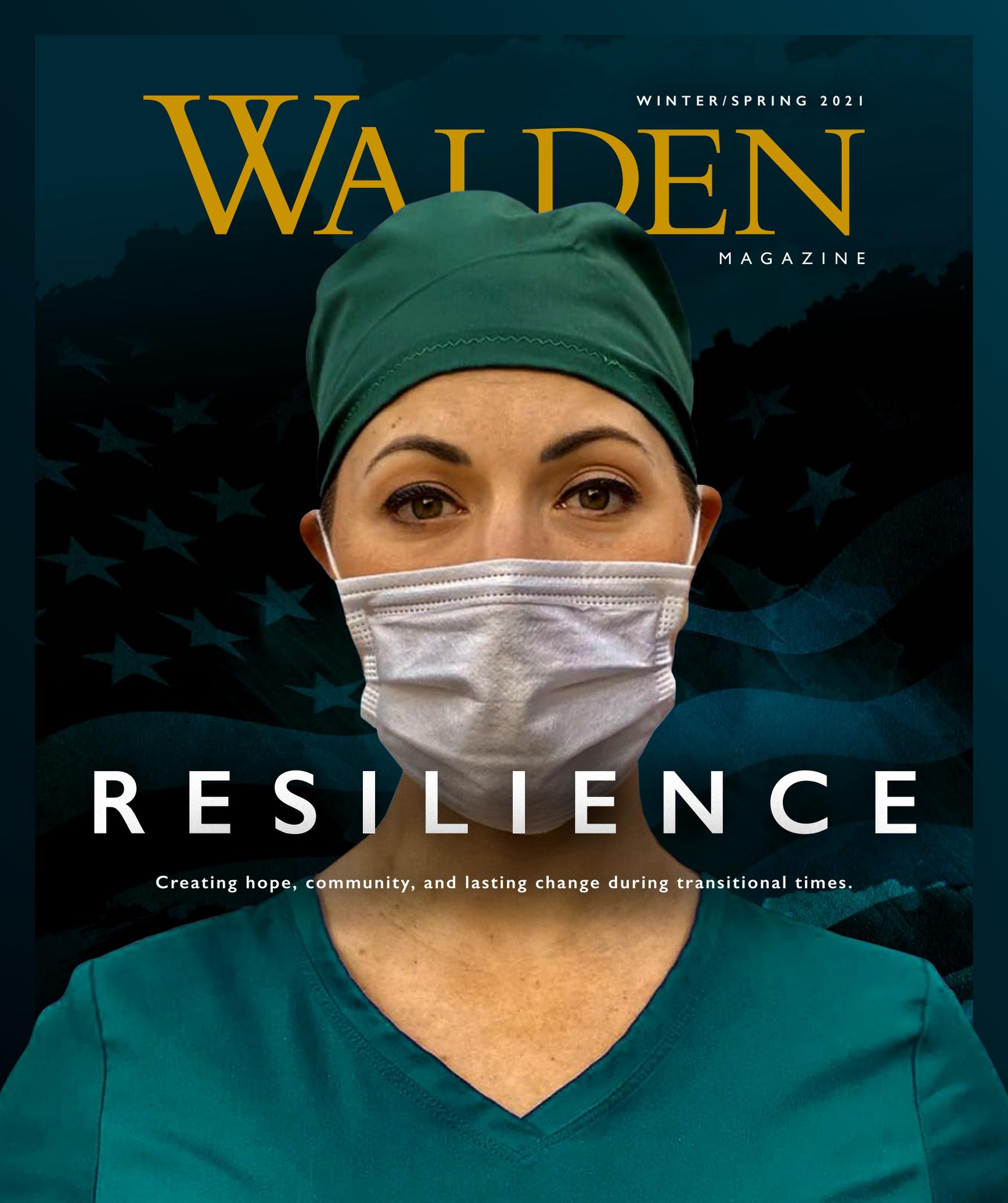


# WALDEN

WINTER/SPRING 2021

MAGAZINE



# RESILIENCE

Creating hope, community, and lasting change during transitional times.

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT



DEAR WALDEN COMMUNITY,

Last year at this time, we were starting to celebrate Walden's 50th anniversary of delivering *Education for Good*. Then began all the challenges that will forever define 2020. Like many of you, I am happy to see last year in the rearview mirror. But before we get too far down the road of 2021, I want to acknowledge our community's resilience. It was exceptional.

We faced each challenge with persistence, innovation, and unwavering dedication to our mission of helping career professionals transform themselves into scholar-practitioners so they can effect positive social change. Our change-agent graduates are needed now more than ever—all 153,000 of them. Especially those who continue to be on the front lines of the pandemic: our nurses, teachers, public health professionals, social workers, counselors, business leaders, and so many others.

This issue of *Walden* magazine is dedicated to your stories of resilience, last year and throughout your lives. Here, you'll meet people like Dr. Joe Horton. He earned his PhD from Walden at age 92. And Frances Bailey, a domestic violence survivor who used her entrepreneurial spirit to help others during COVID-19. You'll also learn more about Anna Slayton, a nurse featured in our TV campaign, who channeled the pain of losing her young son into action by going to New York City during the first wave of the pandemic. We can't tell everyone's story, but it is a comfort to know you are out there overcoming obstacles to make a difference.

Finally, I want to end with a special thank you to retiring Board of Directors member Dr. Barbara Solomon. I speak from the heart when I say that her impact on my leadership, on our School of Social Work that bears her name, on our university, and on her profession are immeasurable and deeply appreciated. The results of her resilience during her 50-plus-year career will ripple throughout the profession and the people it helps for generations to come.

Sincerely,

*Ward Ulmer*

Dr. Ward Ulmer  
President  
Walden University

WALDEN  
MAGAZINE

Volume 16, Number 1  
Winter/Spring 2021

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Walden is published by the Walden  
University Alumni Association.

The views expressed herein are those  
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ISSN number 1557-5578  
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WaldenU.edu/magazine

A  
HELPING  
HAND

We're sharing our  
expertise with those  
adapting to online learning.

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# A HELPING HAND

Walden University is supporting schools adapting to online learning.

BY REBECCA KIRKMAN

In mid-March, just two months after students returned from winter break, classrooms across the U.S. were suddenly empty again. A series of shutdowns required students and teachers to stay at home to stop the spread of COVID-19 and help keep communities safe.

At their peak, the closures affected at least 55.1 million students in 124,000 U.S. public and private K–12 schools, according to data collected by *Education Week*. The National Conference of State Legislatures reports that more than 1,300 colleges and universities in all 50 states canceled classes or moved to strictly online instruction.

As the closures stretched from weeks to months, educational institutions at all levels scrambled to provide the best possible instruction for students at home.

For many schools, especially those with higher populations of low-income students, the pivot from in-person to online learning was fraught with challenges—from providing students with access to the internet and internet-capable devices to setting up the software needed to deliver classes and communicate with families.

Additionally, the quick pivot to online learning exacerbated existing inequities. Only 9% of teachers in schools serving high percentages of low-income students or students of color reported that all or nearly all of their students were completing assignments, compared to roughly a quarter of teachers in other schools, and 66% of teachers

reported that their students lacked the necessary devices or internet connection, a survey by RAND Corporation's American Educator Panels found.

Concerned by these and other challenges, Walden University CEO Paula Singer saw an opportunity to leverage the university's expertise to support its colleagues in education as they transitioned to online and hybrid classrooms.

## AN OPPORTUNITY TO LEND A HELPING HAND

With more than 25 years of leadership in online learning and a mission of positive social change, Walden is uniquely positioned to help schools transition to online and hybrid learning. More than 420 faculty and 59,500 alumni of The Richard W. Riley College of Education and Leadership make up a global network of experts with experience in online education.

With Walden President Dr. Ward Ulmer and other university leaders, Singer assembled a cross-functional team of Walden experts in operations, business, and academics to provide resources and consulting services to schools at no charge.

"Walden has always been mission-driven in the work that we do," says Darrell Luzzo, Walden's senior vice president and general manager, who led the 10-person launch team. "We decided that it was an appropriate manifestation of our mission, given our expertise in digital teaching and learning, to provide this outreach service at no charge to K–12 schools or school districts and historically Black colleges and universities."

In the earliest days and weeks of closures, schools were in what Luzzo calls "emergency remote teaching," the first in a three-phase transition to a fully integrated blended learning approach. During this period, spanning from mid-March to the end of the 2019–2020 academic year in June, schools were primarily focused on covering the basic needs of teachers, students, and families.

“Educators are so driven by the mission of educating our youth, they found a way to make it work,” Luzzo says of the early days of the pandemic. “They were driving printout packets to homes, they were knocking on doors because students weren’t logging in to class, they were worried [about] who had equipment and who didn’t, and who had Wi-Fi access and [who] didn’t. The degree to which whole communities mobilized to allow education to continue as well as it possibly could was remarkable.”

### A MISSION TO CREATE LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS

By the summer, schools across the country were confronted with the likelihood that online and hybrid learning would continue well into the 2020–2021 academic year. Yet major challenges still existed. According to the RAND survey, for example, just 12% of teachers reported covering through distance learning the full curriculum they had planned to cover if schools hadn’t closed due to COVID-19.

“As the fall semester approached, teachers began to realize that they would very likely be engaging with students in some sort of blended fashion throughout the entire academic year,” Luzzo explains. Schools, districts, and teachers may have laid the foundation, but they needed help with the next steps for an effective, sustained approach to high-quality digital teaching and learning.

“Although schools had addressed many of the more immediate connectivity and access issues that arose last spring, there was widespread recognition that many other solutions are required to operate a really smooth and effective online learning operation, like additional teacher training, communications with parents and families, and preparing the home to be an effective learning environment,” he adds.

Luzzo and his team worked throughout the summer to create a web portal with

online learning resources for parents and families, which launched in August. By the fall, they had identified three educational institutions to work with for the first phase of the initiative: a school district in west Texas; a K–5 elementary school in St. Paul, Minnesota; and a historically Black college and university (HBCU) in Louisiana.

“We decided to limit the number of schools we would work with in the fall,” Luzzo says. “Each institution understood that we’re just getting started with this initiative, and they were extremely grateful for our help.” The team hopes to expand the initiative to additional schools.

With partner institutions established, the team set to work identifying each one’s unique needs. “When we have a need presented to us, we leverage our own expert faculty and staff to be the ones to deliver that expertise to the schools,” Luzzo explains.

The *Digital Teaching and Learning Readiness Rubric* Walden developed assesses the K–12 schools in nine areas, from teacher readiness and family support to technology and funding. “The greatest needs we have seen in the schools so far have been in teacher readiness and family and community readiness,” says Steve Canipe, associate dean of the Riley College of Education and Leadership and part of the launch team focusing on K–12 schools. “Teachers are being burned out. They’re not used to working in a virtual environment.”

The team is working with the HBCU to transition its classes to more of a blended and hybrid format. Walden is also helping to shift student services that previously operated in person—registration, student affairs, financial aid, academic advising—online. “Moving every single service at the university online has been the biggest challenge,” says Riley College of Education and Leadership Dean Kelley Costner, also a member of the launch team. “And another challenge is that the students have



families of their own. They’re trying to stay in school and trying to home-school their kids, too. It’s just a snowball effect.”

The team’s strategy includes creating short- and long-term plans tailored to each institution’s needs. With the university in Louisiana, Costner and the Walden team have hosted several summits covering critical topics like implementing remote student services, providing faculty feedback to support student retention, and implementing high-quality, digital instructional design. Walden faculty and staff are also available for one-on-one support and problem-solving.

“We show them the Walden way,” Costner says, noting that the HBCU in particular has been highly engaged at all levels, from the chancellor and president to student services, and that attendance grows with each event. “It’s not something that is going to be over in a month or two. It’s ongoing. We’re just now scratching

the surface, because next we’re going to take them through the implementation stages.”

For the K–12 partner schools, Walden is taking a more incremental approach. “We aren’t going to deliver a three-hour summit, because that would just stress teachers out more,” Canipe explains. Instead, the team will create a collection of “knowledge bites” or “tidbits” to help teachers solve specific challenges, from online assessments to family communication.

At one school, for example, students have all been supplied with Chromebooks for online learning. Many teachers, however, are left using outdated personal devices while teaching from home. To help mitigate potential technology issues, the Walden team is developing a set of specific instructions and workarounds for teachers to run the necessary software on their personal computers so they can stay connected to their classrooms.



### THE WALDEN WAY

As schools at all levels struggle to adapt to an online approach, Walden is proud to offer tools, resources, and expertise. “What makes our faculty so unique for this challenge is that they work for an online university but they may also be a teacher, a professor, a principal, a superintendent, a community college president,” Costner says. “So they can understand [both] sides.” With this perspective, the Walden team can assist the partner institutions as they overcome each challenge and continue to integrate blended learning.

“We’ve always been problem-solvers,” Canipe says of Walden. “It’s just in our DNA.” Costner points to the university’s status as a Certified B Corporation®—signifying that Walden has met rigorous standards of social and environmental impact, accountability, and transparency—as well as its social change mission. “We are here for the greater good, and what greater good is there during a global pandemic than Walden stepping in to help? That’s just who we are,” she says.

Luzzo agrees. “This is, undoubtedly and without question, the most fulfilling role that I’ve had in education,” he says. “Every time I speak with a principal, a teacher, a superintendent, even parents, they are overwhelmed with gratitude because they know they’re not experts in online learning. Anything we can do to help them provide the very highest quality online or hybrid education moving forward will have a huge impact.”

And even when it’s safe for students to return to full classrooms, online learning isn’t likely to go away anytime soon. “I believe that a blended form of education delivery, with online, digital elements offered both in and outside of the classroom, as well as face-to-face instruction, is likely to be the future of education,” Luzzo adds.

With Walden’s support, educators are becoming better equipped to meet student needs now and in the future—both in person and online.



STEVEN TOM

Senior VP of student experience  
and chief transformation officer

# INNOVATION

Walden's experts are putting technology

# IN A TIME

to work to navigate community challenges.

# OF CHANGE

BY KYRA MOLINARO

At Walden University, we've spent the past 50 years helping distance learners achieve their goals. As a pioneer of distance learning in higher education, we continuously embrace new technologies, new learning options, and new ways to create social change.

But this past year, we faced an obstacle that could have affected our ability to deliver quality, innovative learning: a global pandemic. Throughout 2020, COVID-19 challenged us in ways both big and small, but it also gave us the opportunity to reexamine—and enhance—the tools we offer our students to help them succeed.

“At Walden, our charge is to ensure we stay on the forefront of technology,” says Steven Tom, Walden’s senior vice president of student experience and chief transformation officer. “We work hard to give our students tools that produce the very best learning outcomes while allowing them to have flexibility and achieve success.”

While Tom and his team are always working to help meet the needs of students through technology, 2020 underlined the importance of harnessing the power of educational innovation. Explore some of the standout tools Tom and his team created to meet the evolving needs of Walden students.

## CHARLOTTE AND DOCTORAL NAVIGATOR

Prior to the start of the pandemic, Walden introduced Charlotte, a 24/7 virtual support assistant that answers student questions and helps fulfill common requests such as ordering unofficial transcripts or checking financial aid status. Tom says 15,000 students are using Charlotte each term.

Walden has also expanded the availability of Doctoral Navigator, an online dashboard designed to support doctoral students as they move through the dissertation process. Doctoral Navigator features a virtual task checklist and links to relevant resources to help students every step of the way during their doctoral journey.

“Charlotte and the Doctoral Navigator were both created to serve our busy working professional students on their terms and to help them get the information they need at the right time,” Tom says.

## WALDEN'S ESSENTIAL RESOURCES

When pandemic lockdowns began in March, Tom and his team rallied to brainstorm ways to best support student success. “We aimed to drive and transform the Walden virtual experience to resonate with and best serve our students while complementing what they were already doing in their studies,” he says.

Enter Walden’s Essential Resources, a virtual community hub that shares the best of Walden’s expertise in teaching and learning to help community members tackle their professional and personal challenges. The site offers dozens of webinars, articles, and short courses led or created by Walden faculty and alumni on a wide variety of topics, including self-care, finances, and parent/family support, as well as professional guidance

and resources curated specifically for educators and healthcare workers.

“A lot of our students are on the front lines of the pandemic—they are nurses, social workers, researchers, educators,” Tom explains. “We wanted to share some of Walden’s best resources that will support them in supporting their communities and loved ones in this time of need.”

## WALDEN ANSWERS

A student-to-student resource-sharing vehicle, Walden Answers facilitates the exchange of vital information among peers. The portal is moderated by Walden staff to ensure the information shared is appropriate and accurate.

“We are excited to have this environment where students can not only answer each other’s questions, but also crowdsource that knowledge across the university,” Tom says.

## STUDY BUDDY

With the help of more than 100 Master of Social Work students in fall 2020, Walden successfully launched the pilot version of Study Buddy, a time management app that enables students to develop consistent study habits. Students can use Study Buddy to set weekly goals based on how long and how often they want to study, and hit celebratory milestones as they meet or exceed their goals. Tom says he and his team aim to make Study Buddy available to the entire Walden community soon.

“COVID-19 has exacerbated the stress felt by our students to fit their education in,” he says. “We want students to have this tool to help them plan their time, track against their goals, and ... self-motivate to reach their goals.”



# A ONE-OF-A-KIND COMMENCEMENT CELEBRATION

*Walden brought graduates together, even when an in-person celebration wasn't possible.*

BY KRISTIN HANSON



**In a typical year, the Walden University Events Team spends five months planning a commencement ceremony from start to finish. But in March 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic drove all university events online—including summer commencement—the team realized they had to adjust their expectations and their timeline.**

"It was interesting learning and figuring out what we were going to do. We were building the plane while we were flying it," says Monica Nelson, senior manager of the core commencement planning team, which dedicates hundreds of hours each semester to make sure each commencement event is a special one.

With hard work, determination, and creativity, Walden was able to create a commencement experience that not

only met the goals of a traditional in-person ceremony but also in many ways exceeded them. A collection of digital offerings for graduates and their families culminated in a livestreamed celebration on July 18. The 50th Anniversary Graduate Celebration attracted more than 2,500 registered graduates—an increase of 22% over the 2019 summer ceremony—and more than 15,000 viewers on Facebook Live.

Yet the foundation for the celebration's success lay in a somewhat counterintuitive decision: by defining what the event *wouldn't* be.

"We thought a lot about what was important to our graduates in the past—that moment of walking across the stage, bringing their families together, really celebrating. We thought that would be very hard to achieve in the virtual environment," Nelson says.

## CREATING A MEANINGFUL ONLINE EXPERIENCE

Since Walden's summer commencement occurs several weeks after the traditional college graduation season, the Events Team had the chance to see what was working for other schools. The group

looked at more than 50 commencement events and ceremonies to determine which aspects were successful, and which fell flat in a digital format. Fairly quickly, the team chose to aim for an experience that would allow graduates and their families to celebrate safely at home—but without many of the trappings of a formal commencement.

"We ended up calling it a graduate celebration, not a commencement ceremony," Nelson adds, noting that they received complete support from Walden's leadership to move in a new direction. "Everyone was so willing and on board to take our recommendations and really keep graduates at the heart of this."

Design Director Wesley Stuckey got straight to work creating a comprehensive celebration toolkit, which included everything from invitation templates for graduates to send to friends and family to Facebook profile frames, Instagram story templates, and coloring pages for kids. Social Media Content Specialist Meghan Willmore created a Graduate Celebration Facebook event, a community-managed space that gave graduates a place to share photos, ask questions, and connect with one another. Graduates shared more

than 1,000 photos and left more than 7,100 comments in the Facebook event and on other social media.

"Commencement is a signature event at Walden, whether we convene in person or online," says Ward Ulmer, president of Walden. "The photos and videos from our graduates, as well as the congratulations shared by our faculty and staff, were truly inspiring. It was a great demonstration of the passion our community has for Walden and our mission."

## A GRADUATE CELEBRATION UNLIKE ANY OTHER

During the July 18 live ceremony, graduate-generated content took center stage. As guests waited for the event to begin, they viewed photos students had posted on social media. Both President Ulmer and Paula Singer, chair of the Walden Board of Directors, referred to some of the social posts in their remarks. About 1,800 graduates submitted photos that appeared toward the end of the ceremony, just before President Ulmer led them in a tassel turn. The recessional song, "Celebration," by Kool & the Gang, played over a series of congratulatory videos submitted by graduates' friends and families.

"We received over a thousand videos, which was amazing," Nelson says. "We couldn't use them all, but we featured as many as we could."

While Walden is looking forward to returning to in-person commencement celebrations as soon as conditions allow, Nelson expects some aspects of the all-virtual experience to live on beyond the pandemic. Graduates especially loved the resources provided in the toolkit, which they used in a variety of creative ways.

"Some people took photos with the Facebook frame, then had that translated to the top of a cake," Stuckey says. "It was surprising—and wonderful—to see what graduates came up with."

And although Walden has offered a livestream option for commencement ceremonies for the past several years, fully participating generally required travel. The summer 2020 Graduate Celebration Facebook event provided a template for how to engage these students and their families more holistically from home.

"During this event, we gave graduates attending virtually more opportunity to share their excitement," Willmore says. "We got so many great stories from

just giving people a platform for sharing." Despite all of the logistical challenges the Walden commencement planning team had to overcome, they were able to craft a joyous celebration that helped create a small sense of normalcy in the midst of a global pandemic. Throughout both the planning and the event itself, one theme presented itself over and over again.

**"Our graduates want to connect," says Michelle Healy, senior director of the University Events Team. "Whether it's face-to-face or virtual, our graduates want to come together. I'm so proud we were able to discover new traditions that we plan to include in future events, whatever they may look like."**



S O C I A L W O R K F O R

# S O C I A L C H A N G E

*Retired Walden board member and social work pioneer  
Dr. Barbara Solomon reflects on a groundbreaking career.*

BY KEVIN C. THORNTON

Throughout her career  
Dr. Barbara Solomon, who served  
on Walden's Board of Directors  
for nearly 30 years, helped champion  
the underserved and worked  
to revolutionize the field of social  
work. But in the mid-1950s, she was  
still a young graduate student at the  
University of California, Berkeley.

During one of her first field assignments, working with the Red Cross, she would learn a lesson she would take on her decades-long journey to better serve vulnerable populations.

Her client was a white woman from Mississippi who was entrenched in the mindset of the still-segregated South. "And here she was," Solomon recalls, "required to seek assistance from a young so-called 'Negro' woman."

The woman had driven to California, where the U.S. military had originally arranged for her to travel by ship to join her husband, a soldier stationed in Korea. But since she was pregnant, she needed to travel instead by air—and to do so, she needed help from a social worker. That's where Solomon came in.

"I'm sure," Solomon says, "she had never been in a situation where a 'Negro' was in a position of authority."

She recalls that their first interactions were challenging, but her client was desperate for help and seemed willing to accept it from a Black woman. "Then one day she came in hysterical," Solomon says. "She'd been driving through West Oakland for an appointment in San Francisco and, after hitting the rear of a car, she was suddenly surrounded by a group of African American residents. When she related the story to me, she said 'I'm scared to death of ...,' and used the ethnic slur.

"I learned right then, if you're really prejudiced against a certain group and meet someone who doesn't meet your stereotype, you just lift them out of that group. It doesn't change your prejudice at all. That was an important lesson for me as a social worker. That's what we needed to work on."

Experiences like that one motivated Solomon. She dedicated herself to changing prejudicial thinking and working to help underrepresented populations through more diverse approaches to social work. She would go on to reach remarkable heights in her career while navigating the biases, challenges, and roadblocks facing Black women in the 1950s and beyond.

## AN EMPATHIC APPROACH TO SOCIAL WORK

What drove Solomon was an approach to social work that advocated empowering clients to achieve goals and change systems by utilizing available strengths, resilience, and resources. In short, her conviction and work centered on the belief that social workers work *with* people and not *on* them, with a constant focus on supporting underrepresented minorities and their families.

“When it comes to issues of social justice, social work should be at the forefront,” she says. “Social workers are problem-solvers, and that requires collaboration with others. But you have to have the skill and knowledge to see the problem, and the ability to collaborate with diverse groups and professions.”

She also believes that social workers should reflect the culture and people they’re working with. “I see a great need for African American social workers who understand the communities and can communicate with the residents—it is even greater now than it has ever been.”

Solomon’s work and life history reflects a literal hall-of-fame career bridging academia and social work.

## A LIFE OF IMPACT

The granddaughter of slaves and the daughter of a Pullman porter and an elementary school teacher, Solomon graduated from high school at age 15 and began pursuing her undergraduate degree at Howard University before her 16th birthday. She went on to earn a master’s from the School of Social Welfare at the University of California, Berkeley, and a PhD in Social Work from the University of Southern California.



*When it comes to issues of social justice, social work should be at the forefront.*

But education is only one part of her story. Solomon’s life and career have also deeply impacted the thinking of social workers across the globe. Driven by her own experiences and a deep understanding of the African American experience, she has worked for decades to change the approach of social work and bring more diversity to the profession.

In addition to serving as an adoption worker for the California State Department of Social Welfare and as a clinical social worker for U.S.

Department of Veterans Affairs hospitals in Texas and California, she spent years as a professor and administrator at the University of Southern California (USC), serving as dean of the graduate school, vice provost for graduate and professional studies, and vice provost for faculty and minority affairs.

The first African American to serve as a dean at USC, Solomon worked to increase the number of minority students on campus, which led to the highly praised Neighborhood Academic Initiative focused on preparing local secondary school students for higher education. She is also the author of the seminal book *Black Empowerment: Social*

*Work in Oppressed Communities*, published in 1976, which introduced the concept of empowerment as a framework for social work practice.

Solomon’s achievements have earned her the Presidential Medallion and Associates Award for Excellence in Teaching from USC, and the Rosa Parks Award from the Los Angeles chapter of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.

All of that experience, knowledge, and passion was brought to Walden

in 1991 when she was approached by university leadership and asked to serve on the Board of Directors. Although she was initially skeptical of distance learning, she was drawn to Walden’s commitment to social change and to the scholar-practitioner model, challenging students to integrate scholarly research with their own expertise as skilled practitioners in their fields.

“They talked about wanting scholar-practitioners to reform the institutions they were joining,” she says. “That spoke to me.”

For nearly 30 years, Solomon herself has spoken, serving as a steady and forward-thinking influence on Walden’s board. One of her main focus areas for a number of those years was gaining accreditation for the university’s social work master’s program. In 2016, the Council on Social Work Education, the sole accrediting agency for social work education in the U.S., approved Walden’s online Master of Social Work program for accreditation. Later that year, Walden’s school of social work and human services was renamed to honor her legacy. The university had also previously established the Barbara Solomon Scholarships for Social Work, given to outstanding students who demonstrate a proven commitment to helping the underserved.



Solomon receives an honorary doctorate during Walden’s winter 2009 commencement.

## A CONTINUING LEGACY

And now, decades after that memorable interaction with a client from Mississippi, Solomon has officially retired. Over more than five decades, she built a career that impacted an untold number of students—and the greater social work profession.

But even in retirement, the career teacher and social worker can’t help but continue to do what she’s always done: teach, guide, and care.

“I still have a lot of connections in community programs and social work who reach out to me. From day to day, there’s always someone calling,” she says.

“I’m not sure I’ll ever completely retire; there’s still a lot of work to be done.

**“Retirement, to me, means not doing what you have to do, but only what you want to do. Staying connected and involved is what I want to do. That’s where I am now, and it’s great.”**



# TALKS FOR GOOD

A VEHICLE FOR SOCIAL CHANGE



BY SUSAN LANDRY



Creating viable solutions to today's educational challenges starts with having courageous conversations. That's the philosophy behind Talks for Good, part of Walden's larger Mobilize for Good initiative that was launched in conjunction with the university's 50th anniversary.

"With Talks for Good, we planned to gather local educators and subject matter experts in one room and have a live discussion around critical topics affecting communities all around the country," says Walden's president, Dr. Ward Ulmer. "We wanted to provide an opportunity to share experiences, insights, and ideas in a safe environment."

But once the COVID-19 pandemic made social distancing the "new normal," in-person panels were no longer feasible. The Talks for Good team had to pivot from local, live events to a 100% virtual platform.

Not only did the pandemic affect the format of Talks for Good, it also directly impacted the topics discussed.

"The coronavirus pandemic shined a light on something many people in our communities already saw," says Keith Michel, who helped oversee the project. One of these realizations was that many children were without computers and internet access at home, which left them at a disadvantage as classrooms shifted to distance learning. "Teachers are expected to teach a diverse classroom and empower all students to learn to their full potential," Michel says. "But it's not happening. We

wanted to explore what some of those obstacles are."

Ulmer puts it more succinctly: "COVID-19 exposed a crisis in our schools." Recognizing an opportunity to raise awareness of the urgent challenges educators were facing, the Talks for Good team decided to hold a series of four virtual talks on educational equity and access as viewed through the lens of the coronavirus crisis. The first session of the virtual Talks for Good, "A Historical Perspective on Equity in Education," was held in May 2020.

## TALKS FOR GOOD #1

### A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE ON EQUITY IN EDUCATION

**"There's this mythology that 'you could have pulled yourself up by the bootstraps.' Well, you maybe could have ... if you had bootstraps."**

*Dr. Joy DeGruy*

"A Historical Perspective on Equity in Education" was streamed live, webinar-style, to a national audience of Walden

students, alumni, faculty, and staff. It took a deep dive into systemic racism and how it set the stage for disparities that plague underserved communities, leaving many schoolchildren without the resources they need to thrive. The broader history of inequity in education was explored, including the impact of Brown v. Board of Education, the landmark 1954 Supreme Court case that banned racial segregation in public schools.

Panelists for this talk included Dr. Joy DeGruy, a researcher, educator, social worker, and expert on race relations and historical trauma, and Dr. Daryl Williams, senior education equity specialist at Mid-Atlantic Equity Consortium (MAEC).

"It's not rational to begin a discussion about where we need to go until we understand how we arrived at where we are," said DeGruy during the panel discussion. "What are the systems and structures that have maintained the current system of inequity that's producing gaps in so many parts of our community?" Williams said that creating change will require breaking destructive cycles. "Leaders have to be able to recognize that perhaps their school still practices bias or other types of discrimination," he explained. "We need to help people move beyond a model that has not worked for a lot of children."





#### TALKS FOR GOOD #2

### ONLINE AND HYBRID INSTRUCTION: PREPARING K-12 EDUCATORS FOR THE UPCOMING ACADEMIC YEAR

**“As an old scientist, let me tell you that every scientific experiment does not succeed on the first try. If at first you don’t succeed, keep trying. Keep being creative, keep communicating, and certainly keep collaborating.”**

*Dr. Steve Canipe*

With COVID-19 disrupting schools and classrooms across the U.S., educators have been tasked with ensuring all students continue to be able to learn. The second of the Talks for Good, “Preparing K-12 Educators for the Upcoming Academic Year,” looked at how K-12 teachers could be as effective as possible as their classrooms migrated to online and/or hybrid models of instruction. This event brought together two practicing educators with an esteemed panel of experts from Walden’s Richard W. Riley College of Education and Leadership, who shared their insights, best practices, and strategies for online learning.

Walden alumna Tennith Scott ’19, MS in Education, a third grade elementary school

teacher in Reddick, Florida, expressed some of the top challenges she and her fellow educators regularly face while trying to teach online. These ranged from language barriers to the schedules of working parents. Dr. Sharon Porter ’12, Education Specialist (EdS), an elementary school principal in the Washington, D.C., area, shared her own challenges from an administrator’s perspective—such as social and emotional issues and student access to distance learning.

“Communication and collaboration with all stakeholders has never been more important during times like these,” said Dr. Kisha

Walker, academic coordinator for Walden’s Master of Arts in Teaching program. “Getting to know your students and parents is essential.” Walker stressed that educators should be able to exhibit flexibility as well as creativity in supporting learners. This includes giving students and parents alternate options for engaging with teachers to help eliminate barriers like nontraditional work schedules and lack of internet access.

Dr. Suzanne Wesson, academic coordinator for Walden’s Riley College of Education and Leadership, said that educators need to lean on one another for support. “If there’s one thing you take

away with you from here, I hope it’s that there are resources and people available to help and support you,” she said. “Reaching out to help and for help can get us all through this.”

#### TALKS FOR GOOD #3

### ADVANCING A RACIALLY AND ETHNICALLY DIVERSE K-12 EDUCATION AND TEACHER WORKFORCE

**“We have to have real hard-core conversations about differentiated incentives if we really and truly want our young people to have teachers from the communities that they serve.”**

*Dr. Sonja Santelises*

In the 2018 working paper “The Long-Run Impacts of Same-Race Teachers,” researchers from Johns Hopkins University and American University reported that Black students who’d had just one Black teacher by third grade were 13% more likely to enroll in college. When Black students had two Black teachers during that same time frame, the percentage jumped to 32%.

Although student outcomes have been directly linked to who is teaching, many



student populations aren’t reflected in the teaching staff or in the curriculum being taught. These racial and ethnic inequities—brought to the forefront by the pandemic and recent racial justice movements—were the topic of the third Talks for Good, “Advancing a Racially and Ethnically Diverse K-12 Education and Teacher Workforce.”

“Our young people were seeing their city and their home represented in sometimes very disparaging ways in local and national media,” said Dr. Sonja Santelises, CEO of Baltimore City Public Schools and one of the panelists for this discussion. “How do we situate them within the strengths of their community? Within the history of wealth and generosity in their community? We wanted our young people to be able to see themselves in what they were studying.”

Santelises went on to explain how the lack of movement in her district’s social studies curriculum revealed an opportunity to challenge the status quo. Working alongside their social studies teachers, with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Baltimore City students in grades six through 12 helped build an innovative curriculum called BMore Me. Integrated with their social studies program, BMore Me ties students’ learning to the history and realities of their local community as well as to their own ethnic and cultural identities.



#### TALKS FOR GOOD #4

### ONLINE LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

**“All of our processes here at Walden are about continuous improvement. So we’re constantly testing and investing to increase the quality of the student learning experience.”**

*Dr. Ward Ulmer*

The latest of the Talks for Good centered on how the COVID-19 pandemic is accelerating the adoption of online learning at colleges and universities throughout the U.S. “Online Learning in Higher Education” featured a distinguished panel of university presidents, including Dr. Ward Ulmer (Walden University), Dr. M. Christopher Brown II (Kentucky State University), and Dr. Irma Becerra (Marymount University).

There was a general consensus among the panelists that the current crisis has thrust higher education into the spotlight, yielding opportunities for a fundamental shift in how education is delivered. Brown shared his institution’s multi-pronged approach to online learning, which he called “the ABCs of digital

transformation.” This includes access, ensuring students have the technology to access the information available online; bandwidth, confirming students also have the bandwidth needed to manage online classroom platforms and technologies; and consistency, making sure course content can be accessed by all students no matter their day-to-day life circumstances.

Becerra emphasized the importance of using the challenges brought by COVID-19 as a learning opportunity to become better prepared for the future. She explained that expanding online learning options in higher education can help institutions become more resilient during a pandemic or other circumstances that demand remote delivery of instruction.



#### THE YEAR AHEAD

The Talks for Good initiative is resonating with audiences. “The feedback has been very positive,” says Michel. “People who have attended say they feel inspired and empowered to go back to their own communities, have similar discussions, and start implementing real changes.”

Ulmer explains, “It’s been fulfilling to know we are doing what we can to help educators and communities navigate the challenges of the pandemic—and staying true to our purpose of access to education and education for good.”





SPOTLIGHT ON:

# DESMOND PITTMAN

BY KATE SCHMIDGALL



*If you work in the school, there's a lot of kids that at 7:30 in the morning, they show up angry, like there's something bothering them, something troubling them. And that's just part of growing up in the communities that they grow up in," says Walden graduate and current Doctor of Education (EdD) student Desmond Pittman. "I see in their eyes a look of hopelessness, and that is something that bothers me, that keeps me up at night, and really fuels my mission to instill hope into the young generation. And there is no better way than education, because that is what became the light at the end of the tunnel for me."*

*When Pittman started his teaching career 10 years ago in North Houston, many of his students—who were only a year or two younger than he was—had already been in and out of jail. He knew that if he wanted to make a difference in their lives, he would need some extra help. Then he won an Educator for a Day grant from Walden. Armed with \$5,000, he created a weekly mentoring program for his students that incorporated college visits and a trip to the African American Library at the Gregory School in Houston. He used the remaining funds to support his school's "Man Up" campaign, counseling young men to manhood through determined decision-making.*

*"That \$5,000 went a very, very long way," he says, "and it was basically my springboard for everything else."*

## CHANGING LIVES, INCLUDING HIS OWN

Even before receiving a grant from Walden, Pittman already had deep ties to the university, earning his MS in Education (MSEd) with a specialization in Special Education in 2012, as well as an Education Specialist (EdS) degree that prepared him for principal licensure. Now, he is working toward his EdD. By pursuing his own growth, he is gaining

the knowledge and experience he needs to make a difference in the lives of his students, as well as exemplify what it means to be a Black leader.

"When I'm working with a lot of these kids, they remind me of myself growing up—how hard they are, how defensive they have to be," he says, reflecting on his youth in the Lower 9th Ward of New Orleans, where he witnessed severe poverty and crime and little opportunity. "I saw people who were willing to risk their life or take somebody else's life for basically nothing," he remembers. "It wasn't anything that we created in the community—it was already waiting there for us. These communities give us three options: You're going to rap or entertain, you're going to sell drugs, or you're going to play sports."

While sports offered an outlet that helped keep him off the streets while his mom was at work, it was college that put him on a life-changing trajectory.

"Just having the opportunity, the space, is what really turned on the light that—hey, now is my chance. There's no turning back. There's no going back."

## POSITIVELY IMPACTING NORTH HOUSTON

When it comes to making a difference, Pittman knows that by lifting up his students on a daily basis, he has the opportunity to create a lasting effect in his community.

"Our most precious resource is the leadership of Black males in the community," he says. "We want less criminals and more CEOs—bottom line—because everybody's going to be affected by crime at some point or other. These kids are going to jail. Well, who's paying to keep them in jail? The taxpayers. Everybody. It costs less to send them to college, so what are we really doing here?"

He has dedicated his every waking moment to disrupting and dismantling the prison pipelines of the Greenspoint, Cypress Station, and Northborough neighborhoods, whether he's in the

classroom or virtual meetings, on the streets, or putting in time at a local recreation center.

And even though COVID-19 has changed the way he and the community center operate, they're still dedicated to achieving the same mission: helping the youth of North Houston grow and develop. Though the boxing and martial arts programs were suspended, mentoring has continued in every possible way—even by teaching young men how to tie a tie via Zoom.

## BUILDING A NEW FUTURE

"Through my education at Walden, I was able to climb to the highest of levels to understand, how can this be happening?" Pittman says. He credits his decision to attend Walden to the university's commitment to social change, as well as the chance to directly apply what he learns in the Walden classroom to the challenges—and opportunities—of his community.

"Every paper that I'm producing revolves around the school-to-prison pipeline. I get an A on it, [and] I think, 'This is the type of research, the type of work that [needs to be done]. I'm going to go ahead with it, and the school-to-prison pipeline is my opponent,'" he says.

Through his work, he hopes to give his students the support they need to determine and define their own futures.

"Ask any child in the Lower 9th Ward of New Orleans or north side of Houston what they want to be when they grow up, and none of them will say, 'I want to be an inmate,'" he says. "None of them will say, 'I want to be a person on death row.'"



ALUMNI FEATURE:

# FRANCES BAILEY

BY KRISTIN HANSON

ALUMNI FEATURE



*“My Walden education is pushing me into my purpose.”*

*“I used to feel broken,” says Frances Bailey ’20. “Now, I know that I was never broken. I was blessed. And I’m proud I have the opportunity to bless others.”*

Nearly 10 years ago, Bailey found the strength to leave an abusive marriage, but her decision to walk away wasn’t without complications. It also meant dropping out of college and falling into a cycle of depression and anxiety.

“Leaving my abusive marriage meant I lost the financial support to continue my education. But if I didn’t leave, and he killed me, I wouldn’t be there for my daughter,” she says. “I just wanted me and my daughter to feel safe.”

But Bailey found the strength and motivation to find a path forward—and finish her degree. After earning her BS in Criminal Justice from Walden, she decided to continue her education with the university. She is currently earning her Master of Public Administration (MPA) to broaden her skills and strengthen her ability to help more people.

As a welfare fraud investigator for the Accomack County (Virginia) Department of Social Services, one of her responsibilities is talking with welfare recipients about their situations. Often, especially when working with women,

she feels a personal connection with their struggles, particularly with those who are experiencing domestic abuse.

In response to the stories she regularly hears, Bailey founded Red Door Empowerment, an organization that works to “educate, equip, and empower” people facing difficult life circumstances. Bailey and a team of volunteers offer workshops on a variety of topics, including credit restoration, self-care, and addiction.

Support groups—now being held virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic—help connect people with resources to manage depression and anxiety. The organization also offers the “Yes You Will Finish” scholarship to help women who are at risk of dropping out of college because of a life crisis—that difficult decision Bailey once had to make herself.

“It was time to take back some of the things I had lost,” she says. “I started to try to pick up those family values that were engraved in my heart and enrolled back in school to get my degree.”



## THE CHANCE TO MAKE A LASTING IMPACT

For a community outreach project, Red Door Empowerment distributed Christmas “Baskets of Hope and Love” to mothers in a local domestic violence center.

“Most people think about the children in those situations—and of course you want the kids to be thought about. But as a mom, having something or someone to say, ‘You’re appreciated’ or ‘I’m thinking about you’ on Christmas Day would have meant so much,” Bailey says.

The Christmas basket effort was part of a project she completed to earn an executive leadership certification through the National Society of Leadership and Success, an organization she joined while earning her bachelor’s degree. For Bailey, her Walden classes were “the perfect blueprint” to prepare her for a leadership role, offering coursework and training she now regularly applies in her work.

“Walden has been an awesome guide and has pushed me into what I wanted to do,” she says. “I’m grateful that I took the chance to go back to school. I thought I was going back to get an education, but in reality, it was pushing me into my purpose—helping others.”

“I feel like my purpose is to help women who are like I once was,” she says.

“I will continue teaching women and providing them resources and strategies on how to walk out of the things that once held me hostage.”

# FACES OF WALDEN

BY KATE SCHMIDGALL & SUSAN LANDRY

Around the country, from Los Angeles to Atlanta, Walden grads are leveraging their education and personal experiences to make a difference in their communities. Whether they're working to close achievement gaps for students of color, opening new horizons of opportunity for children raised in foster care, ensuring students have access to feminine hygiene essentials, or serving courageously on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic, these Walden alumni are truly using their education for good.

This series showcases the inspiring and world-changing work of Walden graduates in each of these categories: **ADVOCATE, CATALYST, CHANGE AGENT, INNOVATOR,** and **VISIONARY.** We hope their achievements and stories will not only inspire you but also remind you of the power of education to empower the greater good and create social change.



**Dr. Elesia Glover**

PhD in Public Policy and Administration, '18

THE TERM "PERIOD POVERTY" MAY BE UNFAMILIAR TO MANY. BUT FOR DR. ELESIA GLOVER '18, PHD IN PUBLIC POLICY AND ADMINISTRATION, THE ISSUE IGNITED OUTRAGE—AND A MISSION TO HELP GIRLS ACCESS THE FEMININE HYGIENE PRODUCTS THEY NEED TO STAY IN SCHOOL.

"Many women cannot afford the feminine hygiene essentials they need for themselves and their daughters," Glover explains. For girls in middle and high school, this lack of access often comes at a hefty price: missing class. "School nurses told me they would often run out of these supplies halfway through the year. Then they or teachers use their own funds to try to create a supply. If not, students just call a parent to pick them up or they drive themselves home. I saw it as an obstacle that should not exist."

To help overcome this obstacle, Glover started Posh Pack, an organization that supplies feminine hygiene products to middle schools and high schools in Georgia and beyond. She wanted to create a way for girls to get what they need without feeling embarrassed. The name "Posh Pack" is discreet enough that young women feel comfortable asking for it in the classroom. It's a stylish, simple pink and purple bag with two pads inside and a postcard on feminine hygiene health. Glover grew up in a family of educators—her mother, grandmother, great-grandmother, and all her aunts. She remembers hearing stories of kids who washed their clothes at school or who

didn't have enough food at home. It was these anecdotes that nurtured her deep and lifelong commitment to advocacy. "One of the things that attracted me to Walden was the social change foundation across all their programs," she says. "My degree gives me access to conversations I would not have had access to before. It also increased my confidence in what I was capable of."

**"It would not make sense to bring your own toilet paper every time you use a public restroom. So why would we put young women, and women in general, in this position where they have to bring their own feminine products to school?"**

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought the issue of period poverty to the forefront, prompting Glover and her team to temporarily expand their mission. "We've had to adapt to serve women in general, because we've had so many organizations reach out and ask us

for help. We just gave more than 1,200 pads to a mental health institute for women in Georgia." Glover says when the pandemic subsides, they will refocus on students. She looks forward to continuing to expand Posh Pack across different states. "I think about the girl who already has a lot going on, who wants to be successful, but feels like all odds are against her," she says. "If I can take one thing off of her plate, I'm more than happy to do that."



Glover distributes flyers on feminine hygiene awareness to girls outside a high school.

**Dr. Kay Ramsey**

*PhD in Public Policy and Administration, '17*

**BORN INTO THE FOSTER CARE SYSTEM AND ADOPTED AT AGE 3 BY A SINGLE MOTHER WHO LATER PASSED AWAY, DR. KAY RAMSEY '17, PHD IN PUBLIC POLICY AND ADMINISTRATION, UNDERSTANDS THE POTENTIALLY DEVASTATING EFFECTS OF AN UNSTABLE YOUTH.**

For the foster care population ages 16 to 24, Ramsey explains, there is a significant increase in high school dropout rates and low matriculation into college. “So I wanted to be able to, for myself, shatter a lot of those stereotypes and say, ‘Yes, I was born into foster care. Yes, these things happened to me, but I will not let that be my destiny. I will not become a statistic,’” she says.

In her early 20s, after the death of her adoptive mother, Ramsey experienced homelessness until the supervisor at her new job paid her first month’s rent. She went on to earn a bachelor’s degree, joining the mere 2.5% of foster care youth who graduate from a four-year college. This eventually turned into a double master’s degree.

Ramsey attributes her resilience

and perseverance to having strong mentors—such as Joe Rouzan, a retired police officer who is now the executive director of a nonprofit. “I saw him from afar, and he really had it together,” she says. “Joe has been a lifetime mentor for me, 15 years plus, and I know I can always call on him for guidance and support.”

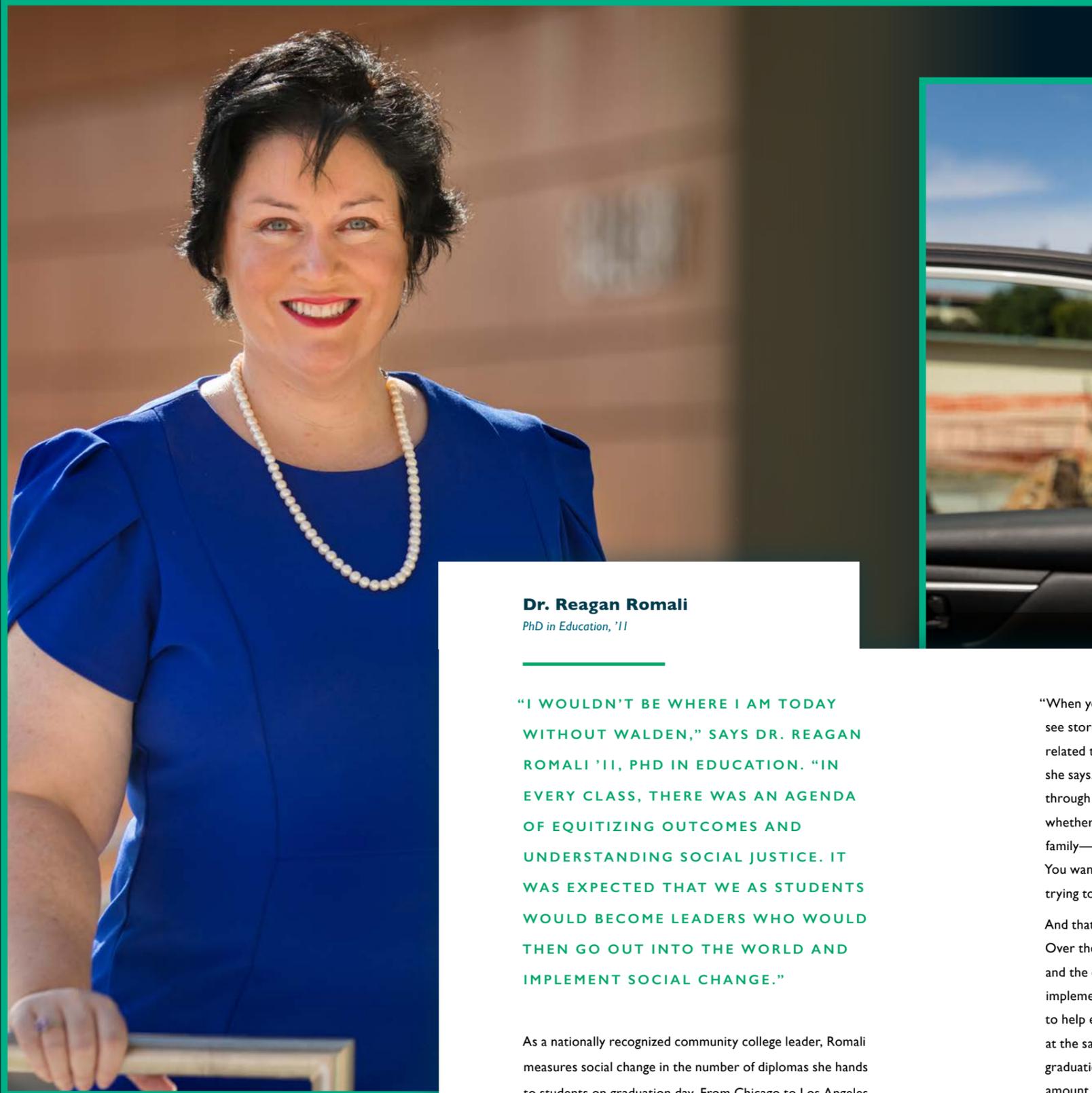
Her higher education journey eventually led her to Walden. Graduating with her doctorate in 2017, Ramsey is now executive branch director for Bethany Christian Services of Southern California, which seeks to protect children, empower youth, and strengthen families through quality social services.

Being a multidimensional change agent is about more than offering physical resources; it’s about offering hope, too.

Today, through Bethany’s partnerships with various organizations, Ramsey provides support and mentorship to a full scope of marginalized populations. This includes children cycling through foster care, as well as fathers returning home from prison, domestic violence survivors, and, more recently, refugees and immigrants who have endured extraordinary trauma.

For Ramsey, it all boils down to being a role model for others, like her mentors were for her. “We need inspirational people,” she says. “My Walden dissertation was about, ‘How often do we need to be inspired?’ We need it every day, and not just if you’re in foster care. Just as humans, we need to be inspired every single day. That’s what it means to shatter and disqualify stereotypes.”

**Dr. Kay Ramsey’s first book, *Persevering Beyond Adversity*, explores the power of mentorship and hits shelves in 2021.**

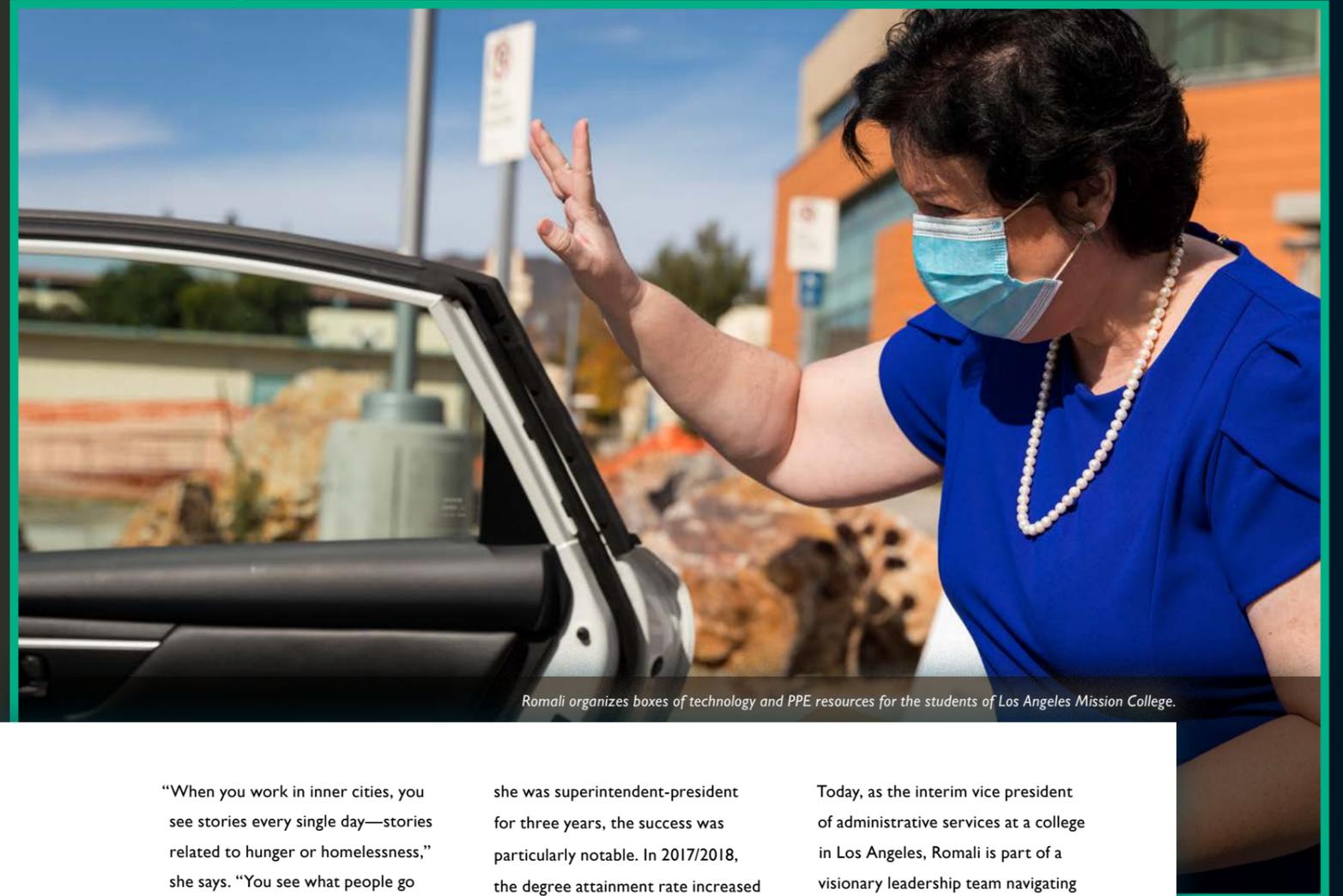


### Dr. Reagan Romali

PhD in Education, '11

**“I WOULDN'T BE WHERE I AM TODAY WITHOUT WALDEN,” SAYS DR. REAGAN ROMALI '11, PHD IN EDUCATION. “IN EVERY CLASS, THERE WAS AN AGENDA OF EQUITIZING OUTCOMES AND UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL JUSTICE. IT WAS EXPECTED THAT WE AS STUDENTS WOULD BECOME LEADERS WHO WOULD THEN GO OUT INTO THE WORLD AND IMPLEMENT SOCIAL CHANGE.”**

As a nationally recognized community college leader, Romali measures social change in the number of diplomas she hands to students on graduation day. From Chicago to Los Angeles, she has dedicated her career to broadening access to higher education in poverty-stricken neighborhoods and closing achievement gaps for people of color.



Romali organizes boxes of technology and PPE resources for the students of Los Angeles Mission College.

“When you work in inner cities, you see stories every single day—stories related to hunger or homelessness,” she says. “You see what people go through due to the *lack* of something—whether it be food, safety, home, family—and it cuts you to your core. You want to spend your entire career trying to make it better for them.”

And that's exactly what she's done. Over the past several years, Romali and the colleges she's led have implemented a number of strategies to help ensure everyone achieves at the same rate. This has boosted graduation rates—and not by a modest amount. At one Chicago college where she served as president for six years, graduation rates tripled.

At a college in Long Beach, where

she was superintendent-president for three years, the success was particularly notable. In 2017/2018, the degree attainment rate increased by 27% overall, with a 21% increase for Latinos, 41% for Pacific Islanders, and 25% for African Americans.

**“We can raise graduation [rates], but if we're not raising graduation [rates] for students of all backgrounds, then we're really not doing our job.”**

“Then, in 2018/2019, we increased graduation 29% with similar numbers for populations of color,” she explains. “That made [the college] the most improved in the state for [degree] attainment.”

Today, as the interim vice president of administrative services at a college in Los Angeles, Romali is part of a visionary leadership team navigating new complexities amid the COVID-19 pandemic. They've provided students with laptops, Wi-Fi, food pantry access, and grocery gift cards. “Being able to get food and technology into the hands of students has been critical. Every day, we think: ‘OK, what else can we do?’” she says.

“I know I'm an idealist, but I think we can heal a lot of what ails our society through education,” Romali explains. “When someone has that piece of paper in their hand, I see it as a golden ticket to a better future. And if my work had even the tiniest impact on that, I've done what I need to do in life.”

**Dr. Jamar Shaw**

Master of Public Health (MPH), '18

**“THE MOST POWERFUL GATEWAY DRUG ISN’T MARIJUANA— IT’S TRAGEDY,” SAYS DR. JAMAR SHAW '18, MASTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH (MPH). “WE FIND THAT DEPRESSION AND ADDICTION WALK HAND IN HAND.”**

Shaw was inspired to enter the mental health field after watching his grandmother care for his uncle, who struggled with addiction most of his life after watching his brother drown.

“In that moment, my uncle’s entire world changed,” Shaw remembers. “He searched for something to numb the pain. And that’s what led him into addiction. While other family members were fed up and frustrated, I marveled at my grandma’s ability to have compassion for him. And it was really her persistence and love that led my uncle into sobriety.”

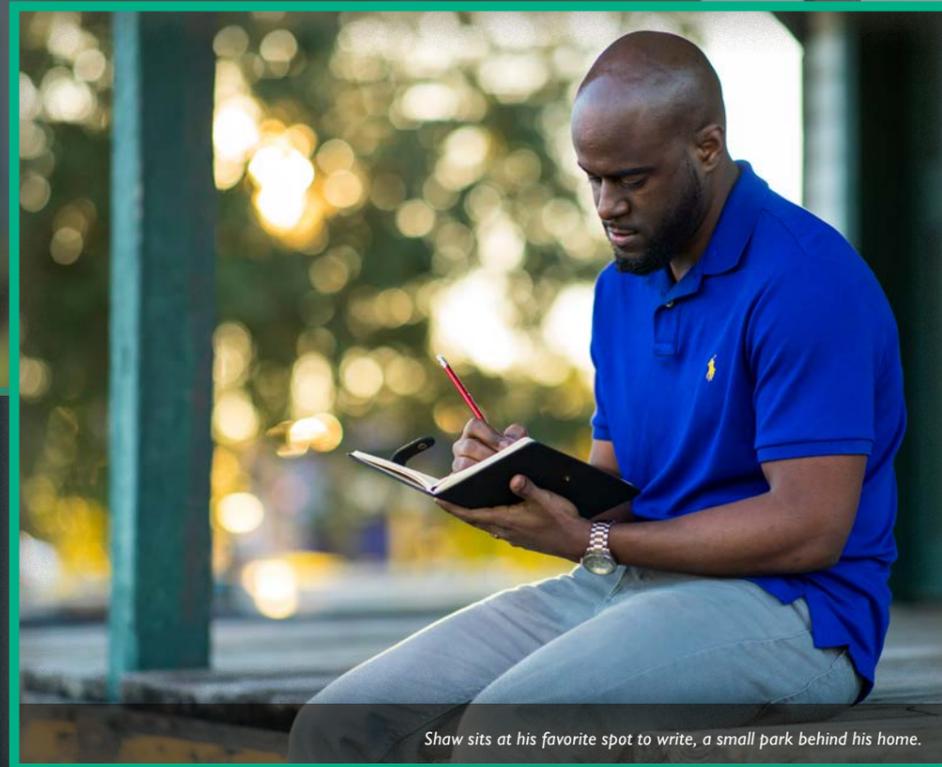
Shaw, who recently joined Emory Healthcare, previously served as director of medical affairs for the Central Florida Recovery Center. In that role, he applied what he learned to help diverse populations overcome addiction and mental health challenges. The clinic practices a nontraditional technique called psychosocial rehabilitation. “We believe if you can somehow help the root cause of the anxiety or depression that’s causing the addiction, it’s better than just treating the addiction itself with medication,” Shaw explains. “This has been very effective for us.”

Shaw says that the clinic aims to help patients become clean and sober in their own environments. “Our rehabilitators look at the house, where they live,

and their family life structure. These are all things that play a role in their recovery. And we tailor their recovery plan based on these factors. We find that through this method, most of our patients move on to productive, amazing lives and sobriety.”

One of the challenges Shaw has encountered along the way is the stigma around depression, especially in the Black community. “I can speak for myself—there’s a big stigma with mental health, especially for Black males,” he says. “The mindset is, ‘You should just get over it, and you don’t need treatment.’” Shaw hopes that through the clinic’s outreach work in central Florida communities, those who are struggling gain the confidence and courage to seek out the treatment they require.

Shaw has another unique platform for banishing the shame and secrecy surrounding mental health: poetry. As a champion spoken word poet, he’s able to connect with communities across the globe, both online and offline. “Through poetry, I try to challenge dominant narratives related to health and race, bring awareness to health inequalities, and scrutinize the stigma of mental health,” he says. “It’s difficult, but rewarding. Even if you can help one patient or save one life, then it’s worth it.”



Shaw sits at his favorite spot to write, a small park behind his home.

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**“A patient once told me that he wished he had leprosy, so that people could see and understand his pain. That was something that stuck with me—it really highlights what mental health is like.”**



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**“Nursing is evolving daily, and healthcare as well,” Prudencio explains. “In this ever-changing environment, having somebody to mentor you is so important.”**



**Dr. Denise Prudencio**  
*Doctor of Nursing Practice (DNP), '19*

**AFTER EARNING HIS DOCTOR OF NURSING PRACTICE (DNP) IN 2019, DR. DENISE ANGELO PRUDENCIO FLEW WEST TO JOIN SACRAMENTO'S MEDICAL SYSTEM AS A NURSE EDUCATOR. LITTLE DID HE KNOW HE'D SOON BE GUIDING STAFF THROUGH ONE OF THE BIGGEST HEALTH CRISES THIS COUNTRY HAS EVER FACED.**

“The first few months of the pandemic, we were so busy,” he explains. “Even now, our ICU beds are fully occupied and our COVID-19 unit is full, too.”

A consummate coach, Prudencio is adapting daily to best support his frontline nurses. He says that mentoring, a role he's passionate about, plays a big part in helping his nurses stay healthy and resilient during a global pandemic.

Prudencio credits his effectiveness as an educator to his personal experiences. Born and raised in Manila, Philippines, he traveled to the U.S. in 2009 to further his education. He remembers the critical role his peer relationships played in helping him find his footing in a new country and culture.

When he started his DNP program

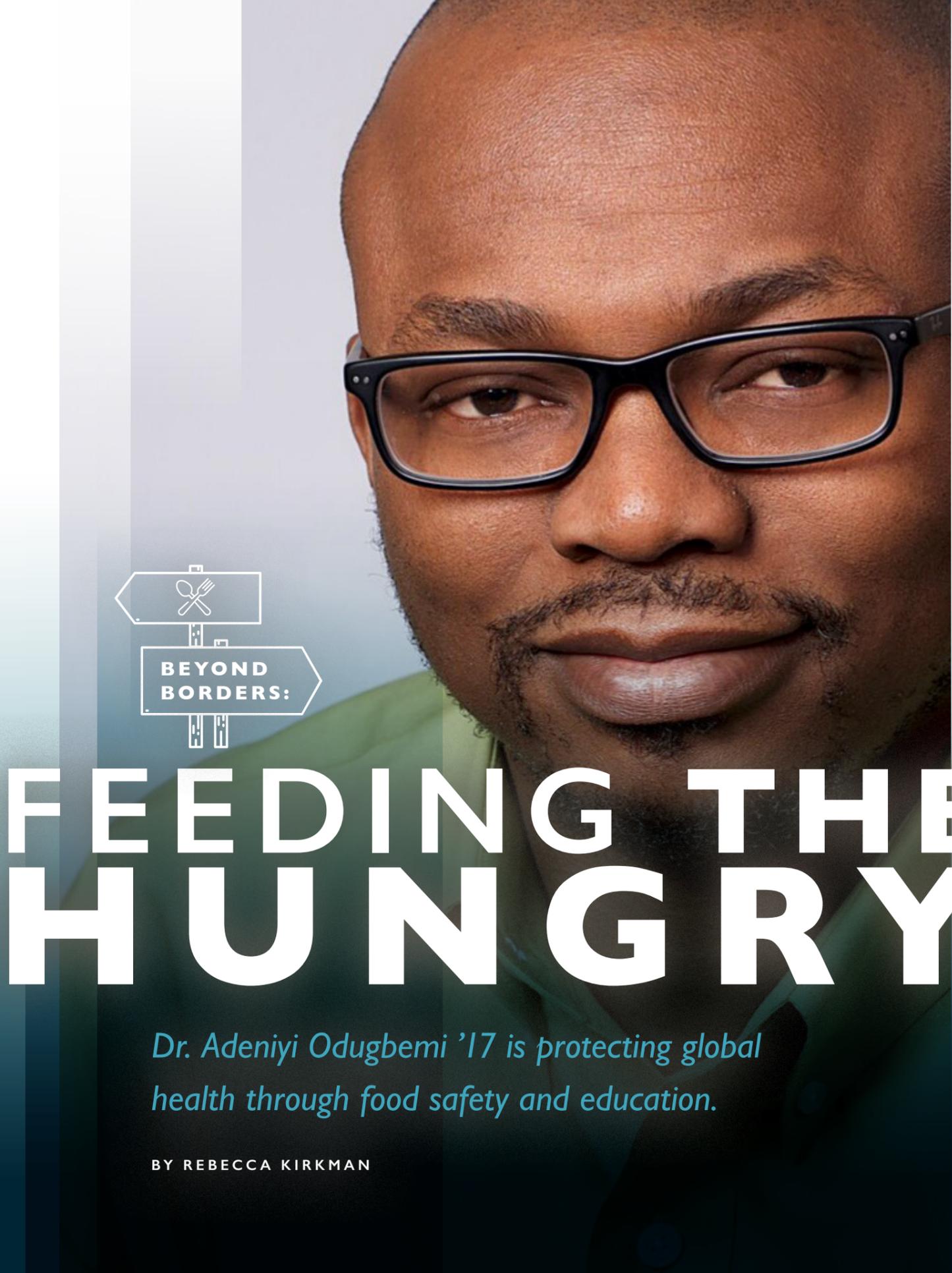
at Walden in 2015, he found similar support. “Online education was new for me,” he explains. “So I thought, ‘How will I make it, especially when English is my second language?’ But my Walden DNP mentor, Dr. Linda Matheson, really made time for me. We scheduled one-on-ones just to make sure I had everything I needed throughout the process. I remember when she told me, ‘Oh, I can call you Dr. Prudencio now.’ And I said, ‘Oh, my goodness.’”

Today, Prudencio supports his own mentees by building rapport on a personal as well as a professional level. “If my nurses are stressed about work or about their personal life, I want them to know I'm here to be their shoulder to cry on or just to vent. Sometimes that's the best way to prevent burnout,

if you have somebody that you can lean on ... someone you can trust to communicate your need. This is how we can help prevent that messy situation down the road.”

*Baltimore* magazine honored Prudencio in its 2019 Excellence in Nursing awards for his contributions as a nurse educator. And for now, it's a role he embraces. “My goal ultimately is to move into leadership. But right now, I want to continue doing what I'm doing.”

What's the best part about coaching other nurses? Prudencio says it's watching someone else tap into their talent and potential. “When they learn or attain something after you've mentored them, you feel it's your achievement, too. I think that's where I find the most meaning.”



# FEEDING THE HUNGRY

*Dr. Adeniyi Odugbemi '17 is protecting global health through food safety and education.*

BY REBECCA KIRKMAN

The moment he stepped onto the bottling plant floor, Dr. Adeniyi “Deni” Odugbemi ’17 knew he was destined for a future in the food safety industry. After just one month at PepsiCo, he moved from his quality control internship to a full-time laboratory analyst position, overseeing a group of interns and running analyses in the lab. He remembers thinking during his very first job, “This is what I’m called to do.”



*Odugbemi teaches a food safety training class in Lagos, Nigeria.*

By 2013, twelve years after that first internship, Odugbemi had worked in nearly all aspects of food safety—from operations to quality assurance. But in a world where the World Health Organization reports that more than 870 million people go to bed hungry each night, Odugbemi knew he needed to do more.

So he enrolled in Walden to earn his PhD in Public Health with an emphasis in food policy.

“I was looking for a program that provides academic rigor, credibility, and a program where the alumni are successful,” he recalls. “I discovered that Walden graduates are hired at leading corporations and many hold leadership positions.”

More importantly, though, Walden offered the unique opportunity to learn the skills he needed to “achieve something significant” and make a difference in the world. Now, with his Walden degree in hand, he is on a mission to address one of the biggest challenges the world faces today: food insecurity.

## A MISSION TO EXPAND FOOD SAFETY

Odugbemi believes that to eradicate hunger, the world needs to accomplish three essential goals: reduce overall food waste, produce enough food to feed the growing population, and establish universal food safety principles.

Because access to safe food is such a basic human need, Odugbemi explains, it is the foundation for many other industries, with far-reaching consequences when food safety protocols fail. That’s why he has dedicated his career to spreading greater awareness of food safety, which he believes will help improve the global economy as well as overall public health.

“The U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates that foodborne illnesses cost more than \$15.6 billion annually due to healthcare costs and decreased consumer confidence in food safety,” he says. “This negatively impacts buying patterns of consumers. Hence, in the spirit of maintaining the health and wellness of consumers, food safety becomes imperative.”

In his daily work, Odugbemi addresses industry challenges like foodborne illnesses, environmental contamination, new bacteria and antibiotic resistance, and changing consumer preferences. Now the global director of food safety at one of the largest food processing companies in the world, he oversees food product safety for approximately 450 crop procurement locations, 330 manufacturing facilities, 62 innovation centers, and the world’s premier crop transportation network—all across 40 countries.

“My goal is to unlock nature and enrich the lives of our customers,” he says. “We do that by ensuring that safe, quality,

and nutritious food products are available for consumers globally.”

## INCREASING AWARENESS ACROSS THE GLOBE

In addition to his daily work, Odugbemi is expanding food safety education in the U.S. and abroad. After helping run a community workshop in his home country of Nigeria, he realized the need for education and resources. “It was an eye-opener for me,” he recalls. “Getting into the class and teaching them, I discovered that food processing in the sub-Saharan is not as elaborate as one would think. They are getting things done, but they’re not always getting it done the right way.”

Since that first meeting, he has run 10 more trainings in Africa, giving members of the local food processing industry the knowledge and resources they need to better prioritize quality control.

While the coronavirus pandemic has had some impact on his global travel and educational trainings, Odugbemi says he has stayed resilient through tough circumstances by focusing on what he can control.

“My resiliency lies in following established practices, protocols, and activities that preserve my mental health,” he says. He continues to move forward, even through difficulty, by focusing on doing good. “I really enjoy what I do.”

ALUMNI FEATURE:

# A RESTAURANT CHAMPION



*Dr. Emily Williams Knight leads Texas restaurants through pandemic challenges.*

BY JOYCE REINGOLD

Dr. Emily Williams Knight was with her family on a spring getaway when she got the call: Texas Gov. Greg Abbott was going to close restaurant dining rooms across the state in response to the coronavirus, which was beginning its virulent spread across the United States. Those were to be the last days of rest Walden alumna Knight, the CEO of the Texas Restaurant Association (TRA) and Education Foundation, would experience for a long time.

“Before that call came in, individual counties were making decisions, and individual cities,” she says. “It was chaos. When Gov. Abbott decided to make a blanket set of closures, it was a sense of relief. It gave us a moment to pause and to think about what we were going to do next.”

The order also introduced an unprecedented challenge for the Texas restaurant industry—and for Knight. She’d joined the TRA and Education Foundation only seven months earlier, becoming the first woman in her position as well as the organization’s first new leader in more than 30 years. The order from Gov. Abbot ensured that Knight hit the ground running in her new job. To meet the challenge, she called upon skills she learned during her business career in global hospitality, as well as the PhD she earned at Walden University.

“When you’re trying to carry a voice in a crisis and you have doctorate credentials next to your name, it gives you an entree,” says Knight, who earned her Doctor of Education (EdD) with a specialization in Higher Education Leadership from Walden in 2016. “That credential alone automatically allows people to acknowledge, wow, that person’s done the work; that person has invested that time. And when the pandemic hit, I had to establish credibility very quickly. That credential helped a lot.”

Knight’s immediate goal was to mitigate the loss of revenue and jobs. In 2019, Texas restaurants had sales of \$70 billion and employed 1.5 million people. By mid-April 2020, 750,000 restaurant employees were out of work.

“We only had about 37% of our 50,000 restaurants prepared to offer drive-through or takeout delivery. So, we just creatively thought of all the ways that we could sustain them through new revenue sources,”

she says. “We passed a series of innovative measures, things like curbside alcohol-to-go and a grocery waiver that allowed restaurants to become grocery outlets because our grocery stores were overrun.”

To accomplish their goals, Knight’s team collaborated closely with other agencies and officials. “We worked with the comptroller on tax relief,” she explains. “We worked with all of our city officials to expand patios and outdoor dining. We reached out to third-party delivery companies to reduce fees. And we did all this while also navigating all of the federal stimulus bills, the CARES Act, and the Families First Act.”

She also worked with Rep. Chip Roy, R-Texas, to convince Congress to pass the Paycheck Protection Program Flexibility Act of 2020, which extended the time businesses have to spend federal funds and obtain loan forgiveness.

“The sort of great story is, I’m a brand-new CEO having replaced someone that was in the job more than 35 years. And I found the only congressman that I knew before the crisis hit in Texas, Congressman Roy, and I said, we’ve got to pass a bill to get this done. And he partnered with a Democratic congressman out of Minnesota (Rep. Dean Phillips), who was also brand new. ... And we only had one ‘no’ vote on both sides of Congress,” she says. “It was a great example of a state association leaning into federal politics. And I’ll be honest: I was probably that bold because I didn’t know any better.

“WE ONLY HAD ABOUT 37% OF OUR 50,000 RESTAURANTS PREPARED TO OFFER DRIVE-THROUGH OR TAKEOUT DELIVERY.”



ALUMNI FEATURE

You’re fearless when you’re new and you see opportunity.”

John B. Gessner, chair of the TRA’s board of directors, says it was Knight’s strength and determination, coupled with her broad experience in hospitality and education, that led to her selection as CEO after a search that drew 500 applicants.

“Emily had barely finished her transition period into the TRA leadership team when the COVID-19 pandemic struck,” Gessner says. “She fearlessly faced this daunting challenge to the hospitality industry and immediately became the champion of the restaurant industry in Texas. Her tireless efforts and understanding of how to motivate team members and appeal to elected officials have saved countless businesses and industry jobs in Texas.”

Knight says she never could have imagined leading the association through a pandemic. But her Walden education prepared her for this in other ways, too.

“I think, honestly, the ability that I had to manage this job, which was about 18 hours a day, my family, the crisis of 50,000 restaurants ... is because of my experience with Walden. When you go through a rigorous degree program as a working adult, you’re managing all of your personal and professional obligations while managing your studies. Once you stretch that muscle, it doesn’t go back,” she explains. “I think people were surprised at my capacity to handle all of it. But I honestly strengthened that by my Walden degree. ... My experience at Walden definitely paid off during the crisis.”

SPOTLIGHT ON:

# ANNA SLAYTON

BY KATE SCHMIDGALL



*When FEMA put out a nationwide call in March 2020 looking for medical workers willing to battle COVID-19 on the front lines in New York City, Walden nursing student Anna Slayton knew she had to go. For the next three months, Slayton worked 12-hour shifts, up to seven days a week, in the COVID-19 unit of a long-term care center in lower Manhattan.*

*“A lot of healthcare workers were either witnessing neighbors and friends get sick and die, or they had to take care of their family members,” Slayton says, noting that most hospital systems were overwhelmed with patients. “There was no staff to take care of the residents. We were the relief, and we basically took over the COVID-19 floor.”*



## FINDING PURPOSE AFTER TRAGEDY

In 2016, Slayton earned her Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) at Walden while juggling her responsibilities as a wife, mother, and full-time professional. “I knew I needed to advance my career, but I wasn’t sure how to balance everything in my life while also going to class in person. Thankfully, Walden provided the ability to reach my goals.”

But just a few months after graduation, tragedy struck Slayton’s family. On New Year’s Day in 2017, her toddler son, Gavin, fell into a backyard pool and drowned. Heartbroken, Slayton felt unable to mourn

her loss because she needed to be strong for her remaining children.

“Losing a child is hard no matter what the circumstances,” she says. “But I had two other babies who I still had to press on for—I feel like I needed to find my inner strength as a mother.” Now, more than three years later, Slayton says her time in the COVID-19 unit in New York City offered her a way to process her grief while serving others.

“The whole underlying part of New York was the healing that I found, both about my son and about my life,” Slayton says.



Slayton with two nurses she worked with while responding to the COVID-19 crisis in New York City.



Slayton says one benefit of earning her degree online was the flexibility it gave her to juggle work, home, and school.

#### AN OPTIMISTIC FUTURE

On pace to graduate with her master's in nursing in just a few months, Slayton credits the supportive community at Walden for helping her continue her program, even as she struggled to adjust to life without Gavin.

"As I was finishing my classes with Walden, my heart just really was scared, to be honest with you," she explains. "But my advisors and everybody at Walden have always been so supportive. Even being a mom and working full time, I'll be able to graduate with my master's. I'm 31 and have lived all this life because of what Walden provided and allowed for me."

After her second Walden University graduation, Slayton plans to pursue her lifelong dream of becoming a nurse practitioner. She will be able to honor the memory of Gavin through her work, every day.

"When I was in New York, I changed my degree plan to my original track of being a family nurse practitioner so that I can take care of kids one day," she says.

# Introducing Walden Connect

## Meet Your New Alumni Network

**We're thrilled to announce the launch of Walden Connect, a virtual professional network—and much more—just for Walden alumni!**

Whether you're looking to advance your career, make contacts locally or globally, or mentor a new graduate, membership to Walden Connect has its perks—and there is no cost to join.

Visit the Walden Connect website to find out everything this next-level network can do for you and your career. Sign up and start connecting!

**WALDENCONNECT.COM**

**WALDEN UNIVERSITY**  
ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

# BLACK HISTORY

WALDEN'S CENTER FOR SOCIAL CHANGE  
GIVES VOICE TO DIVERSE STORIES.

# LIVES HERE

BY KEVIN C. THORNTON



ISAAC CUDJOE

CHIEF OF STAFF AND DIRECTOR OF WALDEN'S  
CENTER FOR SOCIAL CHANGE

The best way to learn, he says, is by listening. "Racial injustice is at the forefront of our culture right now—you're forced to talk about it, and we want to be a leader in that discussion," Cudjoe says. "While Walden is strongly committed to social change as a community, we have room to grow. One way we can do that is by giving diverse people an opportunity to highlight their voices."

To help Walden realize that commitment, Cudjoe, chief of staff and director of Walden's Center for Social Change, created a new initiative, Black History Lives Here. Kicking off at the beginning of February, Black History Month, the initiative will allow the Walden community to not only teach about racial injustice but also empower others to teach us.

The monthlong event will include a series of video interviews featuring Walden staff members, who will share their own experiences and stories, as well as a live event to be announced later in the month.

The impetus for the Black History Lives Here project, Cudjoe says, came from the top. Walden President Dr. Ward Ulmer contacted him last year to ask how Cudjoe could incorporate his extracurricular passions into Walden's commitment to social change. Outside of Walden, Cudjoe works with two unfunded community organizations to create opportunities and action for marginalized populations.

Like countless others,

Isaac Cudjoe has his own

experiences of racial and

cultural injustice to share.

But what's more important,

he believes, is that others

tell their stories in an effort

to build a more diverse

global community.



*When you have underrepresented members of the population, one of the things you can do best is give them a chance to be heard.*

— Isaac Cudjoe



**KURTIS GORHAM**

—  
IT SUPPORT SERVICES  
SENIOR MANAGER

A technology enthusiast in Walden's IT Support Services group, Kurtis Gorham is proud to be part of the university's social change efforts. In the past six years, he's worked his way from tier one technician, resetting passwords and answering calls, to his current position as senior service desk manager. A native of Baltimore, Gorham is the youngest leader in his group, and one of the few African Americans in a similar IT leadership role. "I'm continually committed to doing my best to motivate and inspire others to step out of their comfort zone and do something different."

One group, Brothers With Books, provides free books to lower-income and at-risk children in his home county near Washington, D.C. The other organization speaks to Cudjoe's heart as an immigrant to the U.S. from Ghana. The ReTurn movement is a global initiative to mobilize immigrants to reconnect with the places from where they trace their lineages, empowering them to reclaim their sense of identity to build more inclusive societies.

Cudjoe's work with these organizations, as well as his previous experience with the human rights organization The African Middle Eastern Leadership Project, convinced him of the value of hearing others talk about their own experiences as a way to build more tolerant and inclusive global communities.

"When you have underrepresented members of the population," he says, "one of the things you can do best is give them a chance to be heard."

From a young age, Cudjoe was on a quest to find answers to difficult questions: When would he be able to buy a school lunch? Why did he get pulled over again and again in certain towns? And why did a police officer tap his gun when he looked at him?

But even with those experiences, Cudjoe says he'd rather not tell his own stories; he'd rather encourage others to tell theirs. He hopes to follow the path of one of his primary influencers, Rosa Parks, who prompted the 1955–1956 Montgomery, Alabama, bus boycott. "I'm inspired by what Rosa Parks did that day on the bus and by what she did afterward," he says. "She didn't seek the lights, she was just part of the story."

Black History Lives Here will include discussions with a broad range of Black professionals representing the past, present, and future of Walden. We preview several of the voices we will be highlighting in February.



**ROLANDO COUSINS**

—  
NEW STUDENT  
ENROLLMENT SPECIALIST

Born and raised in the East Flatbush section of Brooklyn, New York, Rolando Cousins knows what racial injustice looks like. But through his own hard work, dedication to learning, and commitment to help others, he also knows what it takes to change things. Cousins has been with Walden for nearly two years as an Enrollment Specialist for undergraduate programs, where, Cousins says, he "challenges every student enrolled to become the best version of themselves they can be." Outside work, he volunteers in support of military veterans, homeless veterans, and African American empowerment movement communities. "As an African American who grew up in New York City in the '90s, knowledge, wisdom, and understanding is what I'm attempting to have every African American embody. There is no self-elevation without it." In short, Cousins says, he lives his personal and professional life guided by the following principle: The strong rule the weak, but the wise rule the strong.



**CARLA CHASE**

—  
STUDENT COMMUNICATIONS  
MANAGER

A native of Jersey City, New Jersey, Carla Chase grew up in a large, loving family and supportive community, which instilled a commitment to social change that she carries into both her career and personal life. "The women in my family were the community leaders," she explains, "always helping others and making sure the youth and neighborhood elderly were taken care of. I try to do the same." She lives Walden's social change mission by being intentional about making a positive impact in the lives of everyone she encounters. Whether it's through her affiliations with Girl Scouts of the USA, Delta Sigma Theta sorority, or the Walden students she's continually in contact with, her message is this: You can be anything you want to be. "My life is a testament to social change. The saying, 'to whom much is given, much is required,' means a great deal to me because I know the best way to ensure a better society is to promote social change. For me, that begins at home. I remind my own children that the best gift they can give themselves and the best way to honor their ancestors is through education and by being an asset to your community."



**ULYSSESSES WILCOX**

—  
ALUMNI AMBASSADOR  
MANAGER

As Walden's Alumni Ambassador manager, Ulysseses Wilcox has a unique perspective on the future of the school's efforts in university's change. In his role, Wilcox manages a group of Walden alumni who advocate for the university and one another by raising awareness of Walden as a leader of social change. Within that role, he acts as a story gatherer and teller, understanding that the future is deeply influenced by the past. "When a student can know and relate to alumni through a social change testimonial or shared story, they can connect to that and carry it forward." Wilcox is inspired by a story his mother once told him about his grandfather, who planted a garden each year to provide free produce to his community. "I learned a lot from that tradition: respect, perseverance, and honor of family," he says. "I hope future generations learn that our humanity will always be connected, and they can continue to seed important values of respect, human dignity, compassion, solidarity, and consensus for generations to come."



When Dr. Rochelle “Ro” Gilbert, EdD, joined Walden in 2010, she was looking for more than a job: She wanted to build an impactful career. In Walden, she saw a university aligned with her beliefs in transformational leadership, positive social change, and lifelong learning. An organization where she could not only put down roots but also foster growth for herself and Walden students.

Today, she is living that vision. In October 2020, after serving as associate academic director of University Residencies and director and senior director of operations for Academic Residencies, Gilbert accepted a new position as dean of Student Affairs. In this role, she brings together her broad experience as a results-oriented business leader and educational champion to help support and develop the next generation of Walden students.

Recently, Gilbert sat down for a Q&A session to share more about her life, career, and experience at Walden.

**YOU’VE BEEN A ROLE MODEL AND MENTOR FOR COUNTLESS PEOPLE THROUGHOUT YOUR CAREER. WHO ARE SOME OF YOUR ROLE MODELS?**

I would definitely have to say one person would be my mother, Clara Gilbert. Mother has always been a beacon of light and support for me in any endeavor. She has always encouraged me to progress, move forward ... to never stop because there’s always a higher height that you can obtain, remembering that it is just as important to bring others with you along the way. My father, the late Charles L. Gilbert, was also instrumental in being a role model. Everyone at his job knew who I was. He constantly talked about me: “My daughter is doing this; my daughter is doing that.” Whereas I never considered the things that I did to be story-worthy, or noteworthy, he was extremely proud and made sure he provided stability for our home and practiced resilience in any challenges that he faced. Additionally, my husband, Dr. Sean Abram, and brother, Jerome Gilbert, have been incredibly supportive of my journey as well.

**WHAT IGNITED YOUR PASSION FOR LEARNING?**

My interest in education was influenced by my family; in particular, my great-grandfather, Papa (Willis Broom). Although Papa was never afforded the chance to go to school, he valued education. Papa esteemed education so much that he allowed aspiring teachers to reside in his home, free of charge, while attending school. Papa learned from them by listening to their academic sharings and having meaningful conversations. He believed that education was the key to life. Papa provided a service that ignited the fire of the majority of my family members to become educators.

**CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR PROMOTION. CAN YOU TELL US ABOUT YOUR VISION FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS?**

I’m honored to have this opportunity to be a part of the exciting work that’s happening here at Walden and to lead such a dynamic and passionate team. Our office consists of student affairs, student organizations, disability services, and interconnectedness with the academic units. My overarching vision is for Student Affairs to be that premier division that provides accessible programs and services. One of my goals is to make sure to create and maintain relationships with our students throughout their entire Walden journey, from the time they first explore our programs to long after they graduate. We want our community to know that, no matter what, we are here when they need it—whether they are preparing for a job interview, writing beyond their dissertation, or are just looking for extra resources.

**WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU OFFER STUDENTS FOR GETTING THE MOST FROM THEIR WALDEN EXPERIENCE?**

As a Walden student or as a leader, one of the goals typically is to enhance your leadership abilities, and you can do that through a collaborative approach to skill development and augmentation. To do that, I would encourage any student to network, network, network. Walden offers numerous resources through our student organizations, honor societies, and student support teams. In addition to networking, I would encourage students to find that person, resource, event, or group that enables them to make and keep a connection with the Walden community, one that fits them as a person and helps it align to where they are going.

**HOW HAS YOUR WALDEN EDUCATION INFLUENCED YOUR LIFE AND CAREER?**

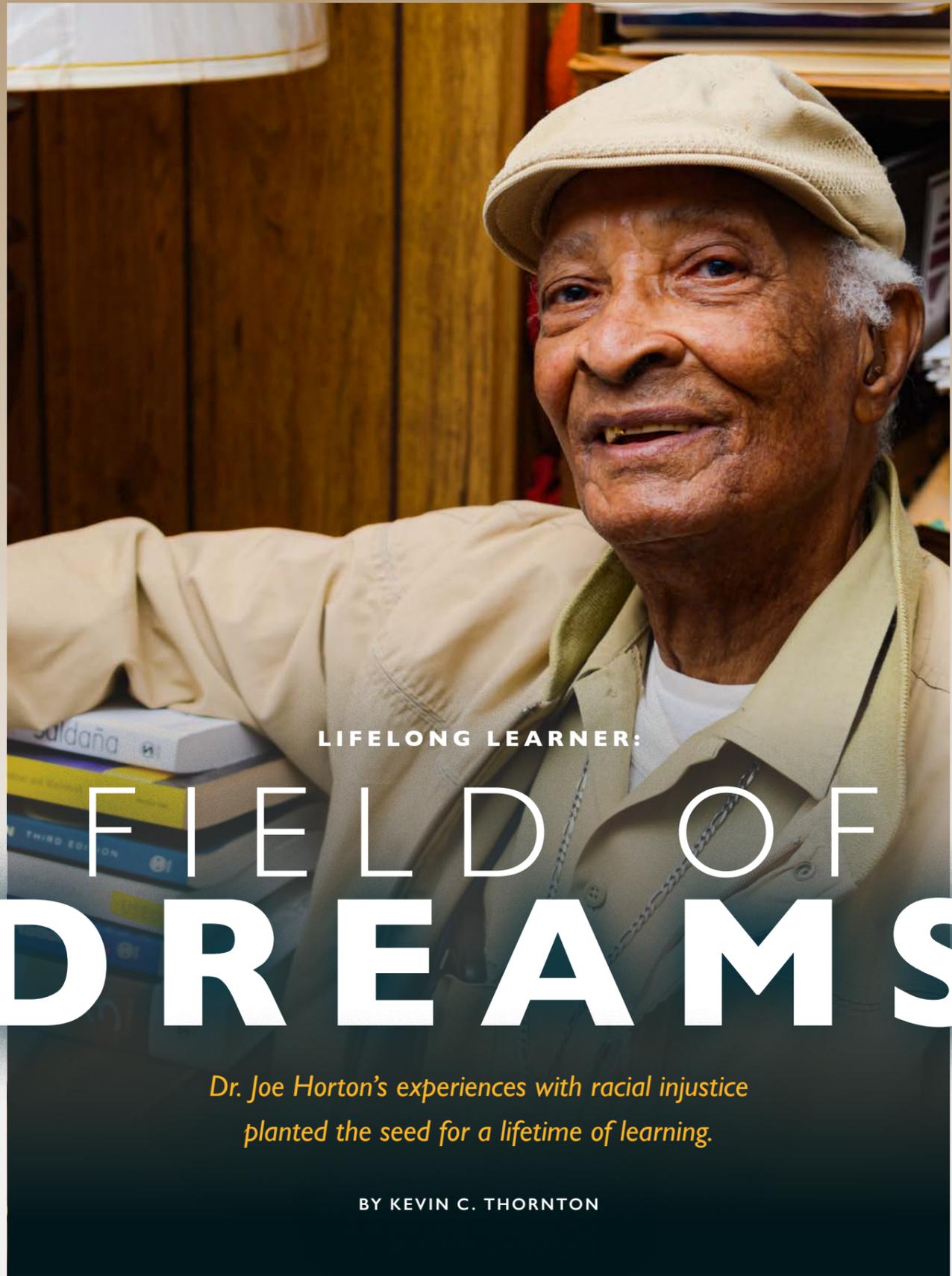
I tell people that I chose Walden! Walden may have selected me, but I chose Walden! I say this because I chose Walden as a place to not only work, but I chose to matriculate through a degree program to ensure I captured the student experience. In 2014, I earned my Executive MBA and I recently completed all the coursework for my MS Dual Degree in Clinical Mental Health Counseling and School Counseling. Walden’s positive social change mission aligned to my philanthropic mission of creating change and being that change. I have always desired to make a difference by helping those in need, promoting excellence, maximizing one’s potential, and being the partner of that person who, too, can be a change agent for others.

**MAKING CONNECTIONS:**

# DR. ROCHELLE “RO” GILBERT

*As dean of Student Affairs, Gilbert looks to expand outreach to support alumni.*

BY JOYCE REINGOLD



LIFELONG LEARNER:

# FIELD OF DREAMS

*Dr. Joe Horton's experiences with racial injustice planted the seed for a lifetime of learning.*

BY KEVIN C. THORNTON

## The extraordinary educational journey and life of Dr. Joe Horton '20, PhD in Public Policy and Administration, began in a farm field in rural Tennessee in the 1930s.

As a child, Horton worked like his father, a sharecropper, and his grandfather, a slave, had always done, his hands deep in the red soil of the South. It was there that he first realized the impact racial injustice was likely to have on his future.

"I witnessed a bus full of white children going off to school while me and my siblings were working in the fields," Horton recalls. "I never lost sight of that child. I didn't understand why we were being denied an education."

It was a harsh lesson learned at an early age, but one that ignited a passion that even at age 92 drives his desire for learning, justice, and positive change.

"Neither my grandfather nor my father could read or write," he notes. "They never even knew if their pay was the correct amount after working the fields all week. I knew early on I needed to know how to read, how to write, and how to count my money."

He's done that, and much, much more.

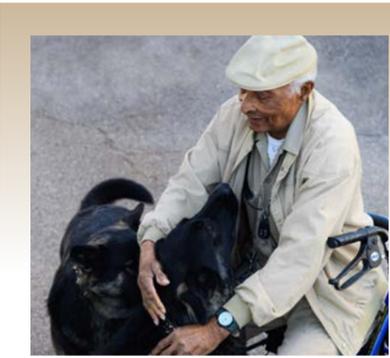
Horton left the fields for good in 1948, joining a brother to relocate to Flint, Michigan. With a week's field pay of \$7 in his pocket, Horton rode to Michigan on a mattress in the back of his brother's pickup truck.

In many ways, Horton's 70-year journey has paralleled the experience of many African Americans in the U.S. And although Horton has experienced racism and injustice on many fronts, he hasn't stopped fighting to achieve the American dream.

Once in Michigan, Horton took odd jobs painting houses and delivering coal. Hoping for a better opportunity, he woke up early every morning to be the first in line at the gates of Flint's auto plants. In 1949, he was hired by General Motors as a janitor.

It was a small step, but working as a janitor allowed Horton to see how the entire plant operated. He quickly

realized that when it came to the way African Americans were treated, Michigan wasn't so far from the fields. "I witnessed similar situations as the ones I saw in Tennessee," he says. "The skilled trades were filled mostly by white men. I knew I couldn't wait any longer to get going on my education."



Horton spends time with his dogs, Slim and Jim.

## A LIFELONG QUEST TO LEARN

Horton took correspondence courses for radio and television repair, spending 20 years working to earn his journeyman's card, in hopes of becoming an electrician. During that same time, he earned his high school diploma. Horton eventually became a welder at General Motors and earned a reputation for being the best of his trade at the plant.

Over the next 60 years, Horton's life would be influenced by two consistent themes: being handicapped by systemic racism and refusing to be defeated by it. He stayed with General Motors for many years, pausing only to serve in the Korean War. After retiring, Horton decided to pursue higher education.

At age 77, the sharecropper's son received his bachelor's from the University of Michigan. At 80, he earned his master's.

Then it was time to take the next—and final—step.

## ACHIEVING HIS DREAMS AT WALDEN

Horton enrolled at Walden University in 2010; he chose Walden, he notes,

because "it had all I wanted in a school." The university offered his desired curriculum, flexible online learning, and access to student support services.

"Pursuing my PhD was the final educational itch in my soul that had started in the fields of Tennessee," he says. It took him 10 years to finish his doctoral work, a decade that proved as challenging as the many others he'd faced. The work was difficult, and in the midst of his studies, in 2015, he lost his beloved wife Dolores.

"I nearly dropped out," he notes, "but failure has never been an option."

In 2020, Horton was awarded his PhD. His dissertation focused on the policies governing older adults' access to home- and community-based services.

"Getting a PhD was the hardest thing I've ever done," he explains, "but not as hard as withstanding the racism I've faced and not as hard as knowing my wife is not with me to complete this journey."

"Racism was a driving force for me to get educated, no matter what else was going on," he continues. "I was a slave to the sharecropping industry, picking cotton and planting corn. I was a victim during my years at General Motors. In the Army, I experienced more hardships. But I believe in the creator, and that helped me redirect myself from thoughts of hatred. I'm peaceful knowing I was not like those who have been so cruel to me and others like me."

As for his doctoral work, he's proud his journey has been an inspiration for others.

"Many of my family members have completed college, and others continue to this day to get an education because of my determination at my age," he says.

The fight for racial justice, he added, has made some strides in his lifetime, but there's more work to be done. But in the end, that boy in the field who watched the wheels of education turn only for others has made significant strides to help himself and others to bloom—and to leave the fields behind.

# UPSKILLING FOR THE WORKFORCE OF TODAY — AND TOMORROW

BY SUSAN LANDRY

WALDEN'S SCHOOL OF LIFELONG LEARNING GIVES ALUMNI  
A FLEXIBLE WAY TO ENHANCE THEIR SKILL SETS AND MEET  
THE DEMANDS OF A CONSTANTLY CHANGING WORLD.

The concept of lifelong learning has always been woven into the fabric of Walden. Since the university's founding in 1970, Walden leaders, faculty members, and students have embraced the belief that learning doesn't stop with a formal education or degree. Rather, it's an ongoing process that helps us adapt to a changing world, address novel challenges, and bring innovation to our organizations and communities.

Walden's School of Lifelong Learning, launched in 2019, supports the continued growth and success of our alumni with targeted, à la carte educational offerings. "Beyond our 80-plus degree programs, we offer shorter-term, skills-based learning that's valuable in so many industries," says Wendy Lin, senior director of product management at Walden. "You might not have the time or resources right now to pursue another degree. But you can upskill and use that knowledge immediately to reach that next level at work and in your career."

## A FOCUS ON IN-DEMAND SKILLS

The School of Lifelong Learning offers hundreds of for-credit individual courses in a variety of areas, including education, business, and counseling. Academic credits may later be applied to a Walden degree program. The school also offers noncredit professional development courses that may lead to continuing education units (CEUs) or micro-credentials (e.g., professional certificates). Students can start these self-paced, online courses at any time.

Last fall, the school launched professional development offerings in addiction counseling, leadership, and data science. "We've been very busy," says Lin. "In 2021, we'll be continuing to invest in curating and offering content in high-demand subject areas. More leadership and communication courses are coming, in addition to courses in nonprofit startup and grant writing."

"Our approach to noncredit, skills-focused instruction is designed for busy professionals," notes Dr. Barry Sugarman, dean of the School of Lifelong Learning. "Participants complete Learning Paths composed of engaging, self-paced micro-courses, fully supporting anywhere, anytime learning."

## A FAMILIAR ONLINE LEARNING EXPERIENCE

The School of Lifelong Learning's user-friendly, e-commerce-style platform makes registering for courses fast and simple. What's more, the supportive, immersive learning experience—threaded with rich-media elements like video and audio—mirrors that of Walden's online degree programs. "All courses are designed by our PhD-level faculty," Lin says. "Although they're not faculty led, they're faculty supported. Students can reach out anytime with questions."

## ADDED ASSURANCE IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

In the midst of a global pandemic and economic upheaval, upskilling is especially relevant. The School of Lifelong Learning provides Walden alumni with a convenient, affordable way to brush up on their knowledge and stay competitive and agile in the changing job market.

"We're constantly asking ourselves, 'How can we better support and engage our graduates when they're not actively pursuing a degree?'" Lin says. "The School of Lifelong Learning is just one more way for us to provide what our alumni need at every step of their journey."



# A NEW WAY TO ADVANCE YOUR SKILLS EXPLORE OUR COURSES

Whether you're looking to deepen your expertise, explore a new subject area, or maintain your license or certification, Walden's School of Lifelong Learning can help you stay resilient in a changing world. And, as a Walden graduate, you're eligible for a **25% TUITION REDUCTION** on any course you take.

Plus, you may be able to transfer the academic credit you earn to a future Walden degree program.

If you're looking to take your skills to the next level, we're committed to supporting your goals. **ENROLL NOW!**

**LIFELONGLEARNING.WALDENU.EDU**

## THE SCHOOL OF LIFELONG LEARNING OFFERS:

- Flexible learning that's 100% online
- 250+ courses from our degree programs
- Access to expert faculty
- An easy, self-service registration process
- Skills-based professional development courses



IN THE FIELD:

# FROM ZIKA TO CORONAVIRUS

*Dr. Aimee Ferraro is educating Peru's most vulnerable populations.*

BY AMELIA WEDEMEYER

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to affect millions globally, our reliance on those caring for patients and working on prevention and treatment is greater than ever. Among those on the front lines is Walden University's own Dr. Aimee Ferraro.

An epidemiologist and senior core faculty member in the Master of Public Health (MPH) program, Ferraro has spent the past 13 years in Peru, conducting public health research on infectious and vector-borne diseases. After arriving in her adopted country, she quickly realized another way she could make an impact: by working with low-income and vulnerable populations.

"The first few years I [was in Peru], I didn't know how to help," she recalls. "I didn't speak a lot of Spanish, and I felt like an inept bystander of systemic discrimination and abandonment of the most vulnerable people in Peru. ... I felt extremely guilty that I wasn't doing something, anything, to share my expertise in communities that obviously needed help."

In 2016, as the Peruvian government failed to adequately respond to the Zika virus epidemic, Ferraro recognized an opportunity to create change. With help from her husband, she developed and implemented a project to educate Peruvians at the greatest risk of contracting Zika—residents of shantytowns on the outskirts of Lima.

"It was extremely difficult work, but so rewarding to know that we were really making a difference in the lives of people who had been ignored for too long," she says.

Now, four years later, as the coronavirus spreads across the globe, Ferraro is once again using her expertise to help



IN THE FIELD

*El Agustino, a shantytown in the heart of Lima, Peru.*



*Ferraro shows a local family how to maintain clean water sources for animals.*

Peruvians most at risk. "The residents of shantytowns cannot easily implement recommendations from the World Health Organization to protect themselves from COVID-19," she explains, highlighting the stark disparity between what most Americans take for granted and the reality for many Peruvian citizens.

"They don't have running water to wash their hands regularly," she points out.



## IN THE FIELD

“They don’t live in homes that allow [for] social distancing. They don’t have refrigerators to stock up on food. They don’t have enough money saved to lock themselves inside for long periods of time.”

“But,” she says, “they can be given a decent face mask and taught how to wear it correctly. They can learn how to increase ventilation in their homes and avoid large gatherings.”

To help the scientific community learn more about how viruses spread among vulnerable populations, Ferraro is working on a study to determine the unique modes of COVID-19 transmission among residents of shantytowns. She hopes her findings can be leveraged to find practical solutions for reducing the risk of the disease among those in poor, crowded communities.



Ferraro conducts a community meeting to educate residents about how to reduce mosquito sites to combat Zika virus.

**“I hope my study will find other solutions for this vulnerable population so I can develop clear risk-communication messages for future public health interventions,” she says.**



## BRINGING CLEAN WATER TO FAMILIES IN NEED

One of the greatest challenges for low-income Peruvian families is lack of access to running water. Ferraro says many of the families she works with depend on water brought into communities in cistern trucks. This system is not only expensive but often results in impure water that can cause diarrheal disease.

So when Ferraro heard of a clean-water initiative through a family friend whose daughter was invested in the cause, she knew she wanted to get involved. She now distributes eco-friendly water bottles with special carbon filters to families who participate in her study.

“I wanted to give them something meaningful that could last over time,” she says. “The water bottles were a perfect solution.”

Ferraro hopes to expand the project to more families and is currently working with an organization to set up a fundraising campaign and distribute the water bottles to more families.

“The other great thing about this initiative is that the organization donates all their proceeds to a nonprofit that works with vulnerable populations on various projects throughout the country,” she says. “It might start with something as simple as a water bottle, but this initiative offers an interesting ripple effect for social change.”

## ACCOLADES: HOLDING OURSELVES TO A HIGHER STANDARD

### THE RICHARD W. RILEY COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND LEADERSHIP



**Dr. Esther Jackson '18**  
*PhD in Education*

Jackson served as a keynote speaker at the 2020 Association for Talent Development (ATD) Conference, where she presented “Times Are Uncertain, but Your Steps to Resilience and Innovations Shouldn’t Be.” She is a dynamic presenter whose topics have included adaptability, emotional intelligence, leadership development, and more. She is national advisor for chapters at ATD and a past president of the ATD Detroit chapter.

### COLLEGE OF HEALTH PROFESSIONS



**Dr. Betty Jean “BJ” Ezell '20, '13**  
*MS in Health Informatics and Doctor of Public Health*

Ezell was recently featured in the *Citrus County Chronicle* for her decision to come out of retirement and earn her doctorate in public health. At 70, Ezell believed her career in healthcare as a nurse and healthcare administrator was done—before the COVID-19 pandemic inspired her to change course. She currently oversees COVID-19 grants as a project officer with the Florida Department of Health.

### COLLEGE OF NURSING



**Dr. Ashley Holmstrom '18, '12**  
*Master of Science in Nursing and Doctor of Nursing Practice*

Holmstrom joined Medical City Frisco as the chief nursing officer in October 2020, after serving as assistant chief nursing officer at San Antonio’s Methodist Hospital Metropolitan. Her appointment follows years of experience in patient care and numerous nursing leadership positions throughout Texas.

### COLLEGE OF MANAGEMENT AND TECHNOLOGY



**Dr. Roy E. Alston '10**  
*PhD in Applied Management and Decision Sciences*

Alston co-founded diversitypop, a mobile app for organizations that delivers diversity training to people on the go. As one of 12 military veterans who created the app, Alston now adds the title of tech founder to a résumé that includes author, combat service veteran with the 82nd Airborne Division during the first Gulf War, and retired Dallas Police Department major.



**Dominic Ford '20**  
*Master of Business Administration (MBA)*

Ford was named the executive director of human resources and community relations for the city of Thomasville, Georgia, in December 2020. Prior to his appointment, he served as Thomasville’s safety, risk, and wellness manager. A resident of Thomasville along with his wife and seven children, Ford began his career with the city 15 years ago as a patrol officer with the police department.



**Tammy Pitts '10**  
*MBA*

Pitts has been named the director of communications for Michigan Nonprofit Association (MNA). She has an extensive background in media relations and brand management, and most recently served as the communications editor for the dean of international studies and programs at Michigan State University.



# NEW YEAR



# NEW GEAR

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**DESMOND PITTMAN '12**  
EDUCATION SPECIALIST (EDS)  
AND MS IN EDUCATION

Featured on page 18.

