

FALL/WINTER 2017

COLUMBIA SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY  
**ALUMNI** MAGAZINE

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Students Who  
Fell in Love*

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AMBASSADORS  
MAKING A  
DIFFERENCE



## What defines a Knight? |

As a graduate, you are entitled to a little boasting. After all, you've worked hard to get where you are. Knights are early risers, night owls and mid-day crunchers. They know about perseverance and dedication and doing whatever it takes to get the job done.

### **Do you know someone who has the potential to be a Knight?**

Refer a friend, family member or co-worker to CSU and take 20% off at the CSU Bookstore. Once you've chosen your item, wear your new Knight gear proudly! And maybe boast just a little. You deserve it.

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# KNIGHT

## TUITION DISCOUNT

### Thinking of Going Back to School? **DON'T FORGET YOUR KNIGHT DISCOUNT**

All alumni who earned their bachelor's degrees with CSU are eligible to receive the Knight Tuition Discount. Take 10% off of your master's degree with CSU, including:

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- » M.S. Emergency Services Management
- » M.S. Occupational Safety & Health
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- » Master of Public Administration
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**To learn more about the Knight Tuition Discount, visit [ColumbiaSouthern.edu/Knight-Discount](http://ColumbiaSouthern.edu/Knight-Discount).**



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## Letter From the Editor

Beloved readers,

It is hard to believe that we are celebrating another Commencement ceremony here at CSU. This is one of the best times of the year for all of us on campus because we get to meet the students in person whom we have known through phone, email and social media during their time as a CSU student. To witness the pride you all have for completing such a grand goal is inspiring and contagious. I hope you know that we all are proud of you and feel honored to be a part of your graduation celebration.

Our alumni community continues to grow and thrive. You all are making connections with one another and aiding in your fellow Knights' success. I have witnessed some of you reach out to others through the CSU social media channels and networking socials to offer a helping hand, a resource or just a word of encouragement. While you may think that these seemingly small acts go unnoticed or underappreciated, I can tell you that couldn't be further from the truth. The Knight bond is a strong one and it is only because of the way you all care for one another.

We love to hear your stories of growth, friendship, new careers and other accomplishments. It is always confirmation that there truly is no other alumni community like the one at CSU.

As always, I would love to hear from you! Please share any ideas you have to further promote engagement with your alumni community. If you have a story idea or have accomplished something that you would like to share in a future publication, connect with me.

None of this is possible without each and every one of you. Together, we can rise to exciting heights.

Happy Reading,

Libby Reilly, Editor-in-Chief



## Letter From The Alumni Association President

Hello fellow Knights.

It has been six months since I had the opportunity to address you last.

As usual, we are moving forward rather quickly with our opportunities to grow our alumni organization. Not only is this a direct reflection on you and other alumni believing in the program, but also the very hard and dedicated professionals who work behind the scenes. This includes not only our board of directors, but also the work of the Mayes family, who continue to support their father's vision without boundaries.

For those of you who subscribe to the CSU Facebook pages, you will undoubtedly see the numerous comments concerning the number of CSU alumni who are being promoted and given greater positions of responsibility in their respective industry. This is clearly an indication of the education they were provided at CSU and how that education paid off. If you too find this to be the case, please let us know. We want to recognize you for your investment into your education at CSU.

On another note, I will be traveling to China and Vietnam this fall and am hoping to be able to meet with our alumni who reside in these countries. I hope to gain a better understanding for just how important the CSU education was for them. For those of you who do not know, the Vietnam Alumni Association is one of our largest and most successful ones.

Thank you for your continued support of CSU and always know that we will prevail as knights of CSU.

With utmost honor and pride,

Ralph Blessing, CSU Alumni Association President

# EVENTS



**Commencement Open House |** 10-26-2017 • Orange Beach, Alabama  
Our newly graduated students will have the opportunity to tell their CSU story and learn more about the regional chapter in their area by speaking to members of the Atlanta and Gulf Coast chapters.

**Commencement Ceremony |** 10-27-2017 • Foley Event Center at OWA in Foley, Alabama

**American Heart Association's Baldwin County Heart Walk |**

10-28-2017 • Fairhope, Alabama  
CSU will be volunteering during the Baldwin County Heart Walk in Fairhope, Alabama. We encourage those in the Gulf Coast chapter and surrounding areas to join us!



**Houston, Texas Chapter Alumni-Veteran Lunch Social at Saltgrass Steakhouse |** 11-4-2017 • Houston, Texas • Organized by alumnus Cory Mennor

**Atlanta and Gulf Coast Chapter: Falcons vs. Cowboys |** 11-12-2017 • Atlanta, Georgia



**Gulf Coast Chapter: Christmas Party |** 12-3-2017 • Mobile, Alabama • Organized by alumna, Gamel Hawthorne  
The event will include a donation drive for the local Salvation Army's Angel Tree



**Networking Social in Conjunction With SHRM Conference |** 6-18-2018 • Chicago, Illinois



To remain up-to-date on CSU alumni news and events, ensure that your contact information is current. You may update your information by logging into the **MyCSU student portal** or contacting the CSU help desk if you do not remember your login information.

# CSU Alumni Association & Regional Chapter Events In Review



Garrison and Hoyt enjoying their cruise vacation in June 2017

To learn more, or to organize an event, join your regional chapter's Facebook group at [ColumbiaSouthern.edu/Alumni/Alumni-Chapters](http://ColumbiaSouthern.edu/Alumni/Alumni-Chapters).

4-24-2017 | San Antonio, Texas Chapter Networking Social in Conjunction with Distance Education Accrediting Commission (DEAC) Conference

- More than 40 CSU Knights and guests in attendance • Highlight: President Mayes was in attendance

5-18-2017 | Pensacola, Florida Military Appreciation Day • Led by guest speaker retired Maj. Gen. George Alexander, M.D.



- Alumna Kim Jennings joined us at the National Naval Aviation Museum (NAS)

6-17-2017 | Elhart, Indiana Scott Firefighter Challenge

- Alumnus Chad Carey helped organize this event in honor of the fire department's 150th year of service. Firefighters from across the country and the world came to compete in these athletic events.



6-20-2017 | Denver, Colorado Networking Social in Conjunction with the American Society of Safety Engineers (ASSE) Conference • 90+ CSU Knights and guests in attendance

6-22-2017 | Cruise to Mexico Atlanta, Georgia and the Gulf Coast Chapter Cruise • Gamel Garrison and Angela Hoyt of the Gulf Coast chapter and Suzette Porter of the Atlanta chapter all set sail together

7-15-2017 | Columbus, Ohio Yellow Brick Pizza Get-Together

- Columbus area alumni Chin Keo, Douglas Fee, James Dean and Ebby Barnett attended

7-20-2017 | Atlanta, Georgia Atlanta, Georgia Chapter Networking Social

- Alumnus Benjamin Goings collected non-perishable snack items to donate to the local USO • 45+ CSU Knights and guests in attendance

8-1-2017 | Mobile, Alabama National Night Out

- CSU volunteered at Mobile's National Night Out event and ran into several • Alumni members: Paul Meynard, Mark Sealy, and Charles "Allen" Krout



9-20-2017 | Vietnam Chapter • Alumni Association president, Ralph Blessing met with members of the chapter

9-26-2017 | Indianapolis, Indiana • Networking Social in Conjunction with National Safety Council (NSC) Conference



Being a part of an online university community, one may not expect the opportunity to join clubs and organizations. At CSU, we strive to offer our students and alumni a well-rounded and robust college experience, and we hope the CSU experience does not stop just because you graduated!

There are many clubs and organizations for CSU alumni to join. These memberships are a great way to connect with other alumni who share similar interests. Some are based on merit or common hobbies and careers; they all take place on a virtual platform so people from around the world can connect!

## Connect Through a Club or Organization

Below is a list of “extracurricular” ways to get involved as an alumni Knight.

Head on over to [ColumbiaSouthern.edu/Alumni/Organizations](https://ColumbiaSouthern.edu/Alumni/Organizations) to learn more or to join the ones that speak to you!

<p><b>American Criminal Justice Association</b></p>	<p>ACJA is a group of individuals who work in the criminal justice system or are taking courses in the criminal justice track.</p>	<p><b>The National Fire Academy (NFA): Executive Fire Officer Program (EFOP)</b></p>	<p>This program provides senior fire officers with a broad perspective on various facets of fire and emergency services administration.</p>
<p><b>American Society of Safety Engineers Student Section</b></p>	<p>CSU is proud to have a virtual student section of ASSE through their Mobile, Alabama chapter.</p>	<p><b>The National Society of Leadership and Success</b></p>	<p>This is a merit-based honor society with membership by invitation only. CSU is one of more than 500 esteemed chapters nationwide.</p>
<p><b>CSU Knights Run</b></p>	<p>The club is for anyone who just wants to get their feet moving. Whether you have never before classified yourself as a “runner” or are gearing up for your umpteenth marathon, members will have access to schedules, tips, forums and the ability to connect with others, completing challenges and building momentum.</p>	<p><b>The Order of the Sword and Shield</b></p>	<p>An academic and professional honor society dedicated to homeland security, information systems security, criminal justice, criminal justice administration, fire science, fire administration and emergency services management.</p>
<p><b>CSU Knights Read</b></p>	<p>This cyber club is for those who enjoy reading more than just textbooks. Members can share their favorite book or authors, discover new titles and participate in guided discussions.</p>	<p><b>Student Veterans Association</b></p>	<p>Our SVA chapter is open to students, alumni, active duty, retired and military family members!</p>
<p><b>Delta Epsilon Tau Honor Society</b></p>	<p>This international honor society is for alumni with a bachelor’s, master’s or doctorate degree.</p>		

# Knight Ambassador Makes a Difference in the Lives of Soldiers

Written By | Sonya Lavett, *Manager of Student Engagement*

Many of us do not end up where we are today because of sheer luck. Those who take the time to plan their lives will, somewhere along the way, be diverted into a previously unforeseen direction. Even the most successful individuals will tell you that their path to success is not even close to a straight line.

There may be opportunities along the way, but there are also twice as many obstacles that, at times, can make the journey a tough one to manage.

Significant milestones in our lives like death, divorce and illness may create a financial hardship for our families. Even joyful milestones, such as growing our families or investing in our first home, has the potential to create a huge financial burden. With financial decisions, there is almost always stress involved. How can you be sure you are making the right decision for you and your family, especially with such an overwhelming variety of choices?

Michael Crow, a retired U.S. Army veteran, current DBA student at Columbia Southern University and Knight Ambassador, has crafted his life plan as a financial advisor who especially enjoys working with soldiers. As an Eagle Scout during his youth, he developed a keen sense of giving back and this principal has served him well over the years. Michael has a passion for selflessly serving others and he recognizes that by offering financial coaching expertise, he is strengthening his community, one family at a time.

One of Michael's greatest challenges as a young man was to find his unique purpose in life. This was difficult as he searched for direction and greater meaning.

"Purpose gives you a clear vision of where you are headed. In finding your true purpose, you are becoming a better person; you are also becoming a better leader," he stated.

There was a time when he made a nearly fatal decision. At 19 years old, Michael used bad judgment and this resulted in him falling asleep at the wheel and driving

into a ditch. He lay there unconscious for eight hours until someone discovered him buried in the wreckage. He suffered many injuries from this accident, but the most critical was a swollen brain. It took him weeks to regain full consciousness and several months to relearn everything- balance, speech, walking and hand/eye coordination.

This hard lesson was a game-changer for Michael. Previously, he had been an average student and a mediocre writer in school. He said, "I actually think this incident made me smarter. Once I learned how to talk again, I had to really think before I spoke. That translated into better writing. After all, if I can write well, I can speak well, too."



"Purpose gives you a clear vision of where you are headed."

**Michael Crow,**  
*CSU Knight Ambassador*

After recovering from his accident, finding his purpose was even more imperative. Michael joined the U.S. Army at 26 and quickly began making rank.

Just as so many of us have planned for a different course, Michael had no intention of becoming a financial advisor. His initial plan was to become a recruiter for the U.S. Army, an organization that helped to hone his leadership abilities. What better way to give back to the very people that helped to develop his skills than to continue serving soldiers? He focused on assistance with their resumes, interview skills and transitioning out of the military.

*Continued on page 22*

# Dress for Success

Written by | Libby Reilly

Regardless if you are just starting out in your career or hoping to land a big promotion after serving your company for many years, dressing for an interview can seem daunting to even the most seasoned professionals. Your resume and interview preparation can and should speak volumes but first impressions and appearance can affect what someone thinks of you more than you may want to believe.

We've all heard it said, "dress for the job you want." How does this translate into the interview? Should you jump at the opportunity to pull out your designer suit, or would slacks or a simple dress suit you just as well?

The answer may not be so black and white. While you are the one being interviewed, you should also do your research on the job to which you are applying so you know exactly what you are signing up for and what the company and/or department is like. The job should be just as much of a good fit for you as you are for them.

Imagine applying to a marketing job and showing up to the interview in a three-piece suit while your potential manager greets you in jeans and Converse sneakers. Getting to know a company, their culture and identity before the interview will give you a good idea of what type of dress code is present there.

CSU Career Services is available to students and graduates. Services include personal career counseling via email, phone and Skype. Appointments are made through CareerQuest, our password protected database.



Choosing between business casual and business professional dress for an interview really comes down to research and your own comfort level.

When in doubt, it is always better to overdress. You want to portray an image of professionalism, self-assuredness, maturity and care.

Keep your hair, makeup and jewelry to a clean minimum. The idea here is to let yourself shine and not let those things distract the interviewer from really getting to know you.

Choosing between business casual and business professional dress for an interview really comes down to research and your own comfort level. If you are applying to a job that seems very corporate and traditional, opt for business professional. If you are interviewing with a start-up company or a company led by laid-back, fun-loving leadership, business casual may be the more appropriate route. Whichever you decide, a fresh, put-together look will allow your personality and experience to shine.

Now, go wow your interviewers and land your next big career move! We can't wait to hear all about your accomplishments. ■



# HOW TO DRESS FOR YOUR INTERVIEW

## BUSINESS CASUAL

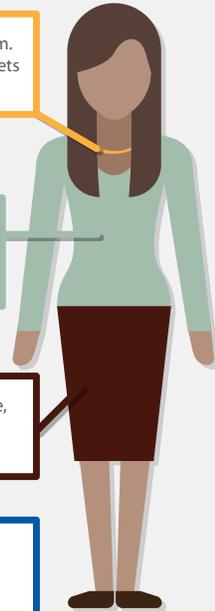
### Women

**Jewelry:** Jewelry should be kept to a minimum. Try to stay away from chunky necklaces or bracelets that make noise when you walk.

**Shirt:** Sleek shirts, blouses or sweaters all work well. Be sure to not show cleavage and make sure your clothing is not see-through.

**Pants/Skirt:** Slacks are always a good choice, but if you choose to wear a skirt, make sure it's knee-length and comfortable for sitting.

**Check the Fit:** Wear clothing that fits appropriately. Shirts shouldn't pull in the front and pants shouldn't be too tight.



### Men

**Shirt:** Clean and pressed button-up shirts work well within a business casual setting. Choose one that isn't too bright or has a bold print.

**Jewelry:** Remove all visible jewelry before your interview except your watch or wedding ring.

**Pants:** Pressed pants like khakis, nice dark jeans or dark-colored slacks are great choices. Be sure to tuck in your shirt and always use a belt.

**Shoes:** Closed-toe shoes like loafers or oxfords are professional yet casual.



## BUSINESS PROFESSIONAL

### Women

**Jewelry:** Just like with business casual, jewelry should be kept to a minimum. Classic pieces like pearls and earring studs are always safe.

**Add a Jacket:** Go from business casual to business professional by adding a tailored jacket or blazer that matches your pants or skirt. Pair it with a tailored blouse or button-up underneath.

**Nails:** Well-manicured nails go a long way in a job interview. No long fingernails or bright nail polish. Try a neutral tone or none at all.

**Pants/Skirt:** A well-fitting pant suit or skirt suit is always appropriate for a business professional atmosphere. If you choose to wear a skirt, cover your legs with hose.

**Shoes:** Toes should be covered and shoes polished. Choose flats or a comfortable low heel, one that complements your pant length.



### Men

**Shirt:** Clean and pressed white shirts pair well with a suit of any color.

**Tie:** Your tie shouldn't draw attention, but pull together the rest of your outfit. Choose one that is all one-color or has a small print.

**Suit:** Wear a dark-colored business suit with a tie. If you don't own a suit, a sport coat with a pair of nice slacks will also work.

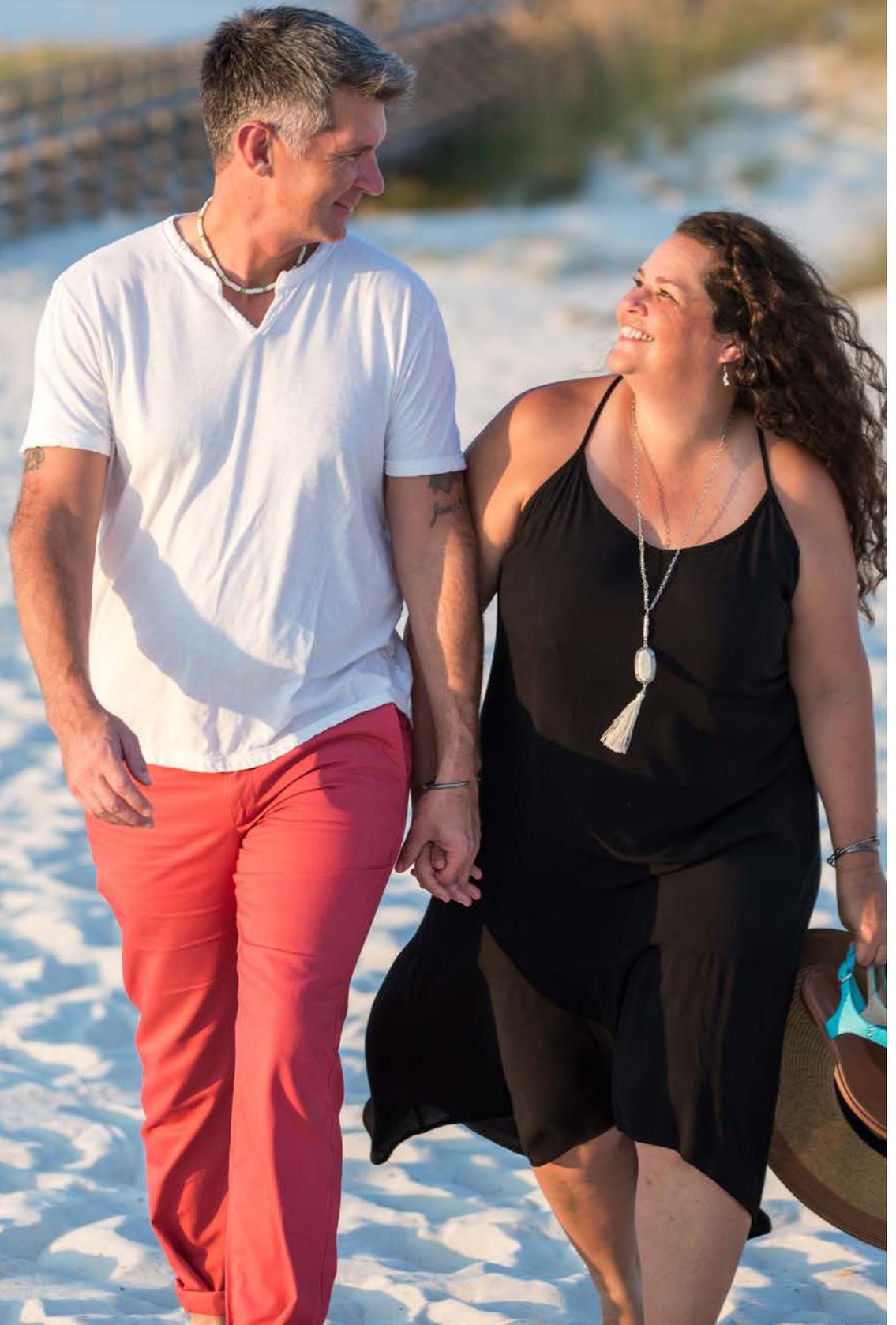
**Shoes:** Choose black polished shoes.



# L · O · V · e

## The Story of Two Students Who Fell in Love

Written by |  
Libby Reilly



# mail

It was 2003 and nearing the end of what would be the last class of her bachelor's program when Angela, who owned a marketing company in Birmingham, Alabama, began reflecting on her upcoming graduation festivities with Columbia Southern University. It occurred to her that, unlike a traditional college graduation, she would be graduating with people whom she had never met in person and with whom she had very limited virtual interactions. Angela decided she would change that for the sake of celebrating graduation with friends.

She decided to send an email to her fellow classmates.

"Graduation was coming up and I didn't want to go to Orange Beach and graduate with a group of strangers; I wanted to go to graduation and throw my cap in the air with someone I knew. So, I sent an email to my classmates and asked, 'What do you do? Tell me who you are.'"

Jason Bortz, a Marine living in Houston, was one of the classmates who received that email.

"Angela sent this email saying who she was and that she wanted to get to know her classmates. She said she owned a marketing company and because I was doing marketing for a Marine Corps recruiting office at the time, I thought we could share stories and I could learn a lot from her."

After Jason responded to Angela's initial email, it quickly became a daily ritual for the two to correspond. They began to share stories of their careers and education, reflecting on classes they took and lessons they learned. From there, it grew into a friendship.

"I had no idea the Marine Corps did marketing; it just wasn't my demographic," said Angela. "I worked for credit unions so his stories were a whole new dynamic for me."

"Every morning when I got to work, I couldn't wait to check my email," said Jason, reflecting on his anticipation of hearing from Angela.

Angela remembers asking Jason to tell her stories of places he had visited during his time with the Marine Corps.

"I hadn't been to as many cities as he had countries," said Angela, "I would just pick a place and ask him what it was like there. Places like Spain, Israel and the Philippines. He is a fantastic storyteller so I would get these fantastic stories in my inbox first thing each morning; it was amazing."

Jason says, "We started out as friends just sharing stories. As we shared stories, we realized we had so much in common—movies, books, life and philosophies."

After several weeks of emailing each other back and forth, Jason was planning to visit his family for Thanksgiving and

would be away from his computer over the holiday. The couple says that this time of pause was a turning point in their relationship.

Angela remembers, "He went on vacation and I didn't hear from him for a week. When he came back, I started to realize just how much he meant to me. We weren't trying to be anything but friends, so it wasn't until I didn't hear from him over the holiday that I realized I was head-over-heels in love with this guy. We started out almost immediately as good friends and neither of us were

looking for a relationship. We were only looking for a friend to graduate with and have a celebratory dinner."

"The whole time I was away, I was pining to get home and get to talk to her again," remembers Jason.

After the holidays, the two began a whirlwind romance. They still had never met in person but they continued talking daily and dreaming of the future.

"I remember when I finally got up the nerve to call her," said Jason. "I thought I would be impressive so when she answered the phone I said, 'Hello, Angela? This is Staff Sgt.





“We started out as friends just sharing stories. As we shared stories, we realized we had so much in common” —**Jason Bortz**

Jason Bortz of the United States Marine Corps.’ And she said, ‘Who?’”

Jason said all of his confidence was drained and he replied, “You know, we’ve been emailing every day?” Angela finally got it: “Ohh, Jason!”

Jason said it wasn’t too long after that that they could both tell the other wanted to say something important.

“We were talking on the phone one day and I knew I wanted to say something, and I thought she might too but neither of us did,” he said. “We hung up, I called her right back, and I said, ‘You know what? I have to tell you something. I’m in love with you.’”

Not long after that, Angela began researching jobs and planning a move to Houston.

“I’m not a ‘jump in with both feet’ kind of girl; I’m pretty reserved,” she said. “But with Jason, I never had any reservations. Houston was much bigger than Birmingham, about 10 times as big, and I was in a bit over my head. Since he and I had built such a strong friendship, I thought, if I move to Houston and the relationship goes nowhere, then I at least had an adventure and have an amazing, beautiful friend in life.”

Of course, the relationship did go somewhere. In lieu of an engagement ring, Jason decided to design something much more Angela’s style. He bought her a necklace that features the Marine Corps logo and the letter “J,” and that was what he presented to her when he proposed.

For their wedding in September 2004, the couple planned to go to Key West, but a hurricane kept them in Miami.

“We were stuck in Miami so we found a justice of the peace, I put on my Marine Corps uniform and she put on a beautiful white dress; we walked on the sand, said our vows and we got married! It was just us.”

Angela says their whole relationship has been an amazing journey. “It’s just amazing to reflect back on how we started. We were at the end of our degree programs when we connected and if I hadn’t reached out, we would never have met each other. Our whole lives started with one innocent little email.”

After the couple wed, Jason and Angela moved around the country, experienced deployment and grew in their careers. While living in Quantico, Virginia, Jason retired from the Marine Corps in 2012 and Angela was offered a job in Pensacola, Florida. Jason then found a job working in public affairs for the naval hospital there and the two headed south.

They have since recruited their daughter Felicia to earn her degree through CSU, and Jason went on to earn his master’s. After walking with the woman he would later call his wife in the 2004 Commencement, he walked across the stage again in 2012 with Felicia.



TOP: The couple on a trip to Jamaica in 2011.  
MIDDLE: Jason and Angela sharing wedding vows at their ceremony in Miami in 2004.  
BOTTOM: Jason and step-daughter Felicia at the CSU Commencement ceremony in 2012.



Their home in Pensacola was close to the CSU campus, but for Jason and Angela, it just wasn't quite close enough. They had to find a way to bring their story full circle.

"We're buying a house just a stone's throw from CSU," said Angela. "CSU has really become the core of our family, the core of our lives now, really. CSU is like family for us, so living in Orange Beach, Alabama, only seems right."

Looking ahead to the next chapter of their life, Jason and Angela are looking forward to enjoying a slower pace.

"We want to retire and sit on the beach all day," said Jason. "I'm at the point now where I just want to enjoy the beach life with her, become beach bums."

While reflecting on the beginnings of their relationship and the education that

brought them together, Jason and Angela realized they have accrued a lot of wisdom they wish to share with others.

Jason said, "If I could share one thing I have learned, it would be to find what you're passionate about and pursue it no matter what. Whether it's a person or a hobby or your education, find your passion in life and don't listen to the people who try to talk you out of it."

"Don't be afraid to reach out and get to know people," said Angela. "Say 'hello' and ask people about their life, then listen. So many opportunities in life are lost because we are so busy that we stop listening to the people who cross our path. You never know how much of an impact someone can make or how important a person can be to you if you just take the time to ask something as simple as 'tell me a story, tell me something about yourself.'"

The Bortzes are certainly glad that Angela took the leap to get to know her classmates in 2003, unknowing at the time that one simple email would change the course of their lives. While the couple enrolled at CSU to earn a degree, they ended up graduating with so much more than just a diploma. ■

**"Don't be afraid to reach out and get to know people . . . Say 'hello' and ask people about their life, then listen."**

**—Angela Bortz**

# CSU Vietnam A Place for Families

Written by | **Tran Trong Quang**  
CSU Vietnam Program Manager

The things that attract Vietnamese people the most is the spirit of learning and family tradition. At CSU Vietnam, it is not difficult to find students who are father and son, husband and wife or sisters and brothers studying in the same classroom. They experience remarkable learning sessions and enjoy classroom memories together. For them, they are family members at home and friends at school.

Let's start with the story of Vo Van Cong, a CSU Vietnam alumni, who joined his MBA program in July 2012, and his eldest son Vo Duy Anh, who has followed in his footsteps to become a CSU MBA student.



<< Alumni Vo Van Cong and Vo Duy Anh's family in the 2014 graduation ceremony

"With 18 months to complete my MBA program, I have learned many new things and gained knowledge that is not fully provided in a local school. I am very satisfied with my learning

experiences at CSU and I wish to bring those good things to my son. He is now working for a US company. I hope that he will get his master's degree from an international standard school that supports his career. CSU is the best choice for these reasons," said Cong.

Alumni Vo Duy Anh, Cong's son, said, "Along with the desire to promote my knowledge to be eligible for a suitable job after graduation, I decided to enroll at CSU since this is the school where my father has graduated. I know that this is a right choice."

Applying the MBA courses to his job has helped Cong become successful in his company. Similarly, the knowledge that Anh has absorbed from his project management and marketing courses supports him a lot in his career.



<< Vo Van Cong and CSU president, Robert Mayes.

Cong's unforgettable moment was when he joined other Vietnam graduates in the 2014 Commencement in Orange Beach.

"It is a great honor for Vietnamese students to be called in the beginning of Commencement. We are so delighted to be welcomed by CSU leaders and professors. I cannot forget President Robert Mayes guiding us in a campus tour and meeting other students from [all over the world]," recalled Cong.

"There are outstanding and friendly professors sent by CSU to teach in Vietnam. I spent sleepless nights painting portraits of the professors before the final exams," Anh shared.

When Phuong and Nga's children grew up, they knew that it was the right time to pursue their MBA degrees. After searching many programs offered in Vietnam, they decided to study at CSU.



Phuong and Nga are named a hardworking couple amongst their classmates. They are never absent and regularly raise valuable comments for lectures.

Phuong said, "I am really satisfied with the educational advantage brought by the online and traditional learning combination offered at CSU Vietnam. We have received professional instruction from various

professors and local tutors who are enthusiastic and have rich experience to inspire us to learn.”

For them, being awarded the 2016 scholarships is a sweet memory. The scholarships bring them pride and confidence to graduate with their MBA.

CSU MBA student Nguyen Thanh Chuong and his wife – student Dang Uyen Thy Dang Uyen Thy works as a senior manager at Asia Commercial Bank. Her husband Nguyen Thanh Chuong is a manager of rural development at Ho Chi Minh City People’s Committee. They are pursuing their MBA degrees.



In their opinion, a suitable MBA program should help them improve their English proficiency, bring knowledge for real estate management and have a flexible learning schedule.

“I found an advertisement for CSU and was informed that CSU Vietnam offered

an MBA degree that is suitable for working adults. When I found that my company’s CEO is a CSU alumni, we decided to submit our applications without any more consideration,” said Chuong.

“Luckily in Vietnam, CSU has a hybrid program, which includes online and onsite learning. U.S. professors and local tutors have helped us keep up with the chapters and compare Vietnam business to the rest of the world,” said Thy.

Their hope to complete their MBA degrees this year.

One month after her enrollment, Tra got pregnant with the couple’s second child. Along with the happiness, busy job and housework, school became a burden. Because of her husband’s care and support, and a flexible learning environment, the couple did not quit their studies.

“There were times when only one of us could attend class because I was pregnant and our first child is young. Additionally, my husband often travel abroad for



<< Nguyen Van Hieu and Vu Thi Thanh Tra in the graduation ceremony and at CSU Vietnam office

business. Since we were classmates, we could continue our study by telling the other about what we learned in class. This was a key point for us,”said Tra.

Their unforgettable memory is a letter sent by their professor, Dr. Larry R. Williams, when they completed his course. In the letter, Dr. Williams congratulated them for completing the course and reminded them to contact him if they need his help in business.

Tra said, “I was so happy to get the letter. Professor Williams is very strict in class when in fact, he is an emotional and sensitive person. There were times when I considered dropping the course because the work was hard and I had a baby at home but my husband and I continued on because of Dr. William’s encouragement.”

It is very impressive that three sisters enrolled in the MBA program at CSU Vietnam. The eldest sister is an alumni who recommended CSU to her two younger sisters.



Trang said, “It is interesting that I can learn with my sisters Nguyen Thi Ngoc Lan, who is working as marketing manager at VIAGS of Vietnam Airlines. Our eldest sister is a CSU alumni. She brought us to CSU Vietnam. We are very lucky.”

The sisters had intentions of getting their MBA for a long time but they could not arrange their time to study. Once they knew about CSU and its learning methods, they decided to enroll.

“As our eldest sister studied here, she shared her valuable learning experiences with us. Now, we are classmates and we can help each other in learning and taking care of our family, as well as balancing work and life,” said Lan.

The sisters acknowledge, “We will always remember class experiences, new relationships and sweet memories of our time together at CSU. We wish the university more success and development to create talent for Vietnam and other countries around the world.” ■

## Charity Should Start At Home



Written by |  
Lori K. Davis, c/o 2017

*B.S. Homeland Security, M.S.  
Emergency Services Management  
(currently enrolled)*

I read an article recently that discussed how parents should teach their children

valuable lessons, such as basic cooking or mechanical skills. However, I have found another lesson or value that our children should learn.

It seems that children today are often taught that no matter how good or poor of a job they do, they will be rewarded for their efforts. While it does give them a sense of accomplishment, what value does that teach them?

Like many families, my family of four watched news reports as Hurricane Harvey began making landfall in Texas. We live in Kentucky and my kids could not wrap their minds around why mommy and daddy were so concerned with what was happening.

My husband and I discussed how we could help those affected by the storm. On a local broadcast, the meteorologist said something that really struck a chord with me: "don't assume someone else will step in and help; every bit that you can do will help."

My family began talking about items that could be used in the relief efforts. We shared a post on social media and friends and family reached out to us with donations. I was shocked and overwhelmed, unsure how I would handle all the donations; however, I was determined to manage.

While we went through the first round of donations, my kids stood on our dining room chairs so they could see inside the boxes. The look on their faces was priceless. They could not believe that so many items were needed, items that most people take for granted such as toothbrushes and toothpaste, deodorant and soap. As they watched their daddy putting boxes together, they asked what they could do to help.

Once my husband explained our process and the purpose behind it, the kids quickly dove in to help. I watched them for a few moments in awe.

Siblings tend to fight, argue and compete at even the most mundane things; however, in that moment, I watched a brother and sister working together to help complete strangers. There was no talk of who did more or how much they got paid for doing a chore; instead, when the task was complete, there were smiles on their faces because they had done something meaningful and someone would be able to benefit from their efforts.

I know there are things in life that teach our children to be competitive; however, I think that charity should never be one of them. My son came home from school not long after our Hurricane Harvey donations and said his school was collecting donations and competing to see who could bring in the most. His face fell and his voice grew quiet, "Mommy, I don't think it should be about who can bring in the most; it should be about the ones that will be helped."

My heart sank; my husband and I wanted to teach our kids about charity, not competition.

Some things in life, like charity, do not need recognition. There are times in life when we jump in and help without the thought of how it makes us look or what we will get out of it. Our children watch what we do and learn from our actions. Charity should start at home. If we teach our children early that not everything is about earning a reward or recognition, then we can begin to instill the value of doing something for no other reason than to help others. ■



<< Lori's children organizing donations for those affected by Hurricane Harvey.

# “Safe from Silica” Webinar Succeeds in Educating Many

Written by | Anthony Cornelius  
Public Relations Specialist



According to the U.S. Department of Labor’s Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), respirable crystalline silica poses a health risk to about 2.3 million workers in construction and general industry operations such as brick manufacturing, foundries and hydraulic fracturing.

To combat this risk, OSHA released a new silica rule that significantly reduces the amount of silica dust to which workers can be exposed. The rule impacts the construction safety managers who work to keep employees healthy and safe.

OSHA released a new silica rule that significantly reduces the amount of silica dust to which workers can be exposed. The rule impacts the construction safety managers who work to keep employees healthy and safe.

As an educator of safety personnel, Columbia Southern University Marketing Department created a special webinar to help educate students, alumni and others on June 30 with a thought-provoking presentation and discussion about the silica rule.

Professor Ralph Blessing, who has worked more than 27 years in the safety industry, served as presenter and gave a splendid production about the rule, its impact, compliance and more to a record crowd of more than 100 participants.

In fact, the webinar set records with its success:

- » 479 registrants through Eventbrite, which was more than expected and the biggest crowd for a CSU AdobeConnect session.
- » A poll taken at the end of the webinar indicated 99.8% of attendees were satisfied with the contents of the presentation

- » A follow-up email that included the link to the webinar had an open rate of 57.1% and a click-through rate of 30.6%. In the industry, a 7% click-through rate is considered a success in email marketing.

Professor Blessing was inundated with questions during the webinar until the very end and gladly answered each query. Several attendees complimented him on the presentation and his attentiveness.

Overall, the Marketing Department was proud to bring a vital webinar to benefit so many of CSU’s occupational safety and health students and alumni to aid them in keeping workers safe. ■



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## CAREER RESOURCE CENTER



## Career Resource Center Hires, Trains, and Employs Transitioning Military



This July, Columbia Southern Education Group (CSEG), Columbia Southern University's parent company, and the Soldier for Life Transition Assistance Program commemorated the grand opening of the Career Resource Center (CRC) in Fort Bragg, North Carolina.



"No one could have imagined in September 2014 what the Fort Bragg Career Resource Center would become,"

—**Robert Mayes**  
*President and CEO of CSEG*

The CRC provides transitioning service members, veterans and family members with a bridge from the military to civilian employment and careers. The opening of the CRC on the Fort Bragg Army base established an official employment, skills-focused facility that provides military

job seekers with employer specific education, training, certifications and information required to hire, train and employ job seekers.

"No one could have imagined in September 2014 what the Fort Bragg Career Resource Center would become," said Robert Mayes, president and CEO of Columbia Southern Education Group. "CSEG's primary goal was to give back to the military community in some small way to change lives. Today, you will discover that the Career Resource Center does indeed change lives, but on a much grander scale than imagined."

Organizations participating in the CRC training programs include:

- » Adaptive Construction Solutions
- » Charter Communications
- » CVS Health
- » North Carolina Agriculture Institute
- » North Carolina Truck Driving School
- » Onward to Opportunity
- » Veteran Assembled Electronics

This is an exciting time for CSEG. Through the new Career Resource Center, CSEG is afforded another opportunity to provide exceptional service to students and deliver affordable quality educational offerings. ■

# Your GPS for Life

Written by | Amanda Manjone

*Director of Student Engagement and Career Services*

"And how do you know when you're doing something right? How do you know that? It feels so. What I know now is that feelings are really your GPS system for life. When you're supposed to do something or not supposed to do something, your emotional guidance system lets you know. The trick is to learn to check your ego at the door and start checking your gut instead."

— **Oprah Winfrey to Stanford University in 2008**

Each month, an estimated 500 students from CSU graduate and continue on in their lives as proud alumni. Many students come to CSU because they have been working in a job and either find that it feels so right they want to progress and do more, or they find that they aren't doing what makes them truly happy and satisfied. In the end, both leave the university experience ready to venture back out into the world and make a difference. Sometimes, it is easy to get caught up in life and do what is easy or to continue doing something out of habit and fear of change. That is what makes our students and graduates so extraordinary! It is paying attention to that gut feeling and knowing, no matter how challenging or difficult it may be, a change needs to take place in order to follow the life path you were destined for.

Following your gut instinct or feelings is quite courageous, especially when it doesn't align with what our families, friends, or even society expects for us. But at the end of our lives, only we can look back on our accomplishments, our risks, our leaps of faith and know that we did all we could to reach our true potential. Imagine if the world was filled with more people using their feelings as a GPS for life. How much happier and more fulfilled we, as a society, would be! Take a few moments to think about where you are in your own life. Are you listening to your gut and following your feelings to guide you through life, or are you allowing the white noise in your head to cloud your journey? What changes would you make if you knew you would succeed?

Perhaps you are already doing exactly what you know you were destined to do. Now, you have taken the time and energy needed to educate yourself as a lifelong learner and are prepared to do it even better. You know you can always improve, even if it's just by 1%. That drive to follow your "something right" serves as an inspiration to others who are stuck. This is incredibly important because you now have the power to positively influence others and help to change their life!

No matter which part of the journey you are in, know that you have the power to pay attention to your feelings and do what truly makes you happy. You have the power to take a risk and inspire others by doing whatever it is that makes you shine. You have the power to live your right life. Now take your CSU degree, get out there and do it. ■



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## Knight Ambassador

*Continued from page 9*

At one point, Michael dealt with his own transition out of the military as retirement approached. Back in the civilian world, he interned with an organization in a human resources role and by the time he had completed his internship, he was certain that this particular path was not a great fit for his specific goals. He wanted to do so much more for others.

Having a keen understanding in how finances, personal life and professional life all intertwine and impact one another, Michael believes in having a five-year plan and written goals. Without a sense of direction and clear goals, one's purpose will remain unclear.

"A lot of people tend to avoid what they don't know how to do. Managing and understanding finances is one of those things that people don't really speak about openly, and yet it is the one thing on everyone's mind."

One of the best things about Michael's career is seeing a soldier apply the information and tools shared and then watching as it all comes to fruition.

"Look, we have all been there. It's not me doing the work; I am just guiding them and giving them the confidence they need. They are the ones taking the actual steps necessary to build a better life on solid financial footing," said Michael.

"Seeing these soldiers three months after our initial consult and they are working within their budgets and are so confident and proud to show me their progress, where before they were embarrassed and ashamed of what they did not understand. That is why I do what I do." ■



**KNIGHT  
AMBASSADOR  
PROGRAM**

The Knight Ambassador program allows students and alumni who are passionate about CSU to share their inspiration with others. To learn more, visit [ColumbiaSouthern.edu/Ambassador](http://ColumbiaSouthern.edu/Ambassador).

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