

COLUMBIA SOUTHERN UNIVERSITY

# ALUMNI

MAGAZINE

2024

## A Fire. Burning from Within

The Rise of San Diego's  
Newest Fire Chief **Robert Logan**



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# From the Editor's Desk

Dear Readers,

I write to you with a grateful heart after another successful and fulfilling year at Columbia Southern University. I am honored to have the opportunity to showcase the achievements of our alumni, faculty and staff through the creation of the alumni magazine.

Our theme for the 2024 alumni magazine is Rising Above. I invite you to turn the pages to see how your fellow CSU knights have risen from their humble beginnings to be where they are today. Just look at Robert Logan's story on page 10. Currently serving as chief of the San Diego Fire Department, Robert has worked hard to get to where he is today in his career. His story serves as an inspiration to everyone that it is not about where you start, but about how you finish. In his words, it's never too late to make yourself better.

Our military spotlight, Robert Parham, also has a wonderful testimony. From the kickboxing area to the actor's chair, he has pushed through the tough times and now holds his doctorate degree. He, like many of you, came to CSU with a dream of earning his degree, but left with so much more. You can read more about his story on page 14.

Have you faced challenges that you have risen above? Most of us have, but every story is unique in its own way, and I want to hear yours! If you would like to connect, I encourage you to reach out by emailing [CSU-Alumni@ColumbiaSouthern.edu](mailto:CSU-Alumni@ColumbiaSouthern.edu) so we can find the best platform to feature your journey.

The stories of success are never-ending here at CSU. Your contributions enable us to create a magazine that truly reflects the remarkable talents of our alumni community. Together, we continue to build a bright legacy that celebrates the spirit and success of our alumni family. As I sign off each year, without you there is no story to tell. With you, I continue to have the greatest privilege.

With gratitude,



Haley Smith  
Editor-in-Chief



You are never too old to set another goal or to dream a new dream."

C.S. Lewis

# Letter From the Alumni President

Hello my Fellow Knights,

I hope this letter finds you in good health and high spirits. As president of our cherished alumni association, I am both honored and excited to connect with each one of you again—the heartbeat of our alma mater.

Our time at Columbia Southern University was more than just academic pursuits; it was a transformative phase that helped mold new visions and goals. For some, it was the trauma of leaving the military life and thinking about a new one. Others may have been firefighters or young minds looking for new challenges. As alumni, we carry forward not only our degrees but also a legacy of resilience, curiosity and lifelong learning. Regardless of where life has taken us, our shared memories remain etched in the discussion boards and virtual meeting rooms of CSU. Let's raise our virtual glasses to celebrate these moments—whether it's a recent promotion, a new addition to the family or simply finding joy in life's small victories.

As alumni, we have a unique responsibility to pay it forward. Our association can be instrumental in supporting scholarships, mentorship programs and other initiatives. Whether it's volunteering your time, sharing career advice with current students or contributing to a scholarship fund, your involvement matters. Together, we can empower the next generation of CSU graduates.



In this digital age, staying connected is easier than ever. Join our alumni network on LinkedIn, follow us on social media and update your contact information on our website. Let's bridge the gap between generations, share stories and inspire one another.

As your president, I am committed to fostering a vibrant alumni community—one that thrives on shared memories, mutual support and a genuine love for CSU. Reach out to me anytime; my inbox is open. Let's make this year one for the books!

Most humbly,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ralph Blessing".

Ralph Blessing  
Alumni Association President  
M.S. Occupational Safety and Health, Class of 2007

*Activate your*  
**CSU ALUMNI ASSOCIATION**  
*membership today!*

As a member of the alumni association, you receive invitations to exclusive events, a discount from the CSU bookstore to purchase your Knight gear and the opportunity to connect with fellow alumni. Connect with us on Facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram to stay in touch.

**Visit the CSU Alumni web page to  
activate your membership today!**

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*These testimonials may not reflect the experience of all CSU students. Multiple factors, including prior experience, geography and degree field, affect career outcomes. CSU does not guarantee a job, promotion, salary increase, eligibility for a position, or other career growth.*

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

# From Law School Dreams To Special Education Advocacy



# How Tia Palmer Is Making A Difference

**T**ia Palmer's plan was always to go to law school. Her dream job was to be a child advocate attorney. After finishing her bachelor's degree in criminal justice administration from CSU, Tia was on her way to law school. Little did she know, her journey to become a lawyer was leading her down a path to discover her true calling—teaching special education.

"I finished my degree right after moving home to Maine," she said. "My original plan with my criminal justice degree was to go to law school and become a child advocate attorney. However, I knew that with my new move and a one-year-old, there was no way that it was my time to go back to school and pursue my law degree."

Tia chose a degree in criminal justice in the first place because of her sister, and wanted to make a difference in the lives of others.

"My mom had recently adopted my little sister and I watched the process and decided I really wanted to be a child advocate attorney and advocate for children who were unable to advocate for themselves."

While waiting on the right time to go back to school, Tia took a job teaching at an early intervention center for children with diagnoses.

"I found my passion for this line of work," she said. "I started as a paraprofessional and found that I really loved teaching and that advocating for students with special needs was also something important to me as all four of my younger siblings have a disability that affects their learning."

After realizing this was her true calling, Tia made the decision it was finally time to go back to school, just not law school.

"I have always been someone who wanted to learn, and therefore, I chose to go back to school to learn more about special education."

Tia is now a special education teacher in Maine, working with children in kindergarten through fifth grade.

"I love forming relationships with my students and getting to know them for who they are," she said. "One of the special parts of being a special education teacher is watching my students meet milestones that some feared were impossible."

Although Tia is not actively working in the criminal justice field, she credits her CSU degree as the reason she got her foot in the door teaching special education.

"With my CSU degree, I was able to become an ed tech in a school, a job that required a degree. This allowed me to find my passion in special education," she said. "I use my knowledge in the justice system to advocate for children with special needs."

Tia says there is a lot of knowledge she takes from her criminal justice degree that she applies to teaching.

"I took a lot of classes around youth incrimination and juvenile laws," she said. "Many of the classes talked about how children with disabilities took up a huge portion of the children incarcerated. I learned a lot about the different laws in place to protect them, but now I get to influence some of the children who could have been a part of those statistics."

Tia's passion was always to make a difference in the lives of children. While she may not be doing so as a lawyer, she found a way to accomplish her goal and makes a difference every day.

"I was able to raise my daughter and pursue my dreams at the same time," she said. "Although I am not using my degree in the way I originally hoped, it has led me to a career path that I am so proud of. My degree led me to a path where I have passion to stop children from entering the justice system, but also gave me a foundation and understanding of laws for special education."

## Notable Knights



### **BRENT BURTON**

Brent Burton has been included in Marquis Who's Who for his dedication to the field of firefighting. He is currently with the Los Angeles County Fire Department. He also co-founded and served as the president of the African American Firefighter Museum's board of directors for many years. While his career has been filled with highlights, he takes the most pride in serving as the Los Angeles County Black Firefighter Association's president. He is a two-time CSU graduate earning an associate degree in general studies and a bachelor's degree in organizational leadership.

### **ARACELI SAUNDERS**

U.S. Air Force Capt. Araceli Saunders, a search and rescue pilot assigned to the 188th Rescue Squadron, 150th Operations Group, 150th Special Operations Wing, New Mexico Air National Guard, returned home April 10th following a busy deployment in Saudi Arabia. While deployed, Saunders became the first pilot in the 188th to execute an airdrop of the Air Force's Search and Rescue Tactical Vehicle (SRTV) – Side by Vehicle (SXV) and 25 Guardian Angels, a non-aircraft weapon system the Air Force uses for Combat Search and Rescue and Personnel Recovery missions. She is a 2015 CSU graduate.

### **ROBERTO FILICE**

The East Bay Regional Park District announced the appointment of Chief Roberto Filice as its new assistant general manager of public safety and police chief at the public agency. Filice, has worked in law enforcement with over 25 years of dedicated public service. "I am excited to be part of an organization that cares about engaging with the public and providing positive experiences in nature and recreational opportunities with safety in mind," said Chief Roberto Filice. "With a community-focused and team-oriented approach, I am ready to build partnerships, mentor and support career development opportunities, collaborate to enhance our work, and commit to serving the public in my role at the East Bay Regional Park District." He holds both a master's degree in criminal justice administration and an MBA in public administration from CSU.

### **AMOS LONOKAILUA-HEWETT**

Retired Fire Battalion Chief Amos Lonokailua-Hewett selected as new Maui Emergency Management Agency Administrator. He brings to the position 25 years of service with Maui Fire Department before retiring in 2019 as a battalion chief. He completed a bachelor's degree in fire administration in 2017, and received a master's degree in public administration with an emphasis on emergency services management in 2019 from Columbia Southern University.

### **REBECCA RAMIREZ**

California Governor, Gavin Newsome, has reappointed Rebecca Ramirez to the State 9-1-1 Advisory Board, where she has served since 2021. Ramirez has served as Interim Fire Chief for the Rodeo-Hercules Fire Protection District since 2023. Ramirez is a member of the International Association of Fire Chiefs and California Fire Chiefs Association. She earned a bachelor's degree in fire administration from Columbia Southern University.

### **SANDI GOLDEN-VEST**

The Ohio Bureau of Workers' Compensation has named Sandi Golden-Vest as the agency's new superintendent of the Division of Safety & Hygiene. She has over 27 years of experience in various programmatic and leadership roles. "I'm honored and excited to take on this new role," Golden-Vest said. "I look forward to advancing and strengthening our efforts to keep workers throughout Ohio safe and healthy on the job with the goal of getting them home safely at the end of each workday." She is a 2018 CSU graduate.

## From Student to Professor

# David Turman's Leadership in Safety



David Turman has always been passionate when it comes to helping others. For him, safety started as an employee who had dealt with workplace injuries and what they can mean for the employee and the company.

"Having been the victim of an injury at work, I understand firsthand how it can affect not just you, but your family as well," he said. "This experience has fueled my passion for caring for people and ensuring their safety."

David holds an associate degree in arts, a bachelor's degree in business administration with a concentration in human resources, an MBA and a master's degree in occupational safety and health. However, while working in safety, he decided he should pursue a degree that reflected his job.

"I have worked many jobs in construction, chemical plants, retail and even telecommunications, but nothing seemed to work for me," he said. "I was even studying to enter the human resources field when I was approached to join an EHS team."

At the age of 36, David felt the decision to apply to CSU was an easy one as he had been an adult learner for almost a decade.

"At the Governor's Safety Conference, I spoke with a recruiter about CSU's online program for occupational safety and health and learned how recognized they are in this industry. I decided that if I was going to complete my degree, it would be through CSU," he said.

In 2021, David graduated with his master's degree in occupational safety and health.

"For me, the pride that I felt standing on that stage receiving my master's degree was one of the greatest moments of my life," he said. "I can say that I have seen the advantage of obtaining your degree from CSU. I feel as though I am an industry leader in OSH because of the education I received."

David is currently working as the head of the environmental health and safety department at Hyundai Mobis North America, an electric car battery manufacturer.

"My role is not just about enforcing safety rules but about inspiring a belief in them," he said. "When people understand why we enforce the rules, they will believe in those rules. Your title doesn't matter; you should always spend time where the workers are and get to know them and the jobs they must perform."

In addition to his day-to-day job, he also is a part-time adjunct professor at CSU teaching courses such as Introduction to Regulatory Compliance, Risk Management and Training and Development.

"My goal has always been to reach the point where I can share my experiences with others and hopefully teach future OSH professionals about what I have learned through the years," he said. "I feel that if I help one person go home safely, then I will be successful. To be considered a professor in this field is something I will always cherish."

Although David has an impressive number of diplomas hanging on his wall, he is making room for one more as he recently decided to earn his Doctor of Occupational Safety and Health.

"I wanted to increase my research skills, learn more about where problems still exist and how to solve them," he said. "OSH is evolving every day as technology and health data are discovered. As occupational safety and health professionals, we must continue looking for the next issues so they can affect employees less."

David's advice to those in his fellow field of safety is simple: never stop learning.

"I always say that we do not have to have all the answers, but we must know where to find the answers," he said. "Never stop learning more about safety and health, meet and network with many other professionals and review as much as possible."

## ALUMNI EVENTS



# A Year In Review

**OCTOBER 2023**

## 1 New Orleans, LA

CSU attended the National Safety Conference (NSC) in New Orleans. Over 100 alumni and current students stopped by CSU's booth in the Exhibit Hall, and over 75 alumni attended an alumni networking social at Fulton Alley for dinner and bowling.

## 2 Orange Beach, AL

CSU's annual Grad Bash and Commencement ceremonies were incredible milestones in October 2023. Approximately 800 graduates and guests attended Grad Bash on CSU's campus the day prior to Commencement and enjoyed a day designed to celebrate the accomplishments of the newest members of the CSU alumni family.

**FEBRUARY 2024**

## 3 Pasadena, TX

The Health & Safety Council (HASC) held its annual Tailgate Extravaganza in February in Pasadena. The theme for this year's event was "Safety on the Strip". It was great to see the many CSU alumni and current students that visited the Las Vegas style CSU booth.

**APRIL 2024**

## 4 Indianapolis, IN

The 2024 Fire Department Instructors Conference (FDIC) was held in April in Indianapolis, IN, and CSU's Community and Alumni Relations team joined the festivities and were able to meet many of the 140 alumni and current students who stopped by the booth.

**AUGUST 2024**

## 5 Denver, CO

CSU attended the American Society of Safety Professionals (ASSP) conference where the alumni relations team connected with 245 students and alumni at their booth. They also hosted a reception where everyone gathered for food, drinks and took home some CSU swag.

## 6 Pensacola, FL

CSU hosted an epic 'Back to School Night' at the Blue Wahoos game, where our digital content coordinator, Matt Rowley, threw the first pitch. Many fans stopped by to say hello and grab some CSU swag.





*Chief Logan connecting with the community*



# A Fire Burning from Within

## The Rise of San Diego's Newest Fire Chief **Robert Logan**

In the small, urban community of Lincoln Park located in San Diego, California, San Diego Fire-Rescue Department's Station 12 felt like home to several firefighters and served as a dream for a young boy who lived a few houses down the street. A young Robert Logan would watch fire engines as they went past his window. Captivated by their heroism, he idolized the neighborhood firefighters and often visited them at the station near his home.

Robert's big dreams of one day becoming a firefighter competed against the reality of the hard life he had dealt with.

"I come from very humble beginnings," he said. "I was raised by my grandmother after my mother had me at 16 years old, so I come from a single parent household. There were times in my youth where I did not think I was going to make it. Some days, I just wanted a meal."

From an early age, Robert worked to help provide for his family. Paying the bills and putting food on the table was his priority. Everything else, including his education and future, was secondary.

"I worked various odd jobs in high school to help with bills," he said. "After high school, I worked as a security guard briefly then with Anheuser-Busch before becoming an EMT."

In 1999, Robert started working as an emergency medical technician for the San Diego Fire-Rescue Department

(SDFD). Later that year, he was accepted into the fire academy and graduated in 2000.

"I rose through the ranks as firefighter, fire engineer, fire captain, battalion chief and deputy chief," he said. "I used to look up to higher ranks and wonder how they got there and what they did to accomplish that task. It is quite daunting early on in your career when you are just trying to learn the basics."

As he climbed the ladder of rank in his career, Robert enrolled in school to complement his fire career.

"I entered the education world later in life and I finished my associate degree in 2015," he said. "I finished my bachelor's degree in communications with a concentration in business and I knew I wanted to keep it going and get my master's degree."

"A friend told me about Columbia Southern University, and it was the best fit for me and for my work schedule as I was a deputy fire chief at the time. I knew that I had to have more than the next

person if I wanted to be successful."

At 51 years old, Robert earned his master's degree in emergency services management with an overall 4.0 GPA and honors.

"As you get into the circle of fire chiefs, there is always a common theme of topics in conversation which is 'Where did you go to school?'. Now, when asked that question, I can stand proud and be confident and say I hold a master's degree from CSU."

After faithfully serving with the SDFD for 24 years, Robert aimed to advance to his highest rank yet. He competed for the top job and, after a long process, was selected as the fire chief of the San Diego Fire-Rescue Department in 2024.

"If you were to ask me when I was a brand-new firefighter if I would ever become fire chief, I would have said absolutely not," he said. "I just wanted to be a regular firefighter going to put out fires and ride in the fire engine."

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## **"I want to help people in their times of need."**

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"When you enter the fire service, you just want to be a firefighter and you just want to do the best you can do for your community and learn and be a productive member of the team," he said. "Along the way, you start to advance and promote. When I was awarded the job, it was an overwhelming sense of accomplishment to be the number one person in the fire department."

"I have some grand ideas that I am doing the groundwork for," he said. "One of them is reintroducing our fire department to the community. I want to get more involved in community events, school events and train the community on how to be substantial on their own. I want to recreate that bond and sense of security between the community and the fire service."

The lifelong San Diegan makes it a priority in his job to impact the people around him, just as the firefighters down the street impacted his life.

"I want to help people in their times of need or on their worst day," he said. "In my role, I will not only be able to impact people on eye-level, but I want to be able to impact people on a professional level and allow them to become instructors and create their dreams."

In addition to his success within his department, Robert co-founded a Fire Protection Program at Lincoln High, a school just down the street from his childhood home.

"This area is known for the challenges that plague the area such as drugs, gang violence and low-income families. The program was started to provide opportunity."

Robert is also an active member of Women in Fire, a national organization dedicated to empowering women in the fire and emergency services field.

"I am a dues-paying member of Women in Fire

# “It’s never too late to start.”

and a supporter of recruiting women into the fire service,” he said. “My fire department will be hosting and supporting the Women in Fire conference in the fall.”

As for future goals, Robert looks to help others rise above challenges life has thrown their way and create paths for them to get to where they want to be.

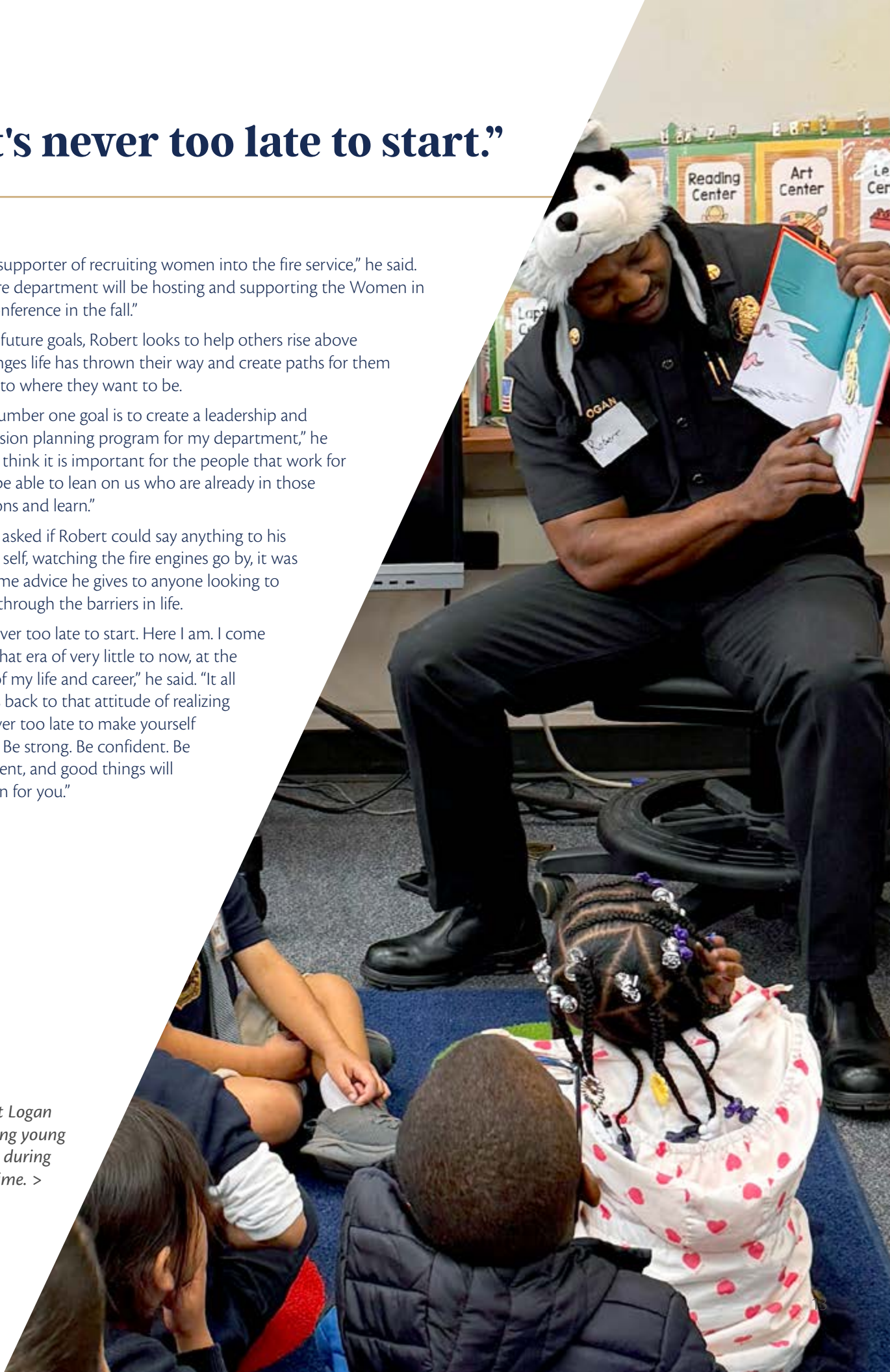
“My number one goal is to create a leadership and succession planning program for my department,” he said. “I think it is important for the people that work for us to be able to lean on us who are already in those positions and learn.”

When asked if Robert could say anything to his young self, watching the fire engines go by, it was the same advice he gives to anyone looking to break through the barriers in life.

“It’s never too late to start. Here I am. I come from that era of very little to now, at the peak of my life and career,” he said. “It all comes back to that attitude of realizing it’s never too late to make yourself better. Be strong. Be confident. Be persistent, and good things will happen for you.”



*Robert Logan  
inspiring young  
minds during  
storytime. >*



## AIR FORCE, ARENA, ACTION!

### Dr. Robert Parham's Journey from Military to Martial Arts Champion & Filmmaker

In the fifth grade, Robert Parham had his first martial arts lesson. He was taught by his father after Robert had a humbling experience: he had gotten beaten up at school, by a girl. Little did they know, that day would mark the beginning of Robert's path to becoming a five-time world kickboxing champion.

Growing up in New Jersey, Robert loved sports, especially boxing and martial arts. When he became a teenager, he decided that, like everyone else in his family, education was the catalyst for moving on to big things.

"When I was 16 years old in high school, I made a shift in my approach to life," he said. "I noticed that the people who had graduated before me were still hanging out around town, playing basketball with no education and no job. I told myself, that is not going to be me."





"My mom and dad were big on education in our household, so I knew I wasn't going to stay."

From there, he joined the Air Force and was stationed at Fort Keesler for 20 years.

"I chose the Air Force by process of elimination," he said. "I didn't want to do anything with water, I grew up hearing war stories from my father who was in the Army, and my father also advised me not to be a Marine. So, that left only one."

During his service, Robert went to England, Jordan and other locations in the Middle East during the Gulf War.

"I had some interesting adventures in the military," he said. "I was in the medical field and I became a licensed vocational nurse in the Air Force, so as I grew older I would have more knowledge about what could be wrong. I also learned a lot about management and how to relate to people which is important outside of the Air Force."

While he was in the military, his childhood love for martial arts and kickboxing found him again.

"I met a gentleman who took me under his wing and brought me into his school," he said. "While I was there, I became a world kickboxing champion and a martial arts champion. I was on the Air Force martial arts and taekwondo team," he said.

Robert won the Mississippi's Silver Gloves Championship, and began earning karate titles, including Armed Forces Champion, Mississippi State Champion and pre-Olympic Taekwondo Champion.

"I had the opportunity to fight, as an amateur in the arena, Frank Liles who went on to be the WBA Middle Weight champion of the world," he said. "I also got to fight Roy Jones who went on to earn a silver medal in the Olympics."

"The sport has kept me grounded and allows me to use the discipline in everyday life," he said. "I learned about protecting myself and not just physical self-defense, but mental self-defense."

In 1992, Robert earned one of his most prestigious honors, the Air Force's Air Education and Training Command's Male Athlete of the Year.

"It was a surreal moment. Generally, martial arts is not a mainstream sport in America, so when I got the award I cried and slept with the award for a few days."

The award-winning martial artist continued his reign of dominance in the sport, going on to claim world kickboxing titles in five weight classes—middleweight in 1994, super middleweight in 1996, light heavyweight in 1995 and 1997, cruiserweight in 1997 and heavyweight in 2001.

He has also been inducted into the Universal Martial Arts Hall of Fame, the Masters Hall of Fame and many other hall of fames for his martial arts accomplishments.

"While I was in the Air Force excelling in all of these things, I was also in school," he said. "I came from an educational household. My father sat for the bar exam, my mother has her bachelor's, my brother has his master's degree, so I am surrounded by education."

Robert found CSU while pursuing his associate degree. After becoming a CSU Knight, he completed his first degree, an associate in business in 2005, and knew this was far from the end of his education journey.

Not only was Robert continuing his studies, his sport and serving in the Air Force, but he found a new hobby that slowly grew into what would be his future.

"During this time, I had a friend who was a stunt coordinator and he got me some roles as an extra on movies. The very first movie I was in, I was an extra in the movie 'Under Siege' with Steven Seagal and Tommy Lee Jones."

"My second extra role was in a movie called 'The Insider' with Russell Crowe and Al Pacino. During filming, Al Pacino told me I had a good look and encouraged me to get an agent. This was one of the highlights of my life, and from there, I caught the acting bug."

Robert went on to finish his bachelor's degree in business and kept going to earn his MBA.

# Tired of Interview Anxiety?

Let Career Services help you overcome the fear of interviewing with Big Interview! Big Interview is an online system that combines training and practice to improve interview techniques and build confidence. This free 24/7 training system offers a new and innovative way to prepare more effectively for job interviews.

Big Interview offers a variety of tools including:

- Mock interview practice and recording.
- Tips covering the job search and interview process.
- Video sharing for feedback.
- Ability to customize and record questions.
- Resume tool.

## How to create an account:

1. Visit [csu.biginterview.com/register](https://csu.biginterview.com/register).
2. Enter **CSU30** in the organization code section.
3. Click "Are you a student?" Then "Select your School" and choose "Columbia Southern University"
4. Enter first and last name.
5. Enter email address.
6. Create password.
7. Click on "Create Account" once you have entered all the above information.

## MAKE AN APPOINTMENT

To learn more about these resources, or to schedule a resume review session, call 877-297-6192 or email

[CareerServices@ColumbiaSouthern.edu](mailto:CareerServices@ColumbiaSouthern.edu)

*Continued from Page 15*

"My degree helped me land an incredible job out of the Air Force," he said. "I figured I should go on and try to get my doctorate. If there was a degree beyond a doctorate that CSU offered, I would be in that class right now."

While many would struggle juggling all that Robert did, he describes it as having the time of his life.

"Balancing my family, my job, my martial arts career and the studio, it was all fun," he said. "I have to live life to my fullest potential. I don't want to leave this earth without my wheels falling off."

As he began the DBA program, Robert retired from the military and moved out to California. There, he began connecting with actors who he had grown up watching on the big screen.

"I began to be intrigued with the set, how the cameras were operated, and I thought, I want to do that. So, I started my own film production company, Meyham Films, with my business partner, James E. Meyer, and we make films."

"Our mission is to create exciting, independent films," he said. "My very first film I play a former kickboxer turned cop. There are a few other movies we have made that have martial arts sprinkled in."

While he continued his newfound passion for making films, Robert completed his doctorate degree at CSU in 2021. His dissertation, 'The Influence of Decentralized Leadership on The Careers of Professional Boxers in California,' connected his love of boxing to his education.

"That dissertation took me about three years to write," he said. "I was so frustrated with it that I just quit and gave up which is very unlike me. I got a call from the dean who told me to not give up, and that they will help you get through this. That showed me that I chose the right school and that they cared about my education."

Robert is always looking to learn and has future plans to help other filmmakers, like himself, succeed as he has.

"I am learning more about distributing films. I want to do this so I can be a hub for other independent filmmakers to get their movies out there."

Much like his action-packed films, Robert has led quite an adventurous life himself. His unwavering belief in himself has guided him to where he stands today. For anyone pursuing their life's purpose, Robert's self-mantra serves as powerful words of wisdom.

"Never take no for an answer. The letters "N," "O" actually mean, next opportunity."



# 2024 Scholarship Recipients

## OMEGA NU LAMBDA

Columbia Southern University's Department of Career Services is proud to award the Omega Nu Lambda Scholarship to its latest recipients. Omega Nu Lambda, a national collegiate honor society, was founded to foster community, provide encouragement and acknowledge the academic success of online students. In order to obtain the scholarship, students must maintain a 3.2 GPA, be in good academic standing and actively participate with CSU Career Services. The Omega Nu Lambda assists in the cost of one future CSU course and recognizes the accomplishments of Omega Nu Lambda student members.

"The ethos of Omega Nu Lambda, which celebrates academic achievement and fosters a sense of community among online learners, resonated with my personal values and rekindled my academic aspirations," said Hasan. "It reminded me that education is not just a personal milestone but a legacy I wish to leave for my family."

**To learn more about the Omega Nu Lambda Scholarship, visit [ColumbiaSouthern.edu/Scholarships](https://ColumbiaSouthern.edu/Scholarships).**



THEODORE LEBOW



QAMARV HASAN



TIFFANY HILLARD

# Nevada Firefighter, Paramedic Awarded Robert G. Mayes Memorial Scholarship



**Justin Grimm**  
2024 Robert G. Mayes  
Memorial Scholarship Winner

Columbia Southern University recently awarded Justin Grimm of Reno, Nevada, the 2024 Robert G. Mayes Memorial Scholarship. Justin works as a firefighter paramedic for the Storey County Fire Protection District.

"As a firefighter, I am committed to protecting and serving my community in times of crisis," he said. "Whether responding to fires, medical emergencies or natural disasters, I strive to provide exceptional service and support to those in distress. Additionally, I actively engage in community outreach programs aimed at promoting fire safety and prevention, educating residents on emergency preparedness and building strong relationships with community members."

In addition to his role as a firefighter paramedic, Justin also serves as vice president of his local International Association of Fire Fighters (IAFF) and is a grant writer for his fire department.

"In my role as vice president of the IAFF, I am involved in managing union finances, negotiating contracts and implementing strategic initiatives to benefit our members," he said. "Understanding business principles has enabled me to make informed decisions and effectively advocate for the needs of firefighters within our organization."

"Additionally, my degree has been instrumental in my capacity as a grant writer for the fire department. Understanding business procedures and policies has allowed me to navigate the grant application process with confidence and efficiency."

Justin earned an associate degree in general studies and a bachelor's degree in business administration at CSU. With this scholarship, he plans to pursue a master's degree in organizational leadership.

"Obtaining my master's degree with Columbia Southern University represents a pivotal step in my career journey as a Firefighter," he said. "Building upon the foundation laid by my undergraduate degree, I aim to achieve several significant milestones in my professional life."

"Ultimately, my goal in pursuing a master's degree with CSU is to position myself for continued growth, advancement and impact within the firefighting profession. Whether leading firefighting operations, managing personnel or shaping strategic initiatives, I aspire to leverage my education and experience to make a meaningful difference in the safety and well-being of my community."

## Robert G. Mayes Memorial Scholarship

Are you thinking of going back to school? CSU is offering our alumni the Robert G. Mayes Memorial Scholarship. This honored scholarship was established in loving memory of Dr. Mayes, Columbia Southern University founder. This 60-credit hour scholarship is awarded annually to one CSU alumnus who wants to further their education by obtaining an online master's degree with CSU.

Be sure to check out other scholarships available to CSU students and alumni to see if you are eligible to apply. You can visit [columbiasouthern.edu/scholarships](https://columbiasouthern.edu/scholarships) for more details!

## Bridging Visions:

# Lebanese Alumnus Unites Eye-Care Experts Through Digital Publication

Dr. Gilbert Nacouzi of Beirut, Lebanon, embodies the spirit of transformative change. With a commitment to advancing both his career and his community, he stands as an example of how one individual's dedication can make a significant impact.

Nacouzi, an optometrist, is working hard along with others in his field to tackle eradicating myopia around the world, which has been declared a serious eye disease and a global epidemic by the World Health Organization.

"Being at the frontline in combatting the biggest eye health threat of the 21st century is very exciting," he said. Nacouzi, who was diagnosed with myopia as a child, is currently working on a myopia management HUB in collaboration with his online publication, Optical Forum.

Nacouzi started the weblog of Optical Forum in 2020 as a means of communication to connect with fellow eye-care professionals and share insights about the business knowledge in shaping the career of an eye-care professional.

"A lot of business concepts are known to eye-care professionals, however they usually don't have the opportunity to discuss them with peers to confirm or amend their perspective," he said. "Therefore, through Optical Forum, I try to help eye-care professionals in their journey towards becoming more and more task or problem centered and my aim through the collaboration with the myopia management HUB now is going one simple step farther. Now we are taking proactive measures and treating the causes of myopia rather than what we use to do five years ago, waiting till myopia appears and correcting the symptoms."



Nacouzi finds the Optical Forum very rewarding as he sees a growing interest of practitioners interacting, sharing ideas and experiences.

"My goal for the publication is to keep inspiring eye-care professionals to inquire about business knowledge and find new ways to collaborate with other practitioners in sharing their experience, and learning from others' experiences," he added.

The publication and his 23-year-old practice are two ways Nacouzi is making a difference and doing something he has wanted to do since he was 12. He is now fulfilling the sole reason he became an optometrist—to help people.



## Dr. Freda Braddock Has Big Plans for New College of Education

Columbia Southern University is proud to introduce its new College of Education under the leadership of Freda Braddock, Ed.D. The new college will offer a range of innovative administrative programs tailored to current educators including its new doctoral and master's degrees in curriculum and instruction.

According to Braddock, the college's degree programs are designed to equip educators and future administrators with knowledge and skills to impact the lives of students by meeting them where they are in their academic abilities and cultivating their potential.

"We will strive to practice what we teach by empowering educators to reach all students—regardless of the labels that they have been given," said Braddock. "Labels are meant for cans and not students."

A longtime educator, Dr. Braddock has served in many facets of the education sector including her time as an instructor, course writer, and program director at CSU.

# Become a Learning Partner



**CAREERQUEST**



# Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force #19 JoAnne Bass Named Strategic Advisor

Columbia Southern University (CSU) welcomes Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force #19 JoAnne Bass as strategic advisor for government, military, and community relations.

Bass served more than 31 years in the defense sector, culminating in her role as the 19th Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force, leading more than 689,000 personnel. As the highest-ranking enlisted member in the Air Force, Bass has provided counsel to top military leaders on issues affecting the enlisting force. Her selection as the senior enlisted leader marked her place in history as the first woman to achieve this rank for any military service.

"I'm thrilled to join the Columbia Southern University team," said Bass. "CSU is doing remarkable work to help advance higher education across the nation and globally. As I think about the challenges we face as a nation...it'll take a whole-of-society approach, and CSU is working toward that by developing people, and having an eye toward emerging programs that lead the way in affordability and accessibility."

As strategic advisor for military, government, and community relations, Bass will leverage her expertise



in leadership and organizational dynamics to support CSU's mission and play a pivotal role in shaping strategic initiatives, fostering a healthy culture, and enhancing CSU's engagement with government, military/veteran, and community relations.

"We are honored and so proud to officially welcome Chief Bass (Jo) to the CSU family. She brings a tremendous wealth of knowledge across a variety of sectors that will not only benefit our students but will strategically guide the university as we push for continued growth and innovation," said Ken Styron, DBA, president. "Coupled with her numerous assignments, achievements, and awards, Chief Bass serves as an inspiration to us all here at CSU, military and civilian students and staff alike."

Bass served as the advisor to the Chief of Staff and the Secretary of the Air Force on all issues regarding the welfare, readiness, morale, and proper utilization and progress of U.S. Airmen. She has significant joint service and special operations experience and participated in several operations and exercises as well as deployments in direct support of Operations Southern Watch, Enduring Freedom, and Iraqi Freedom.

*And Receive*

## Exclusive Benefits

With more than 5,000 Learning Partners across the nation, Columbia Southern University has already provided training and education to thousands. Learning Partners have exclusive benefits at CSU. Not only are these benefits available to our partners' employees but they are also available to employees' spouses and children.

**GET STARTED TODAY.** Visit [ColumbiaSouthern.edu/Partners](https://ColumbiaSouthern.edu/Partners)



[ColumbiaSouthern.edu/Alumni](https://ColumbiaSouthern.edu/Alumni)

## Vicki Barnes *Community Involvement Scholarship*

A new scholarship dedicated to honoring the legacy of Vicki Barnes, a beloved member of the Columbia Southern University family.

We are honored to offer this scholarship in recognition of Vicki's incredible contributions made during her 27 years of service at CSU.

We hope that this scholarship will inspire future generations to follow in Vicki's footsteps and make a positive impact on the world.

Learn more about this scholarship and other resources that may be available at [ColumbiaSouthern.edu/Scholarships](https://ColumbiaSouthern.edu/Scholarships).



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