May 2026.

**AUTUMN GREEN**

M.A. in Secondary Teaching, of Wilmington, was selected as an Advisory Board Member for the

Delaware Financial Educators Council.

**NATASHA HOLLINGSWORTH**

M.S. in Administration of Justice, of Dover, was promoted to warden of Baylor Women's

Correctional Institution.

**CORY NG**

DBA, of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, was featured as an instructor in a new CFO live webinar series launched by

Surgent Professional Education.

**JEFFREY RYAN**

Ed.D. in Educational Leadership and Innovation, of West Chester, Pennsylvania, was appointed

superintendent of Southeast Delco School District.

2016

**GABRIELLE GAUL**

MBA, of Newark, received the Spur 2025 Impact Award.

2017

**FRANK HANSON**

M.Ed. in School Leadership, of Wilmington, was named principal of Delcastle Technical High School.

2018

**PAUL BECHLY**

DBA, of Wilmington, was elected a fellow of the Royal Society of Chemistry.

**JOHN COOK**

B.S. in Psychology, of Wilmington, was appointed director of the Office of Community Safety for the City of Wilmington.

**MEAGAN PRIME**

MSN in Family Nurse Practitioner, of Townsend, received the DAISY Award for Extraordinary Nurses at ChristianaCare.

**TAYLOR ANN RICHEY**

M.Ed. in Elementary and Secondary School Counseling, of Bridgeville, was named the 2026 Delaware Behavioral Health Professional of

the Year by the Delaware Department of Education.

**ANDREW SINCLAIR**

B.S. in Criminal Justice, of Lincoln University, Pennsylvania, was named a 2026 VISTA NextGen Superstar.

2019

**CHRISTOPHER GUNTER**

M.S. in Administration of Justice, of Bear, was honored on the Top 40 Under 40 Class of 2026 list by Delaware Business Times.

**MICHAEL HILL-SHANER**

Ed.D. in Organizational Leadership, Learning and Innovation, of Smyrna, received the Karen Keegan Friend of School Counseling Award.



MATTHEW KIBLER Ed.D. in Higher Education Leadership and Innovation, of Chestertown, Maryland, was

appointed superintendent of Queen Anne's County Public Schools.



EMILY WRIGHT M.Ed. in School Leadership, of Millsboro, was named Indian River School District's

2026–2027 Teacher of the Year.

2020



JOEL BROWN II M.S.M. in Management (Health Care Administration), was elected to serve as the

next president of the American Association for Respiratory Care, becoming the first Delawarean ever elected to this position.



KELVIN LESENE M.S.M. in Management, of Wilmington, was named to Delaware Business Times' Top 40 Under 40 Class of 2026.

2021



HAROLD EDWARDS M.S. in Administration of Justice, of Walkkill, New York, successfully defended his

dissertation, Investigating the Influence of Training and Compensation on Police Conduct, at Keiser University, in Florida.



MELISSA HOPKINS M.S.M. in Management, of Newark, was promoted to CEO of DANA, the Delaware Alliance for Nonprofit Advancement.



JIMMY LEGGETT B.S. in Computer Science, of Bear, is the founder of the Leggett Legacy Project.

2022



LATANYA CHRISTOPHER M.S. in Human Services, of Salisbury, Maryland, recently self-published a memoir titled "The Powerless Child: Wounds That Never Heal."



CHARLES DOLAN M.S.M. in Management, of Salisbury, Maryland, was appointed to the board of trustees at Wor-Wic Community College.



KARI MIMNAUGH DNP in Nursing Practice, of Perry Hall, Maryland, was named president-elect of the Maryland Organization of Nurse Leaders.

2023



SEAN ELWELL DNP in Nursing Practice, of Salem, New Jersey, was named chairperson-elect of the Board of Certification for Emergency Nursing for 2026–27.



DORRELL GREEN Ed.D. in Organizational Leadership, Learning and Innovation, of Wilmington, was named superintendent of the Norristown Area

School District, and 2026 Delaware Superintendent of the Year by the

Delaware Chief School Officers Association.



SEAN HOGGS Ed.D. in Educational Leadership, of Columbus, New Jersey, was named Burlington County, New Jersey's 2025–26 Teacher of the Year.

2024



CASSANDRA DIKE DNP in Nursing Practice, of Saint Cloud, Minnesota, was appointed chief nursing executive at CentraCare.



SEEMAB HASSAN MBA, of Newark, participated in the U.S. State Department's Global Undergraduate Exchange Program at Augustana University.



AVIE SILVER MBA, of Chadds Ford, Pennsylvania, joined Spotlight Delaware as director of Strategic Partnerships.

2025



GIANNI MAGAZZU B.S. in Business Management, of West Berlin, New Jersey, was appointed grant writer for Love Blue, Inc.

2026



ELLA ROYER B.S. in Behavioral Science, of Sherwood Park, Alberta, Canada, was voted 2026 Central Atlantic Collegiate Conference Women's Lacrosse Player of the Year.

Wilmington University School of Law Hosts Delaware Supreme Court for Live Oral Arguments

Wilmington University Farnan School of Law recently welcomed the Delaware Supreme Court to its campus in North Wilmington, where students had the rare opportunity to watch oral arguments in two actual cases. The experience offered a direct view of the appellate process as it unfolded in real time, with real litigants, active legal questions, and immediate stakes.

Chief Justice Collins J. Seitz Jr., Justice Karen L. Valihura, and Justice N. Christopher Griffiths visited the School of Law to hear the cases, and students had the opportunity to take part in question-and-answer sessions each case. Students from Concord High School, The Islamic Academy of Delaware High School, Nativity Preparatory School of Wilmington, and Serviam

Girls Academy Middle School joined Wilmington University law students for the visit. Some watched in the state-of-the-art moot courtroom, chosen from a highly competitive lottery, while middle school and high school students viewed a livestream from various on-campus spaces.

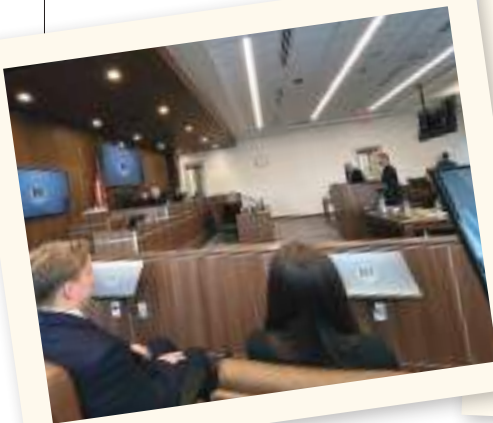
The experience gave students a close look at appellate advocacy in practice, highlighting the preparation, precision, and legal reasoning that shape each argument. The justices' and attorneys' conversations with students added another layer to the experience, offering insight into the law, the courts, and the legal profession.

"It was a privilege to welcome Chief Justice Seitz, Justice Valihura, and Justice Griffiths to campus, and we

are deeply grateful for the time, care, and generosity they offered our students," says School of Law Dean **JAN JURDEN**. "Their presence on our campus, their willingness to hear actual cases here, and the insight they shared gave our students a rare chance to see the law in practice."

Dean Jurden's gratitude for the visit was clear. So was her admiration for the law students. "I was proud of all of them," she says. "Their questions reflected intellectual curiosity, depth, their academic experiences, and the positive influence of their professors. Most rewarding was the fact that the justices seemed to recognize their level of engagement and responded with compassion and respect."

Through the same lottery, 10 law students also had the opportunity to gather in an intimate setting to enjoy lunch with Justices Valihura and Griffiths, Dean Jurden, and Wilmington University President **DR. LAVERNE HARMON**. Around the table, students posed personal questions and spoke candidly about what they had witnessed. The justices met that openness with candor of their own, reflecting on the challenges young attorneys often face, including stress, diffi-



Justice Karen L. Valihura, Chief Justice Collins J. Seitz Jr., and Justice N. Christopher Griffiths



Chief Justice Collins J. Seitz Jr., Justice Karen L. Valihura, and Justice N. Christopher Griffiths visited the School of Law. (Justice Valihura is now distinguished professor of Corporate Law at Farnan School of Law and founding director of Wilmington University's Corporate Law, Governance and Practice Institute.)

cult colleagues or clients, and the search for purpose in the profession. Drawing on lessons from their early years in the law, they spoke about the importance of collegiality, the discipline of self-care, and the need to make time for family and the people who sustain us.

For WilmU law students **ERIC KALET** and **MADELINE EVARTS**, the day offered a firsthand look at appellate advocacy. "Observing oral argument before the Delaware Supreme Court was an

exceptional learning experience," says Kalet. "It reinforced the importance of preparation, precision, and command of the record. Seeing the justices examine issues such as statutory interpretation, standards of review, and precedent brought our classroom discussions to life and showed how legal theory shapes real-world outcomes."

Evarts agrees. "Watching Delaware Supreme Court oral arguments at Wilmington University School of Law

and joining several of the justices for lunch was inspiring and insightful," she says. "Seeing advocacy at that level and hearing the justices speak candidly about the legal field made the study of law feel immediate and real."

It's one thing to study law in the classroom, "and another to see it come alive right on campus," Evarts adds. "I'm incredibly thankful for opportunities like these that make legal education so dynamic." **WU** —*Maria Hess*

Farnan School of Law Celebrates Inaugural Commencement

When Wilmington University's Farnan School of Law opened its doors, its first students stepped into something new. They joined a law school still building its traditions, shaping its culture and defining its place in Delaware's legal community.

On Friday, May 15, 2026, that first class reached a defining moment.

The School of Law celebrated its inaugural commencement ceremony at The Playhouse on Rodney Square in Wilmington, honoring Juris Doctor graduates who helped establish the foundation for Delaware's newest law school.

The ceremony came after the School of Law received provisional accreditation from the American Bar Association, allowing graduates to sit for the bar exam, seek admission to the bar, and pursue careers that require a degree from an ABA-accredited law school.

"This ceremony recognized a remarkable and accomplished class," says The Honorable **JAN JURDEN**, dean of the Farnan School of Law. "These students placed their trust in a new law school, helped shape its identity, and prepared for meaningful service in the profession. We are proud of their achievements and the foundation they helped build."

For the inaugural graduates, the milestone represented years of aca-

demie work, professional preparation and trust in a program still in its earliest chapters. Members of the class helped set expectations for student leadership, peer support, mentorship and engagement with the bench and bar.

Many graduates had already secured roles with respected employers, including the Delaware Department of Justice; Doroshow Pasquale Krawitz & Bhaya; Young Conaway, Tybout, Redfearn & Pell; and the U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the District of Delaware.

Their early paths included public service, private practice, federal court practice, litigation, workers' compensation and judicial clerkships. Others were preparing for careers in environmental law, criminal law, family law, personal injury and bankruptcy law, with graduates planning to sit for bar examinations in Delaware, Pennsylvania and California.

Those outcomes reflected a core part of the Farnan School of Law experience: close mentorship, individualized professional coaching and direct connection to Delaware's legal community. Through the School of Law's mentorship program, students worked with practicing attorneys and judges who helped them understand the profession, build relationships, and prepare for the transition from law school to practice. The advisors also connected students with experienced members of the bench and bar, helping guide

“This first graduating class reflects the heart of Farnan School of Law. Their achievement speaks to the care of our faculty, the guidance of mentors, and the support of a legal community that has welcomed this school from the beginning.”

—Dr. LaVerne Harmon

the school's professional focus and strengthen its connection to the legal community.

That emphasis on professional preparation began early. Students received career guidance, built connections through externships and completed extensive bar preparation. They also took part in programming that developed professional identity, practical legal skills, leadership and judgment.

The commencement ceremony included remarks from Wilmington University President **DR. LAVERNE HARMON** and Dean Jurden, as well as a special appearance from Delaware



Gov. Matt Meyer. **MARY CHRISTINE MACMILLAN**, a summa cum laude graduate, delivered the commencement address. Faculty members hooded each graduate, and Dean Jurden presented the Outstanding Student Leadership Award to **DALTON LAHTI**.

“This first graduating class reflects the heart of Farnan School of Law,” says Dr. Harmon. “Their achievement speaks to the care of our faculty, the guidance of mentors, and the support

of a legal community that has welcomed this school from the beginning. We are proud to celebrate them as they begin their legal careers.”

For Farnan School of Law, the first commencement marked a ceremonial beginning as much as an ending. The graduates left with degrees, professional goals, and the distinction of having helped shape a law school that will continue to thrive. **WU**

—Maria Hess

THE INAUGURAL CLASS

From left: *Elijah Westog, Dalton Lahti, Marrissa Nardo, Hannah Bescrypt, Mary Macmillan (class speaker), Hannah Goldston, Dr. Andrea Rothbart, Genesis Joma and Dr. Britton Ody*

THE PARKING LOT AT 6 O'CLOCK

A Student Perspective on the Wilmington University Farnan School of Law

If you want to understand the Wilmington University Farnan School of Law, skip the brochure and stand in the parking lot at 6 o'clock on a Tuesday. You will see pickup trucks with ladder racks and minivans with car seats. You will see scrubs, work boots and badge lanyards from jobs that started 10 hours earlier. You will see people eating dinner out of a lunchbox with a casebook open on the hood. Then you will watch all of them walk into a Contracts classroom and take notes like their futures depend on it, because they do.

I am one of them. I grew up in working-class Baltimore, went to a vocational-technical high school and spent more than 20 years in mortgage banking and real estate finance before I ever briefed a case. Today I work in the real estate title field by day and study law by night. I am a husband, a father of three and the first person in my family to attempt anything like this. I came to law school in my mid-40s with a full-time job, a mortgage and no playbook.

When I was deciding where to apply, I noticed something quickly. At most law schools, a student like me is an exception to be accommodated, welcomed but slotted into a program designed around someone else's life. Here, we are not the exception. We are the point, and this school was built for us.



Rick Metzgar

The mission is not buried in a strategic plan; it is visible in every design decision. An evening division that respects a workday. A calendar that assumes its students have lives, employers and children. An admissions philosophy that reads 20 years of work as evidence rather than as an anomaly.

This school exists to open the profession to people the traditional pipeline passes by: the midcareer professional, the working parent and the first-generation student. It does not treat that mission as charity. It reflects a deliberate commitment to the idea that working adults with experi-

ence, discipline and responsibilities can thrive in a rigorous law school when the program is built with their lives in mind. The people in that parking lot intend to honor that confidence through their work, their achievements and the lawyers they become.

The faculty turns that commitment into an education. My professors have practiced, argued, closed and counseled at the highest levels of this profession, and they bring that experience into the classroom every night. They teach with the clarity of people who have actually done the work, and they hold the standard high precisely because they know where we are headed.

Nobody waters anything down for the evening division. What they do instead is meet us where we are: office hours that assume you have a job, feedback that arrives with red ink and a path forward, and a level of personal investment I did not expect at any law school, let alone mine. My legal writing professors rebuilt the way I think on paper. My seminar professor pushed a research paper through more drafts than I can count until it was ready to leave the building.

Excellence is the expectation here, and the people delivering it know our names.

Then there is the part nobody warned me about, because it contradicts everything the culture says about law school. This place is collaborative. The stereotype says law students hoard outlines and hide library books. In our section, when a classmate's shift runs long, the notes are in the group chat before he gets to his car. Outlines get shared. Practice questions get built together. When someone's kid gets sick during finals, five people offer to help before the professor has even replied.

The curve is real, but the compe-

tition is never personal, and I think I know why. When your classmates are nurses, contractors, veterans and parents, nobody has the time or the taste for sabotage. We have all worked in real workplaces. We know the difference between competing and rowing, and we row.

There is a particular pride in this student body that is easy to feel and hard to label. We are a new school. Our traditions are not inherited; they are being built in real time by the

*Professors demanded
excellence, classmates
cheered instead of
calculated, and the
school's mission said that
a midcareer father of three
belonged in the room
where work gets done.*

people in the room. Every study group that outlasts a semester, every organization that gets founded, and every paper that leaves this building and lands somewhere impressive becomes part of a foundation that students decades from now will stand on without knowing our names.

Nobody here confuses new with lesser. We know exactly what makes us unique: a mission that gathered a student body no other school in the region looks like and the shared understanding that we are not just attending an institution. We are helping to build one.

In May, the school took the name of Judge **JOSEPH J. FARNAN JR.**, whose five decades of service to this Univer-

sity were built on the belief that education should be accessible, affordable and open to all. It is fitting. The name over the door now says what the parking lot has said all along.

Last summer, that combination produced something I could not have imagined two years ago. In a faculty-supervised research seminar, I wrote a 30-page paper, with 72 footnotes, on one of the most current land-use questions in Maryland, and it is now under review at legal journals.

The kid from the vocational school did that because professors demanded excellence, classmates cheered instead of calculated, and the school's mission said that a midcareer father of three belonged in the room where that work gets done.

People ask me whether it is hard, working all day and studying all night, and the honest answer is yes. It is supposed to be. But hard work was never the thing my classmates and I lacked. We arrived with that already in hand. What we needed was a place that took our lives seriously, and this school built one on purpose.

The legal profession gets better when it draws from a deeper well. The Farnan School of Law deepened it deliberately, and the proof is sitting in the parking lot at 6 o'clock, eating dinner out of a lunchbox, about to walk inside and get to work. **WU**

—Rick Metzgar

Rick Metzgar is a 2L in the evening division at the Wilmington University Farnan School of Law, Class of 2029. He works in the real estate title field and lives in Harford County, Maryland, with his wife, Sarah, and their three children. He writes about the first-generation and nontraditional law school experience at Grit and Gavel JD, a platform and professional brand he founded.

Professor Mozee Selected as Georgetown Constitutional Law Research Fellow

Wilmington University Farnan School of Law Professor **NICOLE MOZEE** was selected as a Research Fellow with the Georgetown Center for the Constitution at Georgetown Law, a prestigious fellowship that supports constitutional law scholarship.

Mozee teaches Contracts, Family Law and Advanced Legal Analysis at the Farnan School of Law. Through these courses, she helps students build a strong foundation in legal doctrine while developing the analytical, writing and reasoning skills essential to law school and legal practice.

She also serves as an academic support adviser, working with students to strengthen their study strategies and approach complex legal concepts with greater confidence.

Mozee brings extensive experience in civil rights, public service and family law to the classroom. Before

MICHAEL HORNZELL'S ARTICLES SELECTED FOR PUBLICATION IN LEADING LAW REVIEWS



Generative artificial intelligence could change more than how lawyers conduct research, draft documents and serve clients. It also could disrupt the way new attorneys are hired and paid.

MICHAEL HORNZELL, an assistant professor of law at the Wilmington University Farnan School of Law, explores that possibility in "Trouble With the Salary Curve: Generative AI's Challenge to the Bimodal Distribution of Entry-Level Lawyer Pay."

Accepted for publication by the Connecticut Law Review, the piece examines the unusual structure of entry-level lawyer salaries, which tend to cluster at opposite ends of the pay scale rather than around a common midpoint. Hornzell considers how generative AI could alter



Nicole Mozee

joining Wilmington University, she served as a Deputy Attorney General in the Delaware Department of Justice's Division of Civil Rights and Public Trust and as Associate Legal Counsel to former Delaware Gov. John Carney.

Her selection as a Research Fellow provides an opportunity to advance her scholarship in constitutional law while bringing new perspectives and insights to her teaching at the Farnan School of Law. **WU**

—Maria Hess

that long-standing pattern by changing the work traditionally assigned to new lawyers and the value employers place on entry-level positions.

For law students preparing to enter the profession, the issue is immediate. As firms and legal organizations adopt AI tools, graduates could encounter a job market significantly different from the one that previous generations entered.

In another recent article, "The Big Shortage: Affordable Housing," published in Volume 55, Issue 2, of the University of Baltimore Law Review, Hornzell examines the nation's shortage of affordable housing.

Although the subjects differ, both articles explore how broader economic and social forces affect people in tangible ways. One focuses on access to housing; the other considers how technology could influence employment and compensation in the legal profession.

Those interests also carry into Hornzell's work in the classroom.

A member of the Farnan School of Law faculty since it welcomed the inaugural class in August 2023, Hornzell teaches Property, Legal Writing, and AI and the Law. He also serves as faculty adviser to the Student Bar Association. His courses allow students to study both the foundations of legal education and the developments reshaping the profession they are preparing to enter.

Hornzell began law school at the University of Baltimore, where his first-year academic performance enabled him to transfer to Harvard Law School. He later earned his Juris Doctor cum laude from Harvard.

At the Farnan School of Law, Hornzell's scholarship and teaching share a common focus: how the law responds as technology, markets and public needs evolve. His latest work raises a question that could shape the early careers of future lawyers: When artificial intelligence changes the work, will it also change what that work is worth? **WU**

—Maria Hess



WILMINGTON UNIVERSITY CENTER FOR LAW, JUSTICE AND SOCIETY

SHAPING THE FUTURE OF PUBLIC SAFETY AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

As the challenges facing public safety and the criminal justice system continue to evolve, innovative solutions require more than individual expertise. They require collaboration, research and a commitment to public service. Recognizing this need, Wilmington University's Center for Law, Justice and Society (CLJS) has launched the Center Scholars Initiative, a multidisciplinary program that brings together practitioners, researchers, educators, policymakers and community leaders to help shape the future of justice.

The initiative reflects Wilmington University's commitment to addressing

complex societal challenges through scholarship, innovation and community engagement. As a university-based think tank, the Center Scholars Initiative will foster meaningful collaboration among professionals from diverse backgrounds who share a common goal: developing practical, evidence-informed solutions that strengthen public safety, improve justice systems and build public trust.

"Today's public safety challenges cannot be solved by one profession or one perspective alone," says CLJS Executive Director **MELISSA A. ZEBLEY**. "The Center Scholars Initiative creates a space where researchers and practi-

tioners can work together to develop innovative ideas that make a measurable difference in our communities."

Scholars appointed to the initiative will serve terms ranging from six months to one year and participate in monthly meetings held in person, through Microsoft Teams or in a hybrid format. Throughout their appointments, scholars will collaborate on applied research projects, develop policy recommendations, contribute to publications and present their work to professional audiences and government leaders.

Center Scholars will engage in interdisciplinary research that advances public safety, strengthens justice systems, promotes effective governance and improves community well-being. Research priorities will address current and emerging challenges while generating practical, evidence-informed solutions for policymakers, practitioners and communities throughout Delaware and beyond.

Beyond producing research, the Center Scholars Initiative aims to cultivate a network of professionals committed to advancing thoughtful dialogue, interdisciplinary collabora-



tion and innovative approaches to public service. The initiative represents an important step in establishing the Center for Law, Justice and Society as a regional resource for criminal justice research, professional development, policy innovation and commu-

nity engagement.

The Center welcomes applications from individuals with expertise, professional experience or demonstrated leadership in criminal justice, law enforcement, public safety, professional development, health and wellness, cor-

rections, public policy, higher education, government or related disciplines. The Center values diverse perspectives, interdisciplinary collaboration and innovative thinking, recognizing that the most effective solutions to today's complex public safety and



Pictured are several members of the Center for Law, Justice and Society. From left: Executive Director Col. Melissa A. Zebley; Associate Executive Director Maj. Laura M. O'Sullivan; Senior Director of Training Scott Duffey; Director of Community Engagement Dr. Kimberlynn R. Reeves; and Director of Training Veronica M. Hnat.

justice challenges emerge from partnerships across sectors, professions and communities.

Through the Center Scholars Initiative, Wilmington University continues to invest in research that not only advances knowledge but also contrib-

utes to safer communities, stronger institutions and more effective public policy. Together, the University and the Center are helping shape the future of justice through research, collaboration and innovation. **WU**

—Kimberlynn R. Reeves

Individuals and agency leaders interested in joining the inaugural cohort can submit a brief statement of interest describing their professional background, areas of expertise and reasons for wanting to become a Center Scholar. Applicants should also submit a current résumé or curriculum vitae with “Center Scholars Initiative” in the subject line to justice@wilmu.edu.



WILMINGTON UNIVERSITY

Center for Law, Justice and Society

UPCOMING TRAININGS
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BUILDING SAFER COMMUNITIES TOGETHER.



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01 	Social Media Investigations This course provides comprehensive insights into the types of evidence available from social media companies and demonstrates how this evidence can be crucial in solving criminal investigations.	EVENT DATES: WEDNESDAY-THURSDAY OCTOBER 21-22, 2026
02 	The Art of the Interview This class will enhance critical skills in the Foundational Principles of an interview from the streets to the interview room. The covered blocks of training will encompass Developing Rapport, Understanding the Interviewee, Detection of Deception, and Obtaining an Evidence-Based Confession.	EVENT DATE: THURSDAY NOVEMBER 12, 2026
03 	Crime Gun Interviewing Techniques Attendees will learn how to spot overlooked opportunities and obtain reliable admissions to strengthen cases for prosecution. Through lectures, real-world interviews, optional scenarios, and case law references, you will gain the skills and confidence to use crime gun intelligence (CGI) methods and investigative techniques to build stronger cases.	EVENT DATE: THURSDAY DECEMBER 3, 2026


TRAININGS WILL BE HELD AT:
Wilmington University
Dover Campus
3282 N. DuPont Highway
Dover, DE 19901


TIME:
8:00 am to 4:00 pm
(Each Training)

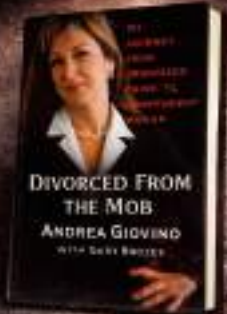
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Visit justice.wilmu.edu or scan the QR code to view course details and register.



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Crime to Independent Woman



Date: November 10, 2026
Time: 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM
Location: Wilmington University – Dover Campus
3282 N. Dupont Highway
Dover, Delaware 19901
Admission: \$10 per person

REGISTRATION
Register online at:
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Date: October 22, 2026
Time: 6:00 PM – 8:00 PM
Location: Wilmington University – Dover Campus
3282 N. Dupont Highway
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Admission: \$10 per person

REGISTRATION
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THE TRUE CRIME LECTURE SERIES IS BACK!

Events will be held in the newly remodeled auditorium
at the Center for Law, Justice and Society at
Wilmington University's Dover location:
3282 N. DuPont Hwy., Bldg. A.

Register now at events.wilmu.edu



FROM RAPPORT TO CONFESSION: FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES OF INVESTIGATIVE INTERVIEWING



Senior Director of Training **SCOTT DUFFEY** will present critical skills in the Foundational Principles of an Interview from the streets to the interview room. The covered blocks of training will encompass Developing Rapport, Understanding the Interviewee, Detection of Deception, and Obtaining an Evidence-Based Confession.



The event will be held on **Oct. 15, 2026**, and **Nov. 12, 2026**, at Wilmington University's Dover location: 3282 N. DuPont Hwy., Room 208.

EDUCATION WITH IMPACT

Wilmington University is proud to be recognized by Newsweek as one of **America's Top Online Colleges** for 2026.



This recognition reflects what our students, alumni, faculty, and staff have always known: **Wilmington University is committed to providing broad access to higher education that helps students achieve their goals.**

We are grateful to the entire WilmU community for helping make this recognition possible. Explore WilmU's national recognitions at wilmu.edu/accreditation.



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WHAT DONORS MADE POSSIBLE

THIS ALUMNA overcame significant personal and family challenges to pursue her education. She reflects on perseverance, gratitude and the donor support that helped make her journey possible.

Read her essay on pg. 24.



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