Education Affiliates Proudly Announces 2019 Circle of Excellence Award Winners

**CAMPUS PRESIDENT**
- Cathy Maxwell ........................................ Denver
- Paul Ferrise ........................................ Queens
- Sean London ............................................ Towson
- Brad Barber ........................................ Georgia Driving Academy
- Wendy Butler ........................................ Cincinnati

**DEAN OF EDUCATION**
- Heather Powell ........................................ Pittsburgh
- Chris Schnupp ........................................ Staten Island & Queens
- Raymon Spottsville ................................ Smyrna
- Keith Meyers ......................................... Lawrenceville
- Amanda Ross .......................................... Pensacola

**DEAN OF NURSING**
- Dr. Lisa Carwie ........................................ Pensacola
- Kimberly Pilker ........................................ Erie
- Rebecca Ford .......................................... Salt Lake City
- Dr. Z. Joanna Hill .................................... Denver

**FINANCIAL AID**
- Alexander Lewis ..................................... Montgomery
- Irena Hoxha .......................................... Queens
- Mary Ricaud .......................................... Bataon Rouge
- Jordan Leicher ......................................... Indianapolis
- Quandra Hamilton .................................. Landover
- Christina Taylor ..................................... Salt Lake City

**CAREER SERVICES**
- Antonia Forney ...................................... Pensacola
- Bethany Wlotzko .................................... Cuyahoga Falls
- Veronica Roldan ..................................... Cutler Bay
- Jarrod Wilson ........................................ Towson
- Whitney Fritts ....................................... Birmingham

**BUSINESS OFFICE MANAGER**
- Taylor Bennett ........................................ Port St. Lucie
- Maria Quinteros ....................................... Houston North
- Suzanne Swallow ................................. Salt Lake City
- Amber Jowers ........................................ Dothan
- Brian O’Hare .......................................... Wayne

**REGISTRAR**
- Amanda Vance ........................................ Indianapolis
- Kyle Hutchinson ..................................... Cincinnati
- Hannah Leonard-Hinds ........................... Smyrna
- Andrea Behr .......................................... Centerville
- Alexandra Freeman ................................ Pensacola

**LEARNING RESOURCE CENTER**
- Jennifer Eatough .................................... Salt Lake City
- Lorenzo Gunn ........................................ Birmingham

*Please join me in congratulating the EA Class of 2019 Circle Of Excellence winners!*

*My ‘A-ha’ moment today was reading these diverse and inspiring bios from people who truly enjoy what they do and are very good at it.*

*We all are changing people’s lives every day!*

- Duncan Anderson

*(winners list continues inside)*
2019 Circle of Excellence Winners (continued)

FACULTY

Jamika Austin ........................................................... Birmingham
Rhonda Ritchey ........................................................... Birmingham
Kaleigh Holt ................................................................. Centerville
Randall Marshall .......................................................... Centerville
Karla Norris .............................................................. Forty Fort
Carl Roy .............................................................................. Houston North
Teresa Hudgins ........................................................... Houston North
Natasha Holden ........................................................... Houston South
Lisa Stephens .............................................................. Indianapolis
Asma Hijazi .............................................................. Landover
Quintin Womack .......................................................... Landover
Kathleen Ryan .............................................................. Lawrenceville
Thomas Gan .............................................................. Lawrenceville
Dr. Pamala Fair ........................................................... Nashville
Pamela Brown .............................................................. Nashville
Catherine Mercer ...................................................... Orange Park
Robin Jefferson ........................................................... Orange Park
Lisa Pate .............................................................................. Pensacola
Nicole Bennett .............................................................. Pensacola
Dr. Thomas French ........................................................ Phoenix
Helen Blazanin .............................................................. Pittsburgh
Mark Turpin ................................................................. Pittsburgh
Julee Weston .............................................................. Salt Lake City
Robert Matheny .......................................................... Salt Lake City
Kristin O’Donnell .......................................................... Scranton
Marieta Valbuena ........................................................ Wayne

NURSING FACULTY

Tara Garrett .............................................................. Centerville
Lisa Allen ................................................................. Cincinnati
Betty Bogart .............................................................. Cutler Bay
Bryant Pham .............................................................. Denver
Connie Morris .............................................................. Orange Park
Wilson Jativa .............................................................. Orange Park
Tina Taylor ................................................................. Pensacola
Sonia Brown .............................................................. Port St. Lucie
Amy Christopher ...................................................... Salt Lake City
Jonathan Budzlak ........................................................ Scranton

ADMISSIONS DIRECTORS

Tim Tubbs ................................................................. Cincinnati
Blanca Paulino ........................................................... Cutler Bay
John Heckman ............................................................ Houston North
Anna Alvarez .............................................................. Port St. Lucie
Lynn Jones ....................................................................... Mobile
Chris Brown .............................................................. Centerville
Russell Washington .................................................. Baltimore AH
Tamika Clinton ........................................................... Baltimore Trades
Carla Johnson .............................................................. Baton Rouge
Jerome Ruffin .............................................................. Birmingham
Emily Maggard ........................................................... Centerville
Angelik Smith .............................................................. Cincinnati
Miosha Schofield .......................................................... Cincinnati
Twyla Penn .............................................................. Cincinnati
Denise Moore ............................................................ Columbia
Laryssa Dombroski ........................................................ Columbus
Tracy Main .............................................................. Columbus
Lisa Strout ............................................................... Cookeville
Ingrid Leon La Rosa ........................................................ Cutler Bay
Stacy Gauding .............................................................. Cuyahoga Falls
Carla Thomas .............................................................. Cuyahoga Falls
Bo Walker ................................................................. Dothan
Janiai Baines .............................................................. Essington
Susan Kinsman .............................................................. Essington
Amelia Pren .............................................................. Houston North
Teresa Zabala .............................................................. Houston North
Sylvia Garza .............................................................. Houston South
Ryan Chavis .............................................................. Houston South
Damilola King .............................................................. Houston South
Lakisha Moore .............................................................. Landover
Daniella Williams .......................................................... Landover
Shari Pratt ................................................................. Lawrenceville
Sandra Wilson ............................................................. Lawrenceville
Terrance Carper ........................................................... Lester
Clarina Harris .............................................................. Lester
Zerick Bradley ............................................................. Mobile
Adriana Raga .............................................................. Mobile
Pamela Boswell .......................................................... Norfolk
Kimberly Deaton ........................................................ Norfolk
Lynnette Blow .............................................................. Orange Park
Carolyn James .............................................................. Pensacola
Charlotte Ruiz .............................................................. Pensacola
Kathleen Devey .......................................................... Pittsburgh
Natalie Dougherty ........................................................ Pittsburgh
Noah Verk ................................................................. Pittsburgh
Diana Martinez .......................................................... Port St. Lucie
Brian Siringo .............................................................. Port St. Lucie
Gil Powell ................................................................. Richmond
Monica Brown ........................................................... Richmond
Debra Huckstep .......................................................... Salt Lake City
Rhonda Anderson ........................................................ Salt Lake City
Joe Maldonato ............................................................. Scranton
LaTicia Gibbs .............................................................. Smyrna
Laponda McArthur ........................................................ Towson
Jacqueline Vermeulen ...................................................... Towson
Maria Elena Romero ........................................................ Wayne
Paul Ferrise

Paul Ferrise is campus president of St. Paul's School of Nursing in Queens, New York. Paul joined EA a year ago and has 40 years of experience in higher education. He graduated St. Bonaventure University with a master's degree in English literature. Paul plays a counseling role by clearing “obstacles from a student’s path so they can focus on their coursework and succeed.” He says his nomination for the Circle of Excellence honor is a result of “the positive impact I have made on improving student outcomes and student success at the Queens campus.” Much of the success of the Queens campus stems from its focus on the needs of adult student, Paul says. “We specialize in addressing the needs of the adult learner,” he says. “Everything we do is geared to helping an adult learner succeed.” Paul has three daughters and 10 grandchildren, and describes himself as a “huge Philadelphia sports fan, especially the Eagles.”

Brad Barber

Brad Barber serves as the campus president for Georgia Driving Academy. He holds a Bachelor of Science in Chemistry and a Master of Business Administration. With 25 years in education supporting more than 14,000 students, Brad shares one “A-ha!” moment that sticks out: “I had a gentleman going through a program that had come from a homeless shelter… We provided him with some used luggage so he would not have to use a trash bag while he was training in the truck with the company trainer,” he says. “About 4 months later, he came back by the school with his new company truck and a big smile.” He says there always will be a need for career schools like GDA “to provide training in areas that do not require a college degree. Programs are geared toward high demand jobs that yield employment in the field.” Brad has three grown children and six grandchildren.

Wendy Butler

Wendy Butler serves as the Fortis College Cincinnati Campus President. She received her master’s of business administration from Indiana Wesleyan University and her Bachelor of Business Administration from Taylor University. When asked about her “A-Ha!” experiences she recounts her joy watching students become graduates, sharing that “seeing them so excited and optimistic when they come to our campus to watching them pick up their cap and gown, I am so proud to be a part of it!” The Newport, Rhode Island native says career colleges provide encouragement, support, and an open door. Wendy says her favorite part of her job is her chance to change lives every day.

Sean London

Sean London is campus president of Fortis Institute in Towson, Maryland. Sean is a native of Brooklyn, New York, who attended Miami-Dade Community College, the University of Montana, and Duke University. Sean, who joined EA 14 years ago, has 23 years of experience working for career schools. Asked why he thinks he won the Circle of Excellence honor, he joked, “I’ve been around so long they figured they had to give me something.” But seriously, Sean speaks from personal experience when he extols the virtues of career schools like Fortis Institute. “As a graduate of two career schools, I have firsthand experience of their value,” he says. “Not only do we serve an underserved population, we train for jobs that are in high demand.” The best part of his job is the opportunity to work with young people. “The bulk are good kids just looking for a path.” Sean has six chickens, three goats, three dogs, two cats, a parrot, a parakeet, and a donkey.
Cathy Maxwell

Cathy Maxwell serves as campus president of the Denver College of Nursing. A Chicago native, Cathy joined EA three years ago and has 23 years of experience in the field of education. She earned a master’s degree in business administration and a Doctorate in Adult and Continuing Education from Northern Illinois University. Cathy says her recurring “A-Ha!” experiences at the Denver College of Nursing come from “helping students who never thought that they would get into a nursing program and realize their dream of becoming a registered nurse.” Cathy says she believes she won the Circle of Excellence honor “because the college has worked very hard to maintain a strong reputation in the community and around the country.” She tries to help students who might not otherwise succeed by providing “a friendly and positive environment where people want to work and students want to learn.” Cathy has five children and three grandchildren, and her hobbies include hiking, biking and other types of exercise, as well as reading and traveling.

Keith Meyers

Keith Meyers is dean of education at Fortis Institute in Lawrenceville, New Jersey. He has been an EA employee for two years and his experience in the education field spans a total of 13 years. He has a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration with a concentration in business management. His biggest “A-ha!” epiphanies happen when successful students thank him for his help after they graduate. He helps students overcome obstacles with a positive attitude, even when disciplinary action is involved, and with his belief that “failure is not the opposite of success, it’s part of it.” Indeed, he says the best part of his job is seeing students overcome obstacles in their path to graduation: “It’s often not the straight-A students but rather the students who are more challenging, or have struggles, that make me feel proudest.” He has a three-year-old son named Jack, five-month-old daughter named Gemma, and a nine-year-old dog, Phoebe.

Heather Powell

Heather Powell is associate campus president and director of education at All-State Career School in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Heather joined EA four and a half years ago and has 20 years of experience in education. Heather has a master’s degree in curriculum and instruction of adult learners. She said All-State Career and other career schools serve many students well and do so economically: “We offer education in … trades that are very lucrative at a price that won’t leave them in debt for life.” Heather says she is a believer in constant contact with students: “I touch base with the majority of our students daily.” Heather has four children: Alec (24), Logen (18), Natalie (17) and Brynn (2.5), whom she calls “my surprise blessing.” She loves her German Shepherd, Mahoney, and University of Michigan sports.

Christopher Schnupp

Christopher Schnupp serves as area dean of education at St. Paul’s School of Nursing in Staten Island, New York. Christopher has 10 years of experience working in higher education, including five years as a dean. A native of Easton, Pennsylvania, Christopher has a law degree, a master’s in library science, and a bachelor’s in history and education. His “A-ha!” experiences recur when students reach the finish line. “It’s at or after graduation, when a student has been able to secure a job and will let us know how impactful our academic and support services have been.” To keep students on track, Christopher says he monitors them for signs of off-campus issues. What might appear to be an academic problem for a student has roots in “more of a non-academic issue,” he says. “But it requires that someone listen to what the student is going through.” Christopher has two children, nine-month-old Abigail and three-year-old Caleb.
Raymon Spottsville

Raymon Spottsville is dean of education at Fortis College in Smyrna, Georgia. Raymon, who joined EA four years ago, has 27 years of experience in education. He has a Bachelor of Science in Biomedical Engineering and a master’s degree in business administration. His on-the-job “A-Ha!” experience includes the realization that “students love structure,” he says. “When they learn in an environment that holds them accountable to high standards, they will step up to the challenge to be successful.” Asked why he was selected for inclusion in the Circle of Excellence, Raymon replied, “Fortis is a family. I instill family values, traditions and expectation in all that I do in my job.” He says career schools like Fortis College excel in educating “first-generation college students, second-chance students, and students who want to make an immediate difference in their life and the life of someone dear to them.” Raymon says the best part of his job is “making a difference in someone’s life every day I go to work.” Raymon and his wife of 22 years, Tamara, have an 18-year-old son, Terrell, and an 11-year-old son, Trenton.

Amanda Ross

Amanda Ross is dean of education at Fortis Institute in Pensacola, Florida. She joined EA seven months ago and previously spent nine years working for career colleges and nine years teaching middle school and high school students. Amanda has a Master of Arts in Education and Human Development and a Bachelor of Arts in Archaeology. Her hometown is New Orleans. One of her biggest “A-ha!” realizations is that her role transcends day-to-day administration. “My role is so much more than administrative, it’s to help nurture and guide students along an unfamiliar patch,” she says. Fortis and other career colleges “fill a niche that would otherwise go unfilled,” Amanda says. “Our students are typically not as successful at more traditional schools.” She ranks her role as a change agent as the best part of her job: “I like that I have had a positive impact on the lives of students and their families.”

Dr. Zoe JoAnna Hill

Zoe JoAnna Hill serves as dean of nursing education programs at the Denver College of Nursing. Zoe, who joined EA nearly 11 years ago, has worked for more than 20 years in nursing education. She also practiced for 15 years as a family nurse practitioner. She has a Doctorate in Nursing from the University of South Florida, a master’s degree in nursing from the University of Tampa, and a bachelor’s degree from Dartmouth University. Her recurring “A-ha!” experiences include watching her nursing students blossom intellectually. “It is absolutely amazing to see a student connect the dots while in the program,” she says. Student success is rarely a clear path to graduation, so Zoe says she offers practical advice to improve student performance through better study habits and test-taking skills and the application of classroom lessons to practice. Zoe has one son, Ricky, and in her free time, she and her husband are working on the production of a collection of sacred and secular acapella music.
Dr. Lisa Carwie

Lisa Carwie is dean of nursing at Fortis Institute in Pensacola, Florida. Lisa has spent nine years with EA and previously worked 34 years as a registered nurse in women’s services and acute care. Her experience in nursing education spans 22 years. Lisa has a Doctorate in Instructional Design and Development, plus master’s, bachelor’s and associate degrees in nursing. She says her on-the-job “A-ha!” moments happen “when a student has made a difference in a patient’s life … and they realize how important they can be.” Career schools like Fortis provide more personal attention than large universities, Lisa said. “Our students have names, not numbers, and I think that helps our student population … to succeed,” she said, and the Pensacola campus of Fortis Institute “does an excellent job of supporting students who have found themselves without a stable support system.” Lisa has two daughters, ages 26 and 19, and shares her home with a cat named Squeak and a dog named Spencer.

Dr. Tina Taylor

Tina Taylor is a nursing faculty member and academic coach at Fortis Institute in Pensacola, Florida. Her hometown is Bayou la Batre, Alabama. Before joining EA four years ago, Tina accumulated 24 years of experience as a registered nurse (RN) and six years as an RN instructor. She has a Doctorate in Instructional Design and Development, a Master of Science in Nursing and a Bachelor of Science in Nursing. Tina says her best “A-ha!” moments occur when a student discovers practical applications of classroom lessons, “and it all comes together.” She says career colleges help provide a professional path, not just a career, to students who put in the work: “Success is all about effort and perseverance.” Tina has a son, Josh.

Rebecca Ford

Rebecca Ford is dean of nursing at Fortis College in Salt Lake City, Utah. Rebecca joined EA eight years ago. Prior to her tenure at Fortis College, she was the dean of nursing for another program in Utah. Rebecca has a master’s degree in nursing, with a certification (NHCE, Nursing Health Care Educator) focus in education. She said her individual Circle of Excellence honor reflects collective talent and hard work: “It is a dedicated and talented group of committed faculty and staff that makes this program a success.” Two graduates of her program recently returned to report they passed the NCLEX test (National Council Licensure Examination), and to thank her for her support during their days as students. She says they thanked her for her “encouragement during the self-doubt times, and for being a ‘family’ to them. They both told me that, had it not been for such a support system here, they would not have been successful.” Rebecca has two kids, ages 33 and 30, and two grandchildren who are eight years old and four. She says, “my hobbies are to spend time with [my grandchildren] as much as I can.”

Tara Garrett

Tara Garrett serves as an academic coach for nursing students at Fortis College in Centerville, Ohio. Tara has a Master of Science in Nursing and worked one and a half years as a pediatric nurse care manager. She joined EA a year and a half ago. Her “A-ha!” moments unfold when she sees students interact with patients for the first time and apply classroom lessons. Tara says she is a promoter of Fortis College and other career schools because they “give non-traditional learners an opportunity to better themselves.” The best part of her job, Tara says, is “encouraging students and watching them develop into nurses before my eyes.” Tara is an animal lover who has two cats, three dogs and 11 horses, and enjoys spending time in her barn and racing harness horses.
Bryant Pham

Bryant Pham is an assistant professor at the Denver College of Nursing. Prior to joining the team one and a half years ago, Bryant was an assistant professor at the University of Colorado. When asked about his “A-ha!” moments, Bryant shares that he works “to communicate with students on an equal level. When equality is established, students tend to begin to think critically for themselves and begin to synthesize information rather than regurgitate it.” Bryant says he loves learning new things and that his free time is spent “learning about anything and everything I can get my hands on,” including longboarding, motorcycle riding, eating contests, historical research, and serving as a Certified Instructor for the American Sport Karate Association.

Jonathan Budzlak

Jonathan Budziak is a nursing instructor at Fortis Institute in Scranton, Pennsylvania and brings plenty of professional experience to the classroom. Jonathan has worked as a nurse for 30 years. He has an associate degree in nursing and a Bachelor of Science in Biology. His “A-ha!” experiences at Fortis unfold “when a student who doesn’t understand something at first, and feels they’ll never get it, ends up not only knowing it but explaining it to other students. I love that the most.” Putting classroom lessons into practice is a key outcome that Jonathan pursues. “Book work is important but being able to carry it from the classroom to the clinical and lab setting is a whole new ballgame,” he says. Jonathan has been married for 19 years to his wife Gail Ann. They have two dogs and a parrot.

Dr. Sonia Brown

Sonia Brown is a nursing faculty member at Fortis Institute in Port St. Lucie, Florida. Before joining the nursing faculty over a year ago, Sonia spent 12 years as a nursing instructor, using her more than 30 years of nursing experience to serve as a resource to student nurses. She says career colleges provide students the opportunity to achieve personal and professional goals that might have been deferred because of life circumstances. Asked why she thinks she was nominated for recognition in the Circle of Excellence, the Royal Palm Beach native says it was because of her commitment to the success of each student: “I avail myself as a mentor to promote the highest professional standard of a nurse.” Sonia has one daughter and a grandson.

Connie Morris

Connie Morris serves as a registered nurse (RN) instructor at Fortis College in Orange Park, Florida. Connie, who joined EA nearly five years ago, started teaching practical nursing students in 2005 and RN students in 2013. She holds a master’s degree in nursing education from Walden University. Connie loves an underdog. “Each of my students has a special story,” she says, “but I am drawn to the ones with the hardships and roadblocks that keep coming up in their lives. But it doesn’t stop them from reaching their goals.” To keep students headed toward goals, Connie says she offers them “a listening ear, patience and encouragement.” But Connie says she avoids coddling students academically: “We have good programs here, but they are not easy,” she says. “We do not hand out degrees.” Connie has two adult sons plus two grandsons and three granddaughters who range in age from two to 16 years. She also has two cats and enjoys boating and riding a motorcycle with her husband.
Alexandra Freeman

Alexandra Freeman serves as registrar at Fortis Institute in Pensacola, Florida. She joined EA almost eight years ago, and she spent five years working as an admissions representative at the Pensacola campus before her tenure as registrar began. She graduated Florida State University with a bachelor’s degree. Alexandra says her “A-ha!” experiences come from the personal moments she has with her students: “I love working with students on an individual basis. Through these experiences I have developed a deeper love for my students and their experience during school.” It’s her personal approach that earned her a spot on the Circle of Excellence: “I believe my students know how much I care about them and I think it shows in their performance.” Alexandra says her “A-ha!” experiences at Fortis Institute include offering support to students who face obstacles that center on scheduling and attendance: “Students will come in and tell me why they haven’t been attending school or may even be thinking of dropping out … After they tell me about the problems they are having, most times we are able to figure out a solution together.” Alexandra enjoys spending leisure time at the beach with friends and family. She is married and has a daughter, Georgia Kate, and shares her home with a Great Pyrenees named Jolene.

Amanda Vance

Amanda Vance is the registrar and compliance administrator at Fortis College in Indianapolis, Indiana. She has a bachelor’s degree in criminal justice and public safety management. Amanda joined EA about 18 months ago and has a total of five years of experience in the education field. She says her on-the-job “A-ha!” moments happen at graduation ceremonies: “I love graduation. It’s nice to see students get excited and enjoy their moment to celebrate.” Amanda says she often helps students with family responsibilities to stay on a path to graduation by “assisting them with class times to meet their work schedules [and] completing verifications to help them receive child care.” The best part of her job, Amanda says, is working with her boss, Dr. James Cox, because he is “highly motivating, upbeat, and he always has his door open to talk.” Amanda is a pet parent with a chocolate Labrador named Hurley.

Kyle Hutchinson

Kyle Hutchinson serves as registrar at Fortis College in Cincinnati, Ohio. Kyle, who joined EA nine years ago, has an associate degree in applied business. He had an “A-ha!” experience when he first saw a celebration of student success at Fortis College. “The first time I attended graduation,” Kyle recalls, “I really got a sense of the students’ accomplishment.” He says he supports students individually “with their schedules, grades, accounts or policy questions.” Kyle believes he won the Circle of Excellence honor “because my boss recognizes my dedication to my job and our campus.” Career schools like Fortis College succeed by providing “a more affordable and faster option,” compared with a traditional four-year university. Kyle has a daughter, two dogs and a cat.

Amy Christopher

Amy Christopher is a nursing professor at Fortis College in Salt Lake City, Utah. She holds an associate degree in nursing and a master’s degree in nursing education. Her “A-ha!” experiences come from the personal moments she has with her students: “I love working with students on an individual basis. Through these experiences I have developed a deeper love for my students and their experience during school.” It’s her personal approach that earned her a spot on the Circle of Excellence: “I believe my students know how much I care about them and I think it shows in their performance.” Amy has four children ages 21, 19, 16 and 2 and two dogs. In her free time, she races cars with her husband.
Hannah Hinds

Hanna Hinds serves as registrar of Fortis College in Smyrna, Georgia. She joined EA nearly four years ago and has a total of 25 years of experience in the education field. She graduated Kaplan University with a Bachelor of Arts and got her high school diploma at the Lumen Cordium Catholic School in Bedford, Ohio. She says her “A-ha!” experiences come from watching students overcome fear of failure and go on to graduate. Hanna believes a caring attitude led to her nomination for inclusion in the Circle of Excellence. “I show the students that I care about their educational goals.” Career schools like Fortis College are a vital “stepping stone” for students unsuited for traditional four-year universities, Hanna says, and graduation ceremonies are the best part of her job, because watching students receive their diplomas “is truly priceless.” Hanna has one son and two grandsons.

Amber Jowers

Amber Jowers serves as business manager and registrar at Fortis Institute in Dothan, Alabama. She joined EA seven years ago. Previously, she spent seven years working for Fortis College, starting in 2012, and in the business office of R&L Construction, LLC, from 2008 to 2011. Her hometown is West Palm Beach, Florida. Her “A-ha!” moments at Fortis Institute happen when students get their diplomas at graduation ceremonies: “Seeing them achieve their goals makes it all worthwhile.” Amber reminds struggling students who consider quitting college “not only why they started in the first place but also who is watching them and how important it is to keep pushing to reach their goals.” She says career colleges like Fortis Institute work well for students who want to finish faster than traditional colleges permit, who want to focus on a particular expertise, and find employment promptly after graduation. Amber says the best part of her job is collaboration: “What I like most is being part of a team.”

Andrea Behr

Andrea Behr serves as registrar at Fortis College in Centerville, Ohio. Andrea, who has held her current position for 11 years, has 18 years of experience in education. She graduated Indiana Wesleyan University with a Bachelor of Science in Management, and she has an Associate of Science in Paralegal Training from Fortis. Andrea says her “A-ha!” moments at work happen when graduates return with gratitude: “It’s always a great feeling – and a reminder of why we do what we do – when students stop by after graduation to say thank you for helping them.” She says when she offers assistance to students who are struggling, “I help with their schedule, attendance, questions and concerns. I fill out documentation necessary for them to get assistance such as childcare [or] food stamps.” Andrea credits career colleges like Fortis College for the individual attention they provide for students: “Small class sizes are beneficial, making it more personable than just a number.” She has a son who is two and a half years old and spends her free time doing outdoor activities and bowling.

Natasha Holden

Natasha Holden is an allied health program director at Fortis College, Houston South. Before joining the team at Fortis College, the New Orleans native amassed 26 years of experience in healthcare and hospital systems, including 17 years in medical office management. She says career colleges address a range of student needs and abilities through programmatic support, personalized learning, and a focus on each student’s learning style. Asked why she thinks she was nominated for recognition in the Circle of Excellence, the nine year teaching veteran said it was because she takes her responsibilities as a program director personally: “I am compelled to not only provide opportunities for students to achieve their dreams, but to provide learning and growth opportunities for staff as well.” Natasha has two sons, two daughters, and two dogs.
Kristin O’Donnell

Kristen O’Donnell is a dental hygiene faculty member at Fortis College in Scranton, Pennsylvania. Kristen has been employed by EA for four years. She previously worked as a dental hygienist in private practice and taught German to students in high school and junior high school. Kristen has a Bachelor of Science in Secondary Education/German with a History minor. Her “A-ha!” moments recur as students learn new concepts and techniques, and the proverbial “light bulbs” in their minds are illuminated. “It is a constant reminder that this is why I am an educator,” she says. Just being available is central to her support of students who are struggling. “I make myself available to students,” she says, “and make it known that my teaching time doesn’t stop when I step out of lecture.” Kristen has three kids and shares their home with a Standard Poodle.

Dr. Thomas French

Dr. Thomas French is a clinic supervisor at Fortis College in Phoenix, Arizona. With over 40 years as a general dentist, he received his DDS from the University of Illinois. His “A-Hal” is the moment the curriculum clicks for students, comparing it to the moment a light bulb goes on. He says career colleges offer more personalized attention, saying “I feel that our graduates are the best prepared students in Arizona.” Thomas is most proud of his students’ stellar performances on the national and clinical boards. Asked why he thinks she was nominated for recognition in the Circle of Excellence, he shares his dedication to student enrichment and extra effort given to those struggling. Thomas has two dogs and enjoys the range of outdoor activities offered by the Arizona climate.

Lisa Pate

Lisa Pate is massage therapy program director at Fortis Institute in Pensacola, Florida. She has been an employee of EA for 12 years. Lisa previously spent 16 years working as a practitioner and instructor of massage therapy. She completed a 650-hour massage therapy program and is pursuing an associate degree. One of her students provided a major “A-ha!” revelation. “Recently, we had a student with a learning disability pass his licensure exam,” Lisa said. “This was through hard work and determination on the part of the student as well as the faculty and the staff.” She says career schools like Fortis help their students by enabling them to “focus on a profession that they love and get into a career field in a short amount of time.” Lisa says she helps students overcome obstacles by reminding them that success is “the only option. Eventually, [it] rubs off on them.”

Teresa Hudgins

Teresa Hudgins, a clinical instructor at Fortis Institute, Houston North, absolutely loves when her students get hired. “Hospitals only get so much room per year,” she notes, which makes the hiring process quite rewarding. Teresa, who has a certificate in surgical technology and 10 years of experience, has been working with EA for more than three years. She values the benefits that Fortis offers students, including the flexible schedules with both daytime and nighttime classes and smaller settings that make learning more conducive. Teresa enjoys seeing the excitement of her students when they succeed, and things fall into place for them. “I remember that feeling and it’s a good one,” she says. She is a proud grandmother of seven.
Nicole Bennett

Nicole Bennett serves as cosmetology program director at Fortis Institute in Pensacola, Florida. She has been an EA employee for the last four and a half years. She previously worked 19 years as a cosmetologist and four years as an instructor. She has a cosmetology diploma and an associate degree in specialized technology for cosmetology education and salon management. Her hometown is Erie, Pennsylvania. Nicole says students who take risks to advance are the source of her biggest on-the-job revelations: “Every time a student is able to accomplish something outside their comfort zone, I have an A-ha! experience.” Asked how she helps students who are struggling, she said, “Listen, listen, listen! For most students, this is their safe place, so if I didn’t listen to them, they might give up.” Nicole has four children.

Marieta Valbuena

Marieta Valbuena is the dental assisting program chair at Fortis Institute in Wayne, New Jersey. She has been an EA employee for six years. Her professional background includes working as an adjunct faculty member at St. Paul School of Nursing in Staten Island, New York. Marieta has a Bachelor of Science in Dentistry. “I feel that I have a great influence in changing the lives of my students,” she says, citing the strength of career schools to teach “real world skills.” Marieta has three sons, two graduates of a business program and one graduate of a dental hygiene program. She also has a seven-year-old Shih Tzu named Prudence. Marieta loves to sing and serves as a Eucharistic minister in her church and as a member of the choir.

Jamika Austin

Jamika Austin is a clinical laboratory instructor at Fortis Institute in Birmingham, Alabama. Jamika, who joined EA two years ago, has multiple certified skill sets, including clinical medical assistant, phlebotomy technician, basic life support instructor and patient account representative. She has an associate degree in science. Jamika says her “A-ha!” moments at Fortis Institute unfold when graduates “come back to share their success stories.” Contributors to such success stories include class sizes smaller than those at four-year universities, she says. Jamika says her approach to helping students stay on a successful path is to “set expectations and hold my students accountable.” She also says she loves to motivate, strives to improve as an instructor, and enjoys helping others “to survive in the world of allied healthcare.” Jamika has a 17-year-old daughter and loves to spend time with her family. Her hobbies are bicycling and other types of exercise.

Dr. Pamala Fair

Dr. Pamala Fair is medical laboratory program director at Fortis Institute in Nashville, Tennessee. Pamala, who joined EA four years ago, has 25 years of experience in her field. She has a Doctorate and a Master of Science in Clinical Health Science and a Bachelor of Science in Clinical Laboratory Science. She promotes career schools like Fortis Institute as a great fit for many students providing “a guaranteed job with the education they will receive.” Pamala says the best part of her job is helping students achieve their goals, partly by striving to “give them the feeling that they belong, they are needed, and they will excel.” Pamala says she brings plenty of practical experience to the classroom: “I have been a laboratory director in a clinical setting, and I know the types of employees needed in a clinical lab.” Pamala has a daughter, Saniya.
Carl Roy

Carl Roy is the HVAC/R program director at Fortis Institute, Houston North. He joined EA about five and a half years ago after a 37-year career in the heating, ventilation, air conditioning and refrigeration business. He is a Texas-licensed HVAC/R contractor. Carl says his “A-ha!” experiences at Fortis Institute happen when he introduces his trade to students: “When you talk about the HVAC/R career field and show them how much money they can earn, students become really excited.” After they enroll, students get ample attention from Carl. “I keep the fire burning under them at all times,” he says. “We talk about real-life issues and how to handle stress positively… I love to excite people about life.” Carl has four children, and he says his hobbies are fishing, reading, listening to music and “working on my HVAC/R retention.”

Asma Hijazi

Asma Hijazi serves as clinical coordinator/faculty at Fortis College in Landover, Maryland. She joined EA nearly six years ago. Her teaching experience spans eight years and she has worked in the clinical laboratory science field for 13 years. She has a Master of Science in Laboratory Management and a bachelor’s degree in clinical laboratory science. Asma says her greatest on-the-job “A-ha!” was meeting “one particular student who came from an extremely troubled background but was determined to attend school.” She succeeded and her graduation was “the biggest turning point in my career,” says Asma, who took personal inspiration from the student’s dauntless determination. Listening to students talk about their struggles has an academic payoff, he says, because they are “more prone to attending class and, overall, doing better in their class.” Witnessing positive outcome is the best part of his job. “I love when a student comes back with a success story,” Asma says. In her spare time, she loves shopping and reading.

Quintin Womack

Quintin Womack is engaged in EFDA instruction at Fortis College in Landover, Maryland. Quintin joined EA three years ago and was lead dental technologist for Tender Touch Dental/Conley Family Dentistry for 10 years. Not only is he an alumni of Fortis College in Landover, his educational background includes attending a U.S. Navy combat nursing school. He says his teaching strategy emphasizes “prior-class recaps, to make sure each student is retaining the information presented.” Quintin promotes schools like Fortis College as a no-nonsense conduit to a career: “It allows a great pathway for students to complete college in a reasonable time frame.” Quintin’s hobbies include traveling to theme parks and aquariums.

Kathleen Ryan

Kathleen Ryan serves as medical assistant instructor at Fortis College in Lawrenceville, New Jersey. Kathleen, who joined EA two years ago spent 20 years working as a medical assistant and has nine years of experience as a medical assistant instructor. She is a certified medical assistant and a candidate for an associate degree in science. Kathleen says career schools like Fortis College benefit their students by allowing them to “get in, get out and get working in their field.” She believes she won the Circle of Excellence honor “because I pour my heart and soul into these students. I care about their education and their achievements.” Kathleen says the best part of her job is “seeing a smile on a student’s face when they have accomplished their goals.” Kathleen has three daughters and five grandchildren.
Robert Matheny

Robert Matheny is a general science instructor at Fortis College in Salt Lake City, Utah, loves to make science enjoyable for his students, understanding that they learn in different ways. “I try to incorporate as many different techniques to help students learn new and difficult material, even using silly analogies or mnemonics,” he notes. His “A-HA” moment is seeing them light up when they learn new information. Robert has a Bachelor of Science in Biology from Utah Valley University and a master's degree in biomedical science from Midwestern University in Glendale, Arizona. He takes great pride in watching his students grow. “They become better people because they all bond together and help each other,” he notes. “They find ways to think critically and overcome stress and obstacles. I love seeing that and helping them in achieving their goals.” He has two step-kids and two dogs.

Catherine Mercer

Catherine Mercer serves as extern coordinator and medical assistant instructor at Fortis College in Orange Park, Florida. Catherine has been an employee of EA for year and now has four years of experience in her field. Her approach to supporting students who struggle is asking them to write the reasons why they enrolled, and then place the list on a night stand or in a car “so they can be reminded daily never to give up.” Student interaction is her favorite part of the job. “Being able to understand, redirect and motivate the students is what I love to do,” Catherine says. “I am able to prepare the students, from beginning to end, for what is to come.” Catherine has four kids and six grandchildren. She enjoys spending leisure time with family and friends, and her other loves include music and baking.

Thomas Gan

Thomas Gan serves as program director, EEST, at Fortis Institute in Lawrenceville, New Jersey. Thomas, who has worked for EA for three and a half years, has 30 years of experience in electrical installation, engineering design and construction project management as well as heating, ventilation and air conditioning service. Thomas is a New Jersey-licensed electrical contractor with a bachelor's degree from Farleigh Dickinson University. The EEST courses in the program Thomas directs are designed to do more than impart technical lessons. “What we do here is build confidence,” he says. His “A-ha!” experiences at Fortis College make him proud — for example, when “the students take pictures of their work and send them to family and friends,” he says. When addressing the issues of struggling students, Thomas says he often will “propose that it is possible to learn at least one new thing every day.” Thomas has a 26-year-old son who works as a biomedical engineer and a 24-year-old daughter employed as a loss prevention manager. He says his hobbies include “designing control circuits and riding around in my boat with my wife.”

Mark Turpin

Mark Turpin is a commercial driver’s license (CDL) instructor at All-State Career School in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Mark worked as a commercial driver before joining EA a year and a half ago. He says his favorite part of the job is lightening the mood in classrooms: “I have fun with students, so they also have fun. That makes it easier for them to learn.” Mark says his “A-ha!” experiences happen when he watches “people get to a higher level of life in a positive manner.” Asked what he does in response to students in distress, he says, “Stay calm and focused.” Mark has three kids, a dozen grandchildren and two great grandchildren. He spends leisure time playing guitar and working on motorcycles.
**Rhonda Ritchey**

Rhonda Ritchey serves as program director of medical billing and coding at Fortis Institute in Birmingham, Alabama. Rhonda previously had spent five years working in medical billing and coding, and nine and a half years in education. She earned degrees in healthcare reimbursement and healthcare information systems. Her on-the-job “A-ha!” moments happen when students learn difficult concepts and their facial expression conveys “confidence replacing fear.” Rhonda says regularly meets with students in her program to keep them on track: “Every day, I try to see each student and say at least one encouraging word to them.” She believes that schools like Fortis Institute are well suited for students anxious to advance. “Our students need a fast track to a career,” she says, “and we provide a quality education with the personal attention they need.” Rhonda says her favorite part of the job is “helping students change their lives, helping them achieve their goals, and watching them leave here with a new confidence.”

**Randall Marshall**

Randall Marshall is an adjunct instructor at Fortis College in Centerville, Ohio. Randall joined EA two years ago and has five years of experience in the education field. He has a master’s degree and a bachelor’s degree in biological science from the University of Cincinnati. Randall says career schools compete well with large, four-year universities like the one he attended: “I went to a school with a large number of very smart graduate students who had appreciably worse job prospects than savvy two-year degree holders.” Randall helps students overcome a myriad obstacles by monitoring them. “I routinely review student progress and assignments to detect problem patterns,” he says, including “attendance, conceptual learning and soft skills like time management and research paper writing.” Randall says he has a wide range of off-campus interests: “I’m a national ski patrol candidate, long-distance cyclist and amateur fencer.” He also serves as a volunteer in waterway cleanups and for such organizations as the Ohio Valley Forestry Foundation and the Ken Anderson Alliance for adults with developmental disabilities.

**Julee Weston**

Julee Weston is a dental assistant instructor at Fortis College in Salt Lake City, Utah. Julee, who joined EA two years ago, has 32 years of experience working as a dental assistant. She has an associate degree in dental assisting. Julee says her professional background serves as a point of reference in classroom discussions with students: “I strive to teach them real-life skills so they can perform them in the dental office with confidence.” Julee says the best part of her job is witnessing individual development: “I love seeing the students learn and master a skill that they will use in their jobs.” Julee promotes career schools like Fortis College because class sizes aren’t so large that instructors overlook some students. “The smaller classes are awesome because the students can get individualized help.” Julee has three kids and five grandchildren, and when she is not spending time with her family, she enjoys crafts.

**Kaleigh Holt**

Kaleigh Holt is a dental assisting instructor at Fortis College in Centerville, Ohio, who joined EA a year ago. Kaleigh had five years of prior experience working as dental assistant. “I have enjoyed being a dental assistant,” Kaleigh says, “and I try to make my passion contagious.” Kaleigh promotes career schools like Fortis College as models of efficiency for students: “We give them everything they need.” She says understanding the individual and unique learning styles of students is key to effective teaching: “If I take into consideration what ‘clicks’ for them, I can teach them how to become a successful student,” she says. She has three kids at home. “I love being with my family, no matter what we’re doing,” says Kaleigh, who also enjoys true crime podcasts and television shows in her leisure time.
Robin Jefferson

Robin Jefferson is an externship coordinator at Fortis College in Orange Park, Florida. The Tulsa, OK native shared that her favorite “A-Ha!” moment came at her local Cracker Barrel when a former student served her meal. The student was a single mother working shifts while finishing her degree in surgical technology. As an externship coordinator, Robin has the chance to see students flourish in their new professions. She is happy to share that the student from her Cracker Barrel encounter graduated with an associate degree and recently moved into a beautiful new home. Robin has two children and three grandchildren.

Pamela Brown

Pamela Brown is the cardiovascular technology program director at Fortis Institute in Nashville, Tennessee. Pamela, who joined EA seven and a half years ago, has been working in the healthcare field since 1978. She graduated East Tennessee State University with an Associate of Science in Radiologic Technology. Watching students learn challenging lessons is her recurring “A-Ha!” experience at Fortis Institute. “I love when concepts finally click,” she says. Pamela says she keeps students on track for graduation by ensuring they understand course material: “If the students fail a quiz due to not understanding, I have mandatory tutoring after the test.” Pamela says she thinks she won the Circle of Excellence honor “because I truly care for all my students.” Pamela is married with a 38-year-old daughter, Jennifer, and a 32-year-old son, Dan. She also has a five-year-old granddaughter, Madilyn. Pamela enjoys craftwork and decorating and shares her home with two rescue dogs, Blue and Finn.

Helen Blazanin

Helen Blazanin serves as weekend and evening supervisor at All-State Career School in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Helen joined EA 15 years ago and has 20 years of previous experience in her field. She has a bachelor’s degree in human resources. Helen says she takes pride when graduates “return to show me their trucks, homes, children and overall life changes that have transpired.” Tough love pervades her approach to students in duress; she says she urges them “to get up and fight for their spot in life.” Helen believes she won the Circle of Excellence honor because she supports students whether they face academic or off-campus issues. In some cases, “I try to give them something that they may not have gotten at home,” she says. Helen has two adult children and two grandchildren. In her free time, she works as a pet-shelter volunteer and enjoys the quiet pleasures of sewing.

Lisa Stephens

Lisa Stephens is the medical assisting program director at Fortis College in Indianapolis, Indiana. Lisa joined EA two and a half years ago and has accumulated nine years of experience in education. She has an associate degree in allied health. Lisa said one of her “A-ha!” experiences was watching a student rise above a tumultuous home life to graduate and get a good job. “She was able to get away from her abusive relationship and support her child,” Lisa says. “That’s why we do what we do.” She closely monitors students and contacts them when they are absent from class. “Many times, students will thank me for caring and encouraging them to stick with it,” Lisa says, “even when times are hard.” She has a married son and a daughter engaged to be married; she has worked eight years at Eskenazi Hospital and he has worked the same number of years at Roche Diagnostics. Lisa shares her home with toy poodle, Mr. Magoo.
Lorenzo Gunn

Lorenzo Gunn serves as learning resource center manager at Fortis Institute in Birmingham, Alabama. He has worked for EA for seven years and has a total of 13 years of experience in education. He has a master’s degree in library and information science and a bachelor’s degree in English. He says career schools are better for many students than four-year universities: “After all, some people are better at holding things in their hands than in their heads.” Lorenzo says his is “A-ha!” experiences with students have led him to believe that “if you speak with enough confidence, sincerity and passion, people will listen to anything you have to say.” The best part of his job is “helping others help themselves,” he said, and listening is the best way to help a student facing academic obstacles. Lorenzo lists photography and computers as his hobbies.

Lisa Allen

Lisa Allen is a nursing instructor at Fortis College in Cincinnati, Ohio. Her experience working in long-term care facilities influenced her interest in teaching gerontology. She received her Bachelor of Science in Nursing at Ohio University and is currently in her last Capstone Practicum to earn her Master of Science in Nursing with a nursing education specialty from Capella University. Lisa goes beyond the classroom to ensure her students’ success, noting: “I’ve been that late-night phone call when a student was panicking over real life issues with the sudden end of her marriage and trying to figure out new living arrangements for her and her children. There is very little that I would not do for my students.”

Betty Bogart

Betty J. Bogart is a nursing faculty member at Fortis College in Cutler Bay, Florida. Betty joined EA two years and seven months ago. She brings ample real-world experience to the job: Betty has been a practicing registered nurse (RN) since 1976 and has been teaching in nursing education programs for the last six years. She has a master’s degree and a bachelor’s degree from the University of Phoenix and is pursuing a doctorate at Barry University. Betty says she uses a narrative technique – based on episodes from her work as a nurse – as part of her teaching style: “Students tend to [mentally] wander during a lecture, but the stories bring them back in … I never give up if a student doesn’t.” Betty is known among students for sharing chocolates and other goodies in her office, a crafty ploy. “This brings them in for a one-on-one, and I can tutor,” she says. “I have an open-door policy.” Betty is married with a daughter, a son, three stepdaughters and three grandsons.

Wilson Jatvia

Wilson Jatvia is an academic coach and nursing instructor at Fortis College in Orange Park, Florida. He earned both his Bachelor of Science in Nursing and his Executive Master of Business Administration from Jacksonville University. He believes career colleges like Fortis are integral to the health of local neighborhoods: “Our students are a direct representation of our immediate community; therefore, career schools like ours are a must to better our community and our immediate universe though our students!” Wilson has five kids and a menagerie of animals, including two cats, two German Shepherds, 12 French Bulldogs, a Kinkajou, a goat, a rat, a flying squirrel, a Cockatoo, a donkey, a horse and several ferrets, ducks, chickens, and fish.

Lisa Allen

Lisa Allen is a nursing instructor at Fortis College in Cincinnati, Ohio. Her experience working in long-term care facilities influenced her interest in teaching gerontology. She received her Bachelor of Science in Nursing at Ohio University and is currently in her last Capstone Practicum to earn her Master of Science in Nursing with a nursing education specialty from Capella University. Lisa goes beyond the classroom to ensure her students’ success, noting: “I’ve been that late-night phone call when a student was panicking over real life issues with the sudden end of her marriage and trying to figure out new living arrangements for her and her children. There is very little that I would not do for my students.”
Jennifer Eatough

Jennifer Eatough serves as learning resource center manager at Fortis College in Salt Lake City, Utah, and she has been an employee of EA for seven years. She earned a Master of Library Science at Texas Woman’s University, and graduated Brigham Young University with a bachelor’s degree in international politics, with minors in English and computers in the humanities. Jennifer shares her writing, formatting and researching skills with students who might not otherwise succeed. For example, “I've worked through basic paper structures with students who were struggling with organizing papers,” she says. Jennifer says she is a promoter of career schools like Fortis College because “they provide a conduit for people to connect with a future they only perceive as a dream.” Jennifer says the best part of her job centers on the written word: “I love being able to help students with their writing. No matter what a person's profession is, writing is a vital skill.” Jennifer is an author of science fiction and fantasy who co-founded an annual education conference on science fiction, fantasy, art and game development.

Antonia Forney

Antonia Forney serves as senior director of career services at Fortis Institute in Pensacola, Florida. She joined EA nine years ago and has an educational background in leadership, marketing and management training. One of her “A-ha!” moments at Fortis Institute happened when a graduate told her she provided career readiness training that was an ongoing benefit to him. Student interaction is the part of her job she likes the most. “Setting them up with career interviews and getting the call that they have been hired is the best feeling,” Antonia says. She ranks individual attention as one of the best qualities of career schools like Fortis Institute: “The class sizes really afford us the opportunity to get to know our students.” Individual attention facilitates “building trust with the students,” she says, and that trust makes her more effective in addressing the issues of struggling students. Antonia has been married for 24 years and has three sons.

Veronica Roldan

Miami native Veronica Roldan is director of career services at Fortis College in Cutler Bay, Florida. She holds her associate degree in liberal studies. Part of the EA family for 10 years, Veronica enjoys “getting to know every student on a personal level,” because “many come from different countries and backgrounds but [they] all have the same goal - to better themselves,” she says. The most rewarding part of her day is helping a graduate find a job in their chosen career. The moment is even sweeter, she shares, when the graduate had an especially hard road: “I always say, 'I told you so!'” Veronica has been married for 24 years and has three sons. The animal-loving trio share their home with a parrot, a dog and a gecko.

Alexander Lewis

Alexander Lewis is director of financial aid at Fortis College in Montgomery, Alabama. Alexander, who joined EA nearly a year ago, has seven years of experience in his field. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Business Administration. “I take pride in helping individuals who are uncertain and skeptical about how to fund their education,” says Alexander, whose job satisfies him most when he can facilitate “a life-changing decision for an individual.” When he advises students who are struggling, Alexander exudes a positive attitude. “This demeanor puts students at ease, which allows me the opportunity to address issues that may have a negative impact on them,” he says. Alexander says his inclusion in the Circle of Excellence likely arose from his work ethic and drive to succeed and his role as a positive contributor to the organization.” Alexander is married with two kids and a dog.
Jarrod Wilson

Jarrod Wilson is the director of career services at Fortis Institute in Towson, Maryland. Jarrod joined EA seven years ago, and he previously worked in admissions at Sylvan Learning for six years. His academic background includes earning a culinary arts degree. His revelatory “A-ha!” experiences include encouraging a massage therapy student to apply for a spa job, and despite her doubt the opportunity, she got the job. “She went and loved it,” Jarrod says. “It changed her life.” He says he deals with students and their professional and academic concerns on a personal level: “I think it’s important to let them know that at least one person believes in them even if they don’t believe in themselves.” Jarrod said he believes his inclusion in the Circle of Excellence stemmed from a fearless and innovative approach to his job: “I stepped out of my comfort zone and wasn’t afraid to try different practices to achieve a better outcome.” Jarrod is a music lover who often attends live musical performance. He also devotes leisure time to running marathons.

Bethany Wlotzko

Bethany Wlotzko is the director of career services at Fortis College in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio. She holds a Bachelor of Arts in Business Communication and Organizational Development. She takes particular joy out of helping wayward students find their way back, saying: “When I have a graduate who tells me they secured a position due to my consistent efforts in reaching out…I feel like I have done not only my job, but I also have done right by them.” Asked why she thinks she was nominated for recognition in the Circle of Excellence, she references her achievements in raising placement rates beyond the 86 percent benchmark. Bethany is an avid runner and is currently training for her fourth marathon.

Whitney Fritts

Whitney Fritts is the director of career services at Fortis Institute in Birmingham, Alabama. Whitney, who joined EA a year ago, has more than a decade of prior experience in marketing management. A native of Knoxville, Tennessee, Whitney says her favorite experience as director of career services is “getting to see students’ hard work pay off.” Her own hard work has paid off: Whitney says she won the Circle of Excellence honor “because I was able to come into this position and positively impact the department in a short period of time.” She promotes career schools as important alternatives to traditional four-year universities that provide students more one-on-one time with faculty. Whitney has an 11-year-old daughter, Cadence, and enjoys playing kickball and beach volleyball in spring and summer.

Irena Hoxha

Irena Hoxha is the director of financial aid at St. Paul’s School of Nursing in Queens, New York. Irena has worked for EA for five years. She has an associate degree and a bachelor’s degree in business administration. Irena has firsthand experience as a student of career schools like St. Paul’s. “I’m a product of such career schools,” she says. “I believe career schools are great for adult learners.” Irena says the aspect of her work that she enjoys most is “helping students make their tuition, books and fees affordable.” Her revelatory “A-ha!” moments include meeting with a graduate of the RN program who dreaded borrowing to cover his tuition costs, yet ultimately succeeded. Irena said he happily told her: “I’m here to inform you, I just passed my NCLEX test [National Council Licensure Examination]. First time. First try. Let me give you a hug.” Irena has 20-year-old and 16-year-old sons. She says she also has a five-year-old German Shephard, Bastian, “who taught me animals are love and love is the cure to everything.”
Mary Elizabeth Ricaud

Mary Elizabeth Ricaud is director of financial aid at Fortis College in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Mary, who has an associate degree, has been an employee of EA since 2009. She says student interaction is the best part of her job: “I love getting to know the students and helping them.” The support system at Fortis College is invaluable to students, Mary says, “and for some, it is the difference between attending college or not.” She says career schools like Fortis College provide a faster path to graduation than four-year degree programs and even some two-year programs: “Many of our students can’t commit that amount of time because they have children and other obligations that take priority.” Mary lives with her partner, John David, and her nine-year-old stepdaughter Syndeigh.

Quandra Hamilton

Quandra Hamilton is director of financial aid at Fortis College in Landover, Maryland. Quandra has nine years of experience in her field, including five as an EA employee, and a master’s degree in health care administration. In her interactions with students, she says she strives to help them “be successful in and out of school.” Asked why she thinks she won the Circle of Excellence honor, Quandra says, “I work hard and I’m willing to assist everyone.” She says the best part of her job is “helping students succeed,” and her duty as director of financial aid is to ensure “we have provided them with the tools to graduate and to continue being successful.” Quandra has two kids.

Jordan Leicher

Jordan Leicher is director of administration at Fortis College in Indianapolis, Indiana. A native of Sedalia, Missouri, Jordan joined EA six years ago and has a total of 11 years of experience in the education field. He graduated Indiana University’s Kelley School of Business with a bachelor’s degree in business. Watching students succeed is a source of his “A-ha!” moments on the job. “I always enjoy graduation and seeing students walk across the stage – especially the ones that you were unsure at times if they would be able to finish.” To support students facing financial problems, Jordan says he tries “to keep our Financial Aid Office open to students at all times and be there for them, even if they don’t have an appointment.” He says her the best part of his job is almost every part: “I enjoy the people I work with and I enjoy interacting with students and helping them.” Jordan has two daughters, ages six and eight, and lists hunting as his hobby.

Christina Taylor

Christina Taylor serves as financial aid director at Fortis College in Salt Lake City, Utah. Christina has been an employee of EA for three years and has a total of five years of experience in her field. Christina has an educational background in general studies. She says her “A-ha!” moments unfold when she offers counsel: “I love sitting across from students in my office while they are in a moment of need, listening and giving them encouragement. Sometimes that makes all the difference.” She says without career schools like Fortis College, many people would lack access to higher education: “Our schools give people the ability to be successful who otherwise wouldn’t be.” Christina has a 12-year-old daughter and three sons ages 12, eight and six.
Taylor Bennett

Taylor Bennett is the business office manager at Fortis Institute in Port St. Lucie, Florida. Taylor joined EA five years ago. Her has an associate degree in accounting and is pursuing a bachelor’s degree. Taylor says she routinely works with the financial aid department to help students in need, because relieving some of their financial stress helps students focus on academics and their path to graduation. Taylor says she gets as much as he gives on the job: “Getting the chance to be a part of a change in someone’s life is a blessing.” As the business office manager, Taylor fields a wide range of questions and quests for solutions. “If I don’t know the answer, I will definitely find out the answer for them,” he says. “It makes me happy that they are happy.”

Suzanne Swallow

Suzanne Swallow serves as business office manager at Fortis College in Salt Lake City, Utah. Suzanne, who graduated Brigham Young University with a bachelor’s degree, joined EA two and a half years ago. Suzanne says the best part of her job is supporting students: “I love working with students to help them succeed.” Compared to traditional four-year universities, she says, career schools like Fortis College are “a terrific option for those serious about getting into a great career quickly.” She often provides financial counseling to students in distress and believes occasional failures are part of their path to success. “If they don’t come through as we’d planned, I try to help them get back on track,” Suzanne says. “I believe in them and want them to know that.” Suzanne has five children and eight grandchildren. Her leisure-time activities include cooking, reading, enjoying the outdoors and spending time with family.

Maria Quinteros

Maria Quinteros is the business office manager of Fortis Institute at its campus in northern Houston, Texas. Maria has been an EA employee for six years, and her total experience in the education field spans nine years. She has an associate degree in the arts. Maria says her “A-ha!” experiences happen when successful students praise the staff and faculty when they receive diplomas in graduation ceremonies. She says the best part of her job is “getting to know our students.” Asked why she thinks she was nominated for inclusion in the Circle of Excellence, Maria says, “I’m a team player and ready to jump in and help out anyway I can.” She lists photography has her hobby.

Brian O’Hare

Brian O’Hare serves as business office manager at Fortis Institute in Wayne, New Jersey. Brian joined EA 28 years ago after graduating LaSalle University with a bachelor’s degree in 1988. He says reminding students of available support is part of his mission: “I remind them that there are plenty of staff here to help them if they need it.” Brian says his Circle of Excellence honor stems from his ability “to take on multiple tasks and to see those tasks through to completion.” He says the best part of his job is that “each day provides a new challenge” in pursuit of fast-track opportunities for “students who do not want to spend four years in college to pursue a great career.” Brian has a son, Sean, and two stepdaughters, Christine and Julia. He also enjoys playing softball and golf as well as coaching his son’s baseball and basketball teams.
Tim Tubbs

Tim Tubbs is director of admissions at Fortis College in Cincinnati. He joined EA nearly two years ago. Tim graduated Wilberforce University with a Bachelor of Science in Management. He says his recurring “A-ha!” experience is watching successful students from start to finish: “It’s totally transformational.” Tubbs says he believes he was selected for the Circle of Excellence honor because “I led my admissions team to victory in every start cycle, not missing any start budgets.” He promotes career schools like Fortis College as excellent alternatives for students unsuited for a four-year university because they “can still achieve greatness and be a productive member of society.” Tim has a dog and bowls in his “spare” time.

John Heckman

John is a director of admissions at Fortis Institute, Houston North, his fifth year working for EA. He enjoys the positive daily interactions he has with prospective students and the “end result of changing lives and seeing the transition from the first visit of meeting the student to graduation.” He takes great pride in motivating and encouraging students to achieve their goals. With 17 years of experience in the field, John firmly believes that without schools like Fortis, many students would not be afforded the opportunity for an education and awesome careers. “We are life changing for many,” he says. A native of State College, Pennsylvania, John has two boys and enjoys sports and the outdoors.

Bianca Paulino

Bianca Paulino serves as director of admissions at Fortis College in Cutler Bay, Florida. Bianca, who joined EA seven and a half years ago, previously worked in sales and customer service for QVC, Inc. She graduated Nova Southeastern University with a Master in Business Administration with a specialization in global management. Bianca says celebrating student success is the best part of her job: “The best part is graduation day. Those smiles are priceless!” Student success starts with her admissions team, and Bianca says she takes pride in the fact that “in some way or another, admissions impacts everything.” She says students who enroll in career schools like Fortis can develop a life plan by getting a diploma in the short term to achieve long-term goals. Bianca lists her hobbies as traveling and experiencing new cultures and foods, and confesses, “I am a bit of a foodie.”

Anna Alvarez

Anna Alvarez is director of admissions at Fortis Institute in Port St. Lucie, Florida. Anna, who joined EA three years ago, began working for career schools in 2010 when she joined Keiser University. She later worked for Florida Career College. Anna also spent eight years in teaching. She says her “A-ha!” moments include hearing a valedictorian praise her by name in a speech during a graduation ceremony: “That definitely touched my heart, and I knew that I helped change her life, not only for her but for her family.” And helping Fortis Institute students change their lives for the better involves more than just cheering for their success in the game of life. “I can be their biggest cheerleader,” Anna said, “but if they don’t have a coach on their side, they will not succeed.” Anna has three children and three stepchildren, and they enjoy spending time at the beach and on family vacations.
Lynn Jones

Lynn Jones serves as director of admissions at Fortis College in Mobile, Alabama. Lynn is a native of Orange Park, Florida, who joined EA more than 17 years ago. She graduated Mount Ida College with a liberal arts degree. Lynn describes her job as training and developing “compassionate admissions people who want to change lives.” She says her Circle of Excellence honor is a shared recognition that “reflects my strong leadership abilities and an outstanding team. My team believes in EA’s core values and exhibits them daily.” A long-term approach to learning distinguishes Fortis from other career schools, she says, because beyond graduation, “we also promote a life learning culture.” Lynn has three adult kids, Darius, Chrian and Devin, and a granddaughter, Mailana. Her hobbies include reading, traveling in her RV, and serving in ministry.

Russell Washington

Russell Washington is the director of admissions at All-State Career School in Baltimore, Maryland. Russell joined EA five years ago, and he has a total of nine years of experience in admissions, including his prior position as an enrollment recruiter for Trinity Washington University. He graduated College of Charleston in May 2005 with a Bachelor of Arts in Communications, with a concentration in media studies. He says his inclusion in the Circle of Excellence appears to stem from his leadership: “I was able to turn around the culture for Allied Health here in Baltimore, and I lead by example.” He also leads students through difficulties in a methodical way, checking first their attendance, reminding them that All-State Career offers free tutoring, among other supportive services, and assisting in finding employment for income-hungry students who need a job while pursuing graduation. Russell has two daughters, three-year-old Riley and one-year-old Kennedy, and in his free time, he enjoys workouts and beach time.

Chris Brown

Chris Brown is the director of admissions at Fortis College in Centerville, Ohio. The four-year Fortis veteran never hesitates to go the extra mile for his students, saying “I am willing to invest the needed time to make an impact on a daily basis.” Chris believes career colleges provide a valuable alternative to traditional schools due to “time constraints, cost constraints and the ability to receive assistance through the admissions, financial aid, career placement and educational processes like they would receive at a career college.” Chris has three children Austin and Sean (17) and Samantha (15), a Pomapoo named Charlie and a Labradoodle named Brownie.

Tamika Clinton

Tamika Clinton serves as assistant director of admissions at All-State Career School in Baltimore, Maryland, and she has been an EA employee for seven years. She is a native of Newport, Rhode Island and attended the University of Rhode Island. She says she helps discouraged All-State students by reminding them why they enrolled in the first place: “I help them see how making the change in their lives by going to school will benefit them and their families.” Tamika says career schools like All-State excel at job placement. The best part of her job is “seeing how our programs can completely turn a student’s life around,” Tamika says.
Debbie Huckstep

Debbie Huckstep is an admissions representative at Fortis College in Salt Lake City, Utah. She joined EA six years ago after graduating Brigham Young University with a bachelor’s degree in Spanish and communications. Her “A-ha!” revelations come from watching students overcome obstacles “with a smile on their faces and a faith that strengthens me. [It] makes me determined to fight my own battles with a little more grace and gratitude.” Debbie said she believes she won the Circle of Excellence honor because “I am passionate about my students finding stability in life, something that I struggled with for years.” She says her favorite experiences on the job are witnessing the series of milestone achievements by successful students: “Watching lives change daily touches my heart and brings tears to my eyes.” Debbie has three children and seven grandchildren, and her hobbies include hiking, bicycling and swimming.

Joe Maldonato

Joseph Maldonato is an admissions representative at Fortis Institute in Scranton, Pennsylvania. Joseph has worked for EA for 12 years. He previously was a Penn Foster employee for 16 years. His “A-ha!” moments unfold when graduates say Fortis changed them for the better. He says the best part of his job is “meeting and helping people from start to finish.” Joseph says career colleges work well for students seeking an alternative to traditional higher education: “I believe in what we do.” Joseph says students he assists often refer other students to him, and “I emphasize that I know I can help them because I’ve helped whoever referred them.” He has three kids and loves baseball.

Rhonda Anderson

Rhonda Anderson is an admissions representative at Fortis College in Salt Lake City, Utah. Rhonda joined EA three years ago after attending college. Her on-the-job “A-ha!” moments arise from friendships forged in the supportive campus community. Some students “have said they feel like I am their ‘mom’ at school,” she says. “It makes my heart happy that I have made a difference in their lives.” Rhonda also says a critical difference between four-year universities and career schools is attention to the individual student: “The students are not just a ‘number’ like some of the other colleges.” Rhonda has two sons, Jeremy and Nick, and one daughter-in-law, Jordan, plus two grandchildren. She loves family time and craft making.

LaTicia Gibbes

LaTicia Gibbes is an admissions representative and a dental hygiene intake specialist at Fortis College in Smyrna, Georgia. LaTicia joined EA nine years ago. She attended Atlanta College of Business and South Carolina State College. LaTicia says the best part of her job is “sharing the gift of education.” Personal interaction is the basis of her approach to helping students on a path to success. “Greeting them by name when seeing them in the halls. Asking them how they are doing or how their days are going. And how the family is doing,” LaTicia says. “Just showing them that we care.” She says her on-the-job “A-Ha!” revelations center on “what a difference receiving an education makes. It builds a person’s confidence. It also gives them a feeling of self-worth.” When not changing lives through education, LaTicia says she enjoys traveling.
LaPonda McArthur
LaPonda McArthur is an admissions representative at Fortis Institute in Towson, Maryland. LaPonda, who joined EA three years ago, has a master’s degree in business administration and 25 years of experience as a salon owner. She helps students at Fortis Institute prevent obstacles from derailing their academic progress by staying in touch. “I always ask them how things are going,” LaPonda says. “I allow them to vent.” She emphasizes the placement perk that career schools like Fortis Institute provide, a “lifetime commitment to … helping graduates with gainful employment.” LaPonda says she thinks her inclusion in the Circle of Excellence stems from “consistency in reaching my monthly and overall annual goals.” The best part of her job, she says, is its non-routine nature: “There is never a dull moment. Each student has a different scenario on a day to day basis.” LaPonda has two adult children and three grandchildren. Her hobby is decorating and staging homes.

Jacquie Vermeulen
Jacquie Vermeulen is an admissions representative at Fortis Institute in Towson, Maryland. Jacquie joined EA a year and a half ago. She graduated Radford University with a bachelor’s degree. Jacquie says she believes she won the Circle of Excellence honor “because of my hard work, competitiveness and determination.” In her work with students who struggle, she says, “First and foremost, I listen to them. Then I advise them any way I can to the best of my ability.” The key to helping students who struggle, Jacquie says, is appreciating their individuality: “They are all different and reach their success and goals in different ways.” She says career schools like Fortis Institute are a good choice for students who “want the hands-on approach to instruction and assistance with career placement.” Jacquie has two kids and three dogs.

Brian Siringo
Brian Siringo is an admissions representative at Fortis Institute in Port St. Lucie, Florida. He earned his bachelor’s degree from Wingate University in North Carolina. He feels passionate about his work as an admissions representative because “many of the individuals I come in contact with lack confidence in themselves. They have not had anyone in their corner helping them or encouraging them.” When asked what he loves most about his job, he says “I love helping people accomplish something they didn’t think they could do or were too scared to try!” Brian has two children: a daughter, Taylor, who is 19 and his son, Nick, is 16.

Maria Elena Romero
Maria Elena Romero is a master admissions representative at Fortis Institute in Wayne, New Jersey. Her hometown is North Haledon, New Jersey. She has been an employee of EA for just over 12 years. Her “A-Ha!” experiences include working with a single mother who was living in a shelter yet completed the dental assisting program at Fortis and ultimately moved with her son into an apartment. She says career colleges are good for many students because they “gain an education in a short period of time and we assist with job placement.” Asked why she thinks she was nominated for recognition in the Circle of Excellence, Maria credited her tenacity: “I’m passionate and I never give up on a student.” Maria has four sons and a daughter.
Carla Johnson

Carla Johnson is an associate admissions representative at Fortis College in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Carla joined EA nearly three years ago after earning a Bachelor of Arts in Mass Communication. Her “A-Ha!” moments at Fortis unfold when she tells students that she graduated college with honors at age 47. “I always get a smile,” she says, “and they seem to sit up straight in their chair and say, ‘If you can do it, so can I.’” Carla said she thinks her inclusion in the Circle of Excellence resulted from doing her job “with purpose, integrity and passion.” Career schools like Fortis College have proliferated, she says, because “we give an environment that traditional schools lack. We have a hands-on, intimate setting with great expectations.” Carla has six children and six grandchildren. She says she enjoys reading “anything spiritual or inspirational. I am also working on an inspirational book.”

Emily Maggard

Emily Maggard serves as senior admissions representative at Fortis College in Centerville, Ohio. She joined EA three years ago and has nine years of experience in her field. Emily graduated Miami University in Ohio with a bachelor’s degree in elementary education. Her on-the-job “A-ha!” moments happen when her students earn certifications, graduate and land great jobs. “I don’t give up on people that I believe can be successful,” Emily says. “Hard work and dedication always pay off in the end.” She says she is a strong believer in the career-school option for students “who are not set up to be successful at a community college or university.” Emily says the best part of her job is the opportunity to serve others: “The help and encouragement we provide to students on a daily basis really does make a difference.” Emily has two daughters, ages 15 and 17, and two dogs. She celebrated her 20th wedding anniversary this year.

Jerome Ruffin

Jerome E. Ruffin is an admissions representative at Fortis Institute in Birmingham, Alabama, and his hometown is nearby Bessemer, Alabama. He has been an employee of EA for three years. His prior experience includes 16 years as a recruiter for the Navy. What Jerome likes most about his job at Fortis is seeing students graduate, especially those who “started in a place where the only place to go is up,” he says. He believes career colleges like Fortis are the best choice for students who need small class sizes and individualized instruction. Asked why he thinks he was nominated for recognition in the Circle of Excellence, Jerome said, “I guess it’s because I love what I do.” Jerome has four daughters and a son, plus six grandchildren.

Angelik Smith

Angelik Smith, a native of Los Angeles, is an admissions representative at Fortis College in Cincinnati, Ohio. She joined EA a year and a half ago. Angelik previously worked in non-profit fundraising and development, staffing and recruitment. She has a Master of Arts in Human Resources Management. Angelik says her on-the-job “A-ha!” experiences include seeing “the look on a student’s face when they get enrolled … especially the ones that never thought they’d ever go to college.” Angelik says she believes her honor as a member of the Circle of Excellence is “because I add value to a team. I am a natural-born cheerleader, and I believe it’s contagious.” Angelik is a cheerleader for career schools like Fortis College, she says, because, compared to traditional four-year universities, they offer “more value, less debt.” She has a daughter who just enrolled in the RN program at Fortis College in Cincinnati.
Miosha Schofield

Miosha Schofield serves as an admissions representative at Fortis College in Cincinnati, Ohio. Miosha joined EA two years ago and had six years of experience in her field. She has a bachelor’s degree in social work. She says her “A-ha!” moment was an appreciation for the accessibility of career schools like Fortis: “Everyone can achieve a college-level education if they put their mind to it.” She believes her Circle of Excellence recognition stems from her work ethic. “I always go the extra mile for my students,” Miosha says. Career schools like Fortis are vital educational options for many students, in her view. “I do believe Fortis is good for our population of students because it gives them non-traditional options,” Miosha says. She has three grandsons ages five, four and two. She enjoys traveling, dancing and critiquing movies.

Twyla Penn

Twyla Penn is an admissions representative at Fortis College in Cincinnati, Ohio. She earned her master’s degree in human resource management and boasts nine years of experience as part of the Fortis team. When asked why she thinks she was chosen as a member of the Circle of Excellence, she credits the support of her leadership saying, “I am blessed to have a campus president and director that recognize my effort and contribution to my team… If I am excellent it is because they have provided me the environment to be so.” After nearly a decade, her passions for the students at Fortis have not waned: “I still love what I do. I am still excited to come to work and drive towards team goals.” When she’s not solving problems for her students, Twyla enjoys music, card games and art.

Denise Moore

Denise Moore is an associate admissions representative at Fortis College in Columbia. Originally from Columbia, she is personally invested in the success of her campus’ students. For the past three years, she has often been found providing an uplifting word in the hallways or encouraging students not to give up by creating small, attainable goals towards their program completion. Explaining the importance of education in the pursuit of a good career and stability is the best part of her job, often crediting the importance of her role in their future success as her most powerful motivation. She believes the smaller settings and hands-on learning offered at career schools give its students an advantage. Denise has four children.

Lacey Dombroski

Lacey Dombroski works in admissions at Fortis College in Columbus, Ohio. Lacey has been with EA for three years and previously did social work in the medical field for five years. She says students supply her “A-ha!” moments by continually demonstrating that “just a leap of faith can change your life.” Lacey says her approach to counseling students emphasizes “speaking with them in the most honest way and putting myself in their shoes.” She said she hopes her Circle of Excellence honor is the result of her “hard work and dedication to teach every student I come across.” Career schools like Fortis have a competitive edge in the education market, she says, because “the career world is evolving to specific needs for specific jobs, and people who know what they want.” Variety is her favorite spice at work. “I enjoy coming across a new face, a new approach to life … every day, all day,” she says. Lacey has an 11-year-old son, Sean and a nine-year-old daughter, Mya. She also shares her home with Jewels the family dog, and in her spare time, she runs a pregnancy crisis center and program.
Tracy Main

Tracy Main serves as senior admissions representative at Fortis College in Columbus, Ohio. Tracy is an 11-year veteran of EA who has an additional five years of experience in education. She has a Bachelor of Arts in Communication. She describes her work in admissions as a group effort, with heart: “I am passionate about helping students change their lives. I am committed to my team and to making starts.” She says many students get more out of career schools like Fortis than they could at traditional four-year universities. “It allows them to take the classes they are most interested in and get out and working the field in a short time.” Indeed, Tracy says the best part of her job is “seeing students grow, graduate and make more than they ever have before.”

Lisa Strout

Lisa Strout is an associate admissions representative at Fortis Institute in Cookeville, Tennessee, who joined EA two years ago. Lisa has worked more than 10 years in management and more than 20 years in sales and customer service. She has studied communication design at Brookdale College in New Jersey and healthcare management at Nashville State Community College in Tennessee. Lisa is now pursuing a Bachelor of Science in Accounting a Western Governors University. She says there is a spiritual dimension to her work at Fortis College: “My students don’t know it, but I pray for them on a daily basis… Some of the students here have never been given a fighting chance; well, I believe Fortis gives them that chance.” Lisa has two daughters, both married, and three granddaughters. She says art is her hobby: “I work with all kinds of mediums. There is no limit to creating.”

Stacy Gauding

Stacy Gauding serves as a senior admissions representative at Fortis College in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio. Stacy joined EA 13 years and has a total of 15 years of experience in her field, including her employment at Bauder Fashion College. Stacy graduated Bauder Fashion College in Atlanta, Georgia, with a degree in fashion merchandising. She says her “A-ha!” moments recur “every time I realize that we are sometimes the only positive, supportive and encouraging people in their lives.” Her approach to keeping students headed for their goals is based on listening to all aspects of their lives – “the good, the bad and the ugly,” she says. “They are known by their name and not just a number … I don’t forget about them after they enroll.” Stacy has one daughter who attends Duquesne University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Ingrid Leon La Rosa

Ingrid Leon la Rosa serves as a senior admissions representative at Fortis College in Cutler Bay, Florida. She joined EA 14 years ago. Ingrid says her “A-ha!” moments at Fortis unfold when students show new-found confidence, saying “when you see them in class all excited, compared to the first day they came to you completely lost on what career to choose.” Ingrid monitors students she recruits to ensure they overcome any obstacles in their pathway to graduation. Many students flourish at Fortis and other career schools, she says. “Not every student likes the traditional schools and they need hands-on [approach] to learn faster and better,” Ingrid says. Ingrid has two kids and enjoys watching movies and relaxing at the beach.
Carla Thomas serves as a senior admissions representative at Fortis College in Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio. Carla has been an employee of EA for 14 years. She has a Master of Science in Education. She says fast-paced career schools like Fortis have earned their place on the educational landscape: “They are necessary. Not everyone is equipped, nor do they want to be in school for a long period of time.” Carla says her “A-ha!” moments at Fortis happen when she is “seeing a student blossom into the person they are meant to be. I get to be part of that process!” The best part of her job, she says, is her main mission: “I am in the business of changing peoples’ lives.” Both on-campus and off, it turns out. “I’m a Deacon of the Word Church,” she says. Carla loves being a doting aunt as well as enjoying thrift shopping and reading.

Janai Baines is director of admissions at Fortis Institute in Lawrenceville, New Jersey. Janai, who has a bachelor’s degree, has been an employee of EA for 12 years. She says the best part of her job is “helping students reach their goals and seeing them happy.” Supporting students is critical, Janai says, because many of them lack support outside Fortis Institute. “For some of our students, this is all they have,” she says. In many cases, “they were the first [in their families] to graduate high school and the first to continue their education after high school.” Janai says she and her colleagues have a duty to “help motivate students and help them believe in themselves – even when others don’t believe in them.” She says she probably was included in the Circle of Excellence because “I love what I do, and it shows.” Janai spends free time visiting her nieces and hanging out with friends.

Bo Walker is an admissions representative at Fortis College in Dothan, Alabama. He joined EA a year ago. Bo, a graduate of Wallace College, says he has “A-ha!” experiences when he sees the dedication of some Fortis College students: Some “work all day or all night and they still come to school and get their work done.” Bo says his own “dedication to reaching company goals” is probably why he was nominated for the Circle of Excellence honor. He says career schools like Fortis College fill an important niche in higher education because “not everyone is meant for a four-year university or even a two-year degree.” Bo says he tries to assist struggling students by “showing them I care about their success,” and the best part of the job is watching students graduate after overcoming challenges. Bo is married with two step-daughters, loves the Atlanta Braves and the football team at the University of Auburn, and shares his home with a German Short-haired Pointer named Hoyt.

Susan Kinsman is a senior admissions representative at All-State Career School in Essington, Pennsylvania, and a 15-year employee of EA. Susan is a graduate of the medical assisting program at All-State. Student interaction is her favorite part of her job at All-State. “I enjoy helping students reach their goals and change their lives,” Susan says, adding that career schools like All-State allow students to “reach their career in less than a year.” She believes her on-the-job satisfaction played a major role in her inclusion in the Circle of Excellence. “I think I was nominated because I really enjoy what I do, my work ethic and my drive to help others succeed,” Susan says. Her “A-ha!” experiences with students include sharing the joy of achievement. “I love when they come to show me their grades and especially seeing my students graduate,” she says. Susan has three children, Jeffrey, Danielle and Gina, a cat named Mazy and a grandson, Harper.
Amelia Pren

Amelia Pren, a Senior Admissions Representative at Fortis Institute, Houston North is enjoying her eighth year with EA. Amelia is motivated by a “profound desire to help students overcome any obstacle that may prevent them starting their careers.” She believes Fortis Schools suit the needs of the individual students to prepare them for any entry level employment. A native of Houston, Texas, she holds a bachelor’s degree in Business Administration with Management. She loves interacting with people and seeing the happy faces of students in the classroom and working throughout their career. She is proud of her “lovely and talented” son, Moises, and owns a cat, Bisha. She enjoys reading and gardening.

Sylvia Garza

An Admissions Representative at Fortis College at Houston South, Sylvia Garza understands that traditional education is not for everyone. “Many students need that extra push, motivation and support that they cannot get elsewhere, except here.” With 12 years of experience in the field, and four years at EA, Sylvia enjoys working with students to set goals and visions to change their lives. “I love when my students keep me updated of where they are working and how much they’ve grown in their career. One of my most memorable moments is when I had a surgical procedure and my Surgical Technician was one my top students in the class. That made me feel very comfortable and proud.” A native of Katy, Texas, Sylvia has an Associates of Arts Degree in Business Management. She has three kids, three German Shepherds and enjoys being outside.

Teresa Zabala

Teresa Zabala is an admission representative at Fortis Institute, Houston North. The Houston native has worked for Fortis Institute for 11 years. She loves that her role as an admissions representative gives her the opportunity to follow each student from enrollment to graduation. She says career colleges offer close, individualized support to those looking to improve their lives or seeking a second chance. Asked why she thinks she was nominated for recognition in the Circle of Excellence, she says it is her belief in what she does: “I give 110 percent.” Teresa has one child and is excited to share she is a grandmother-to-be.

Ryan Chavis

Ryan Chavis is a senior admissions representative at Fortis College, Houston South. He has worked at Fortis for 10 years and credits seeing his students change their lives through education as his motivation. “I make myself available no matter what. I treat them like they are family,” he says. Ryan says the step-by-step, personalized support he and his colleagues give students is what makes a career college like Fortis so special. When he is not helping students with their career aspirations, Ryan is committed to his 10-year-old son: “My life and everything I do revolves around shaping him into the young man he’s meant to be.”
Damilola King

Damilola King is an administrative advisor at Fortis College, Houston South. The Nigeria, Texas native boasts more than seven years of experience as an admissions counselor, with the past two years serving at the Fortis campus. Her “A-Ha!” moment came when she met a student struggling to make ends meet and on the verge of losing her children. Through shared tears, Damilola helped create a plan that put her on the path to graduation, a stable job and happy children. She says career colleges offer education in a practical way that helps students visualize and experience their future careers. Asked why she thinks she was nominated for recognition in the Circle of Excellence, she credits her hard work and dedication to “changing people’s lives.” Damilola has three children and is an avid shoe collector.

Daniella Williams

Daniella Williams serves as assistant director of admissions at Fortis College in Landover, Maryland. Daniella joined EA 13 years ago after working for more than 10 years as a dental business manager, makeup artist and fashion photographer. She has a Bachelor of Science in Management. Daniella says she believes her Circle of Excellence honor reflects “my purpose and passion for helping people and my team.” Supportive staff and faculty distinguish her campus, she says, noting that “students are in this for themselves, but not by themselves.” Indeed, Daniella says the best part of her job is “helping people believe and achieve.” Part of the educational mission at Fortis is to prepare students for a lifetime of learning, “to continue their education beyond our schools.” Daniella has five children, a kitten and a puppy.

Lakisha Moore

Lakisha Moore is a senior admissions advisor and RT program coordinator at Fortis College in Landover, Maryland. A Fortis member for nearly a decade, Lakisha sees her students as diamonds in the rough – in need of a good polish to shine as they were intended. She works to make a connection with each student, often sending encouraging text messages or postcards with inspirational quotes to keep them motivated and on the path towards graduation. Asked why she thinks she was nominated for recognition in the Circle of Excellence, she credits her commitment to improving herself, her team and the lives of her students. When she is not in the service of her students, she enjoys serving her community. Lakisha has four children and one granddaughter.

Shari Pratt

Shari Pratt is an admissions representative at Fortis Institute in Lawrenceville, New Jersey. She joined EA seven years ago after attending Richard Stockton College of New Jersey. She has previous experience in sales, training, and health and wellness. Shari says career schools like Fortis Institute play an important role in higher education because they give students an opportunity “to change their lives and situations in a short period of time.” She says her nomination for inclusion in the Circle of Excellence probably stems from her compassion: “I genuinely care about helping students, and I believe they sense that.” Shari has a son, Angelo, whom she describes as “an amazing 10-year-old baseball player.” They share their home with two dogs, Luna and Odin, and a cat named Shadow.
Sandy Wilson
Sandy Wilson is a senior admissions representative at Fortis Institute in Lawrenceville, New Jersey. Sandy has worked at EA for seven years and has a total of 25 years of experience in education. Her previous employers include Kaplan University, ITT Technical Institute and Gordon Phillips Beauty Schools. Sandy says the best part of her job is “being able to see the potential in others and helping them achieve it.” Helping students who struggle is a team effort that hinges on communication, Sandy says, so staff and faculty generally “keep an open-door policy. Succeeding today takes a village.” Her “A-ha!” moments include watching several students she recruited achieve the rank of valedictorian. Sandy has three grandchildren.

Clarina Harris
Clarina Harris is an admissions representative at All-State Career School in Lester, Pennsylvania. Clarina joined EA a year ago and previously worked in sales management and customer service. She graduated Community College of Philadelphia with a degree in business management and administration. She says her “A-ha!” moments at All-State happen when students “come up to me and thank me for pushing them forward.” Clarina often uses pep talks to push students forward, and she says her inclusion in the Circle of Excellence is probably a result of her “positive outlook on everything.” For Clarina, the best part of working at All-State is helping people, and she says career schools like All-State are tailor-made for students who “need to get trained and right to work, ASAP!” Clarina has a 23-year-old son, a 24-year-old daughter, and three grandchildren who range in age from three months to three years. She loves music and works part-time as a hair stylist and a seamstress.

Terrance Carper
Terrance Carper is an admissions representative at All-State Career School in Lester, Pennsylvania. Terrance joined EA three years ago and previously worked as a PECO Energy manager with a 38-man crew. “I’ve also owned multiple hair salons and detail shops,” he says. Terrance has an associate degree in computer repair and electronics. The best aspect of his work as an EA employee, he says, is “helping people reach for their dreams” and the best aspect of his employer is accessibility. “We help people with education that’s going to last a lifetime,” he says, “but won’t take a lifetime to complete.” While he is an admissions representative, his commitment to students doesn’t end at enrollment. “I run into my students very often, and when I see them, I always ask how they are doing in school,” he says. Terrance enjoys boxing, playing chess, shooting pool and riding his motorcycle.

Zerick Bradley
Zerick Bradley is an admissions representative at Fortis College in Mobile, Alabama, and before joining EA five years ago, Zerick spent seven years working as a regional sales manager. He graduated Florida A&M University with a bachelor's degree in business administration and did graduate studies at Nova Southeastern University’s Wayne Huizenga School of Business. He says he works with many prospective students who have obstacles to overcome: “Every student is not created equal. Some students require a more nurturing environment.” This is the kind of environment students encounter at Fortis College in Mobile, he says, because the school keeps “student-focused outcomes at the forefront.” The best part of his job, Zerick says, is “the smile on a student’s face when they are given an opportunity to change their narrative.” Zerick is the father of twin daughters who love listening to music and singing.
Adriana Raga

Adriana Raga serves as senior admissions representative at Fortis College in Mobile, Alabama. Adriana joined EA 13 years ago and she previously worked for Blue Cliff College from 2000 to 2006. Her educational background includes studies of massage therapy and cardiovascular technology. One of her “A-ha!” moments happened about three years ago when she had foot surgery. “My podiatrist had four of our graduates working in his office,” she says. Adriana often supports students still chasing success but encountering obstacles, and “one of the things I do is keep a positive and encouraging environment,” she says. The payoff for students who persevere at Fortis and other career schools is “the opportunity to have a career in a short amount of time,” says Adriana, whose job satisfies her most when she helps students change their lives for the better.

Kimberly Deaton

Kimberly Deaton is an admissions representative at Fortis College in Norfolk, Virginia. Kimberly joined EA seven years ago and has an associate degree in liberal arts. She says she experiences an “A-Ha!” moment “every time a graduate reaches out and lets me know they have landed an opportunity in their field. It just makes my day!” Kimberly says regular interaction with students is part of her strategy to keep them from straying off the path to graduation: “I take a few moments out of each day to walk the halls and just check in with students or simply say hello. When students know you genuinely care, they seem to want to make you proud, as well as themselves.” Kimberly thinks her role as a change agent is why she won the Circle of Excellence honor: “I know it may sound cliché, however changing lives is what I love to do.”

Pamela Boswell

Pamela Boswell is a nursing admissions representative at Fortis College in Norfolk, Virginia, who joined EA two years ago. She has held positions including senior admissions representative, assistant director of admissions and director of admissions during her 10 years in the education field. Pamela has a Bachelor of Science in Psychology with a minor in sociology. She says her “A-ha!” experiences recur when students overcome obstacles and graduate, which is “amazing to watch.” Pamela helps students stay on a path to graduation by listening to them and letting them know “someone is in their corner and wants them to succeed.” She says she believes one strength of career schools like Fortis is that they draw an exceptionally diverse mix of students, because they are “tailored for all types of students from all walks of life.” In her leisure time, Pamela enjoys reading, going to concerts and beach time.

Lynnette Blow

Lynnette Blow is an admissions nursing representative at Fortis College in Orange Park, Florida. She has 12 years of experience as an EA employee and 22 years of experience in college admissions. Lynette, a native of Seattle, Washington, has a degree in psychology. Lynette is a promoter of career schools like Fortis College. “Many students thrive here because we take the time to get to know them, care for them and never give up on them,” she says. For Lynette, serving as an admissions nursing representative is a labor of love. “When you enjoy what you do,” she says, “it is a passion.” Lynette says she is passionate about life off the job as well: “I have a family of 12 with two dogs and I love hanging out with them at the lake.”
Carolyn James
Carolyn James is an admissions representative at Fortis Institute in Pensacola, Florida, and a former teacher whose daughter graduated the nursing program at Fortis. Before she started working as an EA employee five years ago, Carolyn worked as a teacher and a real estate agent. Carolyn has an associate degree in education, and she is pursuing a bachelor’s degree in psychology. Her hometown is Houston, Texas. Carolyn promotes Fortis as an excellent educational alternative for many students: “The job market requires diversity and so should education.” She said her admission to the Circle of Excellence probably stemmed from her tendency to “provide honest expectations and a whole lot of motivation.” She says the best aspect of her job is “knowing that … someone who might not succeed on a large university campus can become a registered nurse” at Fortis. Carolyn is married with five kids and two grandchildren.

Charlotte Ruiz
Charlotte Ruiz is an admissions representative at Fortis Institute in Pensacola, Florida. She joined EA a decade ago. She is pursuing a bachelor’s degree in psychology. Charlotte says her “A-ha!” experiences at Fortis Institute include witnessing the determination of a successful graduate who was a jobless single parent without transportation when he enrolled. She supports such students by listening to their concerns, saying many enrolled at Fortis Institute because “they love the small classroom environment.” Charlotte says the best part of her job is service to others: “I love helping people, as cliché as that sounds.” Charlotte has three adult children and enjoys working out and loves spending time with her family.

Kathleen Devey
Kathleen Devey is an admissions representative at All-State Career School in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She joined EA two and a half years ago and has 10 years of experience in admissions, plus four years in the Navy. Her experience has taught Kathleen that many people need second chances to achieve success. “My A-ha! moment was when I realized that everyone deserves a second chance, and All-State Career is where a student can get it,” she says. Kathleen says she takes a step-by-step approach in advising a struggling student “to help them achieve small victories that will empower [them].” Indeed, she says her favorite aspect of work is “helping students discover their true potential.” Kathleen has a 10-year-old daughter, Ella.

Natalie Dougherty
Natalie Dougherty is an admissions representative at All-State Career School in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Natalie, who joined EA a year and a half ago, has more than six years of experience in college admissions and financial aid. She has a bachelor’s degree in business administration. The best part of her job is “helping people reach their goals,” Natalie says. “I have helped students who were unable to feed their families regularly and did not have a roof over their head for their children.” Her approach to counseling students who are struggling emphasizes “having real conversations and holding them accountable.” She is married with two children, and her family enjoys outdoor activities.
Noah Verk

Noah Verk is an admissions representative at All-State Career School in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He joined EA a year and a half ago. Noah previously spent two years working in bank management and three years in hotel management. He says his “A-ha!” moments at All-State are revelatory for students, too: “It’s when they grab the wheel of a truck, or see the sparks in the welding shop, or even see the inside of an AC unit. They know this is what they want to do.” Noah keeps students on track for graduation by making them feel comfortable to come talk to me whether it be good, bad or ugly.” Noah says the secret sauce of career schools like All-State is their value proposition for unlikely candidates for academic success: They allow “the 18-year-old who wasn’t a fan of school to succeed and find a career path.” Noah shares his home with his boyfriend Charlie and their cat Ariel.

Gil Powell

Gil Powell serves as assistant admissions director at Fortis College in Richmond, Virginia. Gil, who joined EA nine years ago, has 30 years of experience in education. He has a Bachelor of Arts in History and Business. Gil says the best part of his job is, “in a couple of words, making a difference.” He says his most important response to struggling students “is to listen to their story so you can better serve them and point them in the right direction.” He says career schools like Fortis Institute “are life-changing in the many doors they open for students.” Gil believes a big factor in his selection as a Circle of Excellence honoree is his “100 percent effort every day I come to work.” Gil has two kids, three grandchildren, and his hobbies are golf and fishing.

Diana Martinez

Diana Martinez, a native of the Bronx in New York City, serves as an admissions representative at Fortis Institute at Port St. Lucie, Florida. Diana has spent two years working for EA and a total of eight years in the education field. She graduated Indian River State College with a bachelor’s degree. Diana says frequent encouragement is what she provides to keep struggling students from dropping out. She says career schools like Fortis Institute fill a critical niche by providing a fast track to graduation together with individualized attention and employment placement. In her spare time, Diana enjoys swimming, cruise vacations, and spending time with her husband and family.

Monica Brown

Monica Brown is an admissions representative at Fortis College in Richmond, Virginia. Monica, who joined EA a year ago, has 10 years of experience in her field. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Communications with a concentration in technology. Monica sums up the long-term importance of college graduates this way: “No one knows what the future holds. We only know who holds the future.” She says the best part of her job is watching students build futures for themselves: “What I love most about what I do is I get to hear success stories that follow graduation.” In working with students who are struggling, she says, “I remind them that there is always a grind before the shine.” Monica has three kids, ages 31, 29 and 18. She enjoys traveling.
Congratulations to all 2019 EA Circle of Excellence Award Winners!