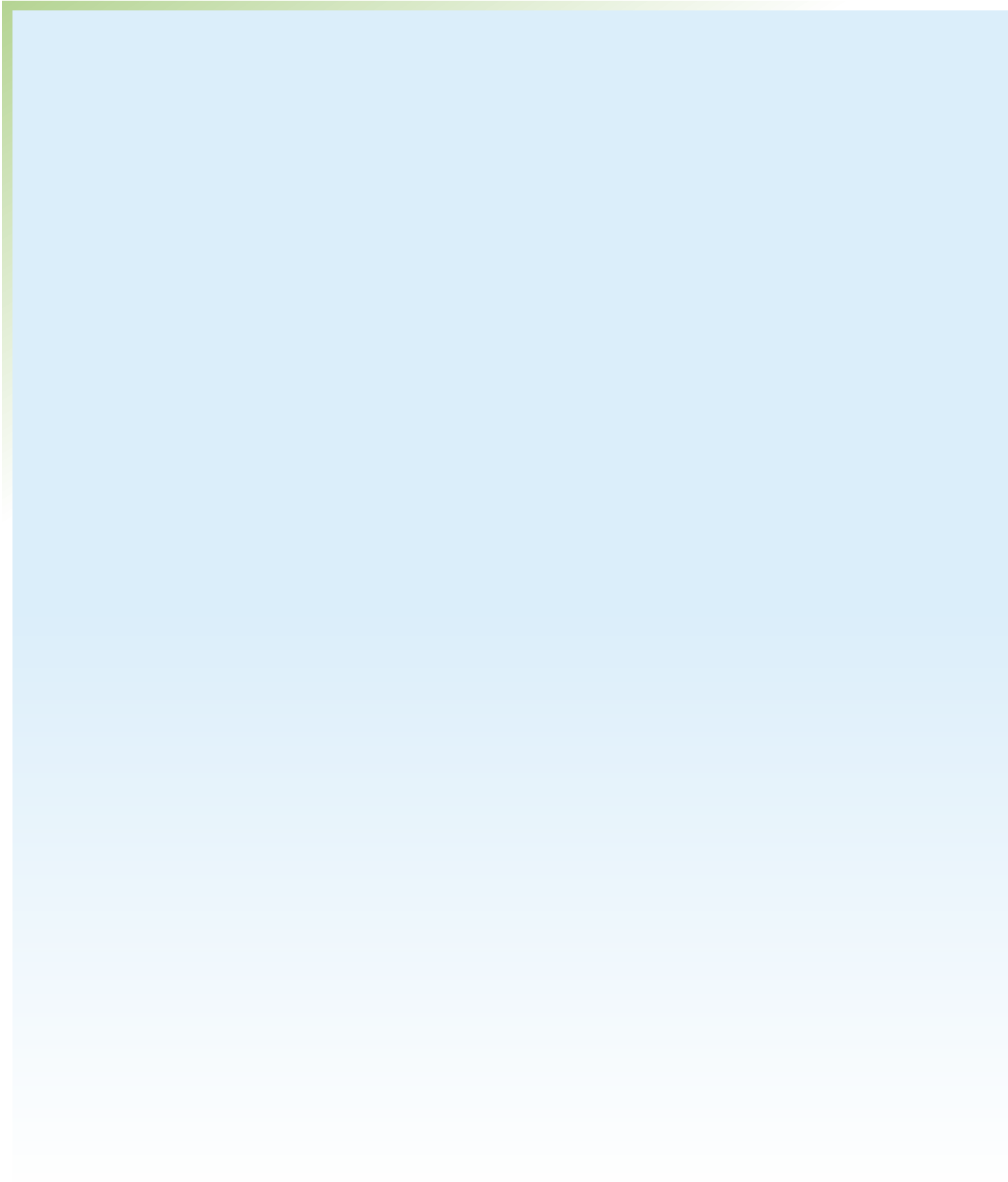


# Synapse



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# Letter from the Dean





# Lifechanging Gift



JOHN M. LAWRENCE '73 IS WELL KNOWN FOR HIS PASSION FOR SAVING RARE BOOKS AND MANUSCRIPTS. HOWEVER, HE ALSO IS PASSIONATE ABOUT PRESERVING THE DREAMS OF USI STUDENTS PURSUING CAREERS IN THE HEALTH PROFESSIONS, INCLUDING NURSING AND FOOD AND NUTRITION.

A certified public accountant, Lawrence established a scholarship in 2006 in memory of his late wife, which has helped 28 students realize their dreams of becoming nurses. Nichole Taylor and Damon Weaver are the most recent recipients of the Melissa Faye Lawrence Endowed Memorial Nursing Scholarship. They both plan to graduate in Spring 2022.

Nichole Taylor grew up in Newark, Delaware, but has lived in Indiana for the past nine years. She is the mother of three children, 5-year-old twin girls and an 8-year-old son.

"I was inspired to become a nurse because of the important role the nurses played when my children were in the neonatal intensive care unit (NICU)," she said, adding that one of her twins was transferred to the NICU at Riley Hospital for Children in Indianapolis.

"If I ever meet Mr. Lawrence in person, I will first and foremost tell him, 'Thank you,'" she said. "I want him to know that without him, I would not be able to finish my degree and graduate on time. I will tell him how much it means to me to be able to have the opportunity to succeed and provide for my family. His generous scholarship allows me to be able to achieve my dream of becoming a nurse!"

Taylor said in five years, she would love to be working in the NICU and eventually become a nurse practitioner. "Because of this scholarship, I am able to take the first step in that journey," she said.

Damon Weaver also is an adult learner in the USI Nursing Program. He commutes to USI from Owensboro, Kentucky, where he lives with his wife and children. The scholarship has relieved some stress about paying for a nursing education. "With COVID hitting, my wife was required to take a pay cut. As classes became more difficult, I had to drop down to working part-time," he said. "The financial impact of the scholarship really helped calm some financial concerns."

Weaver says his short-term goals are to work in the intensive care unit. "I am currently a paramedic and want to experience the continuation of

care for the critical patients I have been bringing to the hospital for the past 12 years," he said. "I have met some incredible people and helped





The University of Southern Indiana received

## Expanding Career Opportunities

The University of Southern Indiana Board of Trustees approved the Doctor of Occupational Therapy (OTD) Program in its November meeting. It will be the third doctoral program offered by the University. The OTD Program will next be reviewed by the Indiana Commission for Higher Education, Higher Learning Commission and the Accreditation Council for Occupational Therapy Education. It is scheduled to begin instruction in Fall 2023.

"USI is proud to start offering our second healthcare doctoral program as we seek to meet the needs and goals of ever-changing healthcare demands," said Dr. Ann White, Dean of the College of Nursing and Health Professions. "As our population ages and the demand for qualified healthcare professionals continues to rise, our program will provide extensively-trained, doctorally-prepared occupational therapy practitioners to serve southwest Indiana, the state and the nation."

The OTD Program will require a minimum of 100 graduate credit hours. Students entering the program with a bachelor's degree will take classes in person on the USI campus and at the Stone Family Center for Health Science in downtown Evansville. An online track will also be available for post-professional and master's degree-holding students requiring 31 graduate credit hours.



## New Student Trustee



Liam Collins, USI Class of 2023, is the first student from the College of Nursing and Health Professions to join the USI Board of Trustees. Indiana Governor Eric J. Holcomb appointed Collins to a two-year term as the student trustee, beginning July 1, 2021.

A native of Lowell, Indiana, Collins is pursuing a bachelor of science in nursing and is a Presidential Scholar for the Class of 2023. He currently holds a 4.0 cumulative GPA and works as a mathematics coach for students participating in Academic Super Bowl. He is involved in a number of groups and activities including Sigma Pi Fraternity, Special Olympics and College Life at USI Campus Ministry.

As a student trustee, Collins said he plans to contribute his perspective and experiences

as a student to “inform decisions as we move forward to returning to a more recognizable, pre-COVID-19 environment” and that he would strive to “ensure every student feels their opinions are heard, valued and respected.”

The student trustee, a voting member of the nine-member USI Board of Trustees, brings a student’s perspective to the governing board. The USI Board of Trustees must include one alumnus of the University, one current student and one resident of Vanderburgh County. The student trustee must be a full-time student, a U.S. citizen and resident of Indiana, have a 2.5 GPA or above, and have completed 24 credit hours at USI.

## A Lesson in Seeing

What would it be like to attend college with a visual impairment? USI students learned about the unique challenges faced by students who are blind or visually impaired during a summer program on the USI campus with the Evansville Association for the Blind (EAB).

“The purpose of the program is to help guide incoming students to campus life before an actual semester begins,” said Elizabeth Ramos, Instructor in Food and Nutrition. “USI University Division, Academic Skills, Disability Resources, and Housing and Residence Life participated. Food and Nutrition was asked to open the Food Science Lab in the Health Professions Center for cooking classes, so that is how I got involved.”

Krysti Hughes of the EAB allowed USI students to help facilitate the cooking classes, which offered mutual learning, according to Ramos. “Our students learned about the visually impaired, the need for adaptations and the special utensils and equipment used in food preparation, while the EAB clients learned the kitchen basics, including cutting, chopping foods, range top, oven and Instant Pot use, recipes, planning a menu and grocery shopping,” she said.

Ramos said she was amazed at the EAB clients’ curiosity and willingness to learn about food safety and preparation. “I had to marvel at the fun the students had especially making their own creations with a waffle iron. The CNHP students were involved at every step,” she said. “The joy

of watching them eat and savor every bite was heartwarming.”

In addition to two dietetics students, Ramos also had one USI occupational therapy student participate in the volunteer service-learning project.

Michaela Jones, a dietetics student who plans to graduate in Spring 2022, volunteered for each of the four cooking classes. She bonded with the EAB students, offering good conversation, menu

and cooking suggestions and hands-on assistance. At the conclusion of the classes, Jones said, “Going into this project, I was excited to work with the students but completely unaware of the impact each of them would have on my life. As I taught them how to cook, they taught me that a disability does not disable you. With a new approach, you can overcome any obstacle. Each day when I left the kitchen, I felt like I had experienced a miracle.”



*During a summer program with the Evansville Association for the Blind, USI dietetics students helped teach food safety and preparation while making waffles in the Food Science Lab in the Health Professions Center.*



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During the Spring 2021 semester, Dr. Karen Parker, Assistant Professor of Nursing, collaborated with the American Red Cross on a project to help fulfill some of her students' clinical hour requirements. Sixteen USI nursing students were instructed how to present "Prepare with Pedro" and "The Pillowcase Project" across southwestern Indiana. In total, the USI students presented 37 virtual programs, impacting 827 students. They also shadowed Red Cross staff to observe disaster follow-up with clients.

"Prepare with Pedro" is a Red Cross education program for kindergarten through second grade that teaches students how to

be prepared and take action for either home fires or a local hazard. Students learn coping skills by reading a story featuring a penguin named Pedro, and they receive a storybook to share what they have learned at home.

The Red Cross "Pillowcase Project," for third through fifth grades, also teaches students about personal and family preparedness, local hazards and coping skills. Upon completion, students receive a sturdy pillowcase in which to build their personal emergency supplies kit.

# AROUND THE COLLEGE

## New Employees



**Taylor Elpers**  
*Instructor in Nursing*



**April Fehlinger**  
*Instructor in Nursing*



**Melissa Rockman**  
*Instructor in  
Diagnostic Medical  
Sonography*



**Dr. Jenna Thacker**  
*Assistant Professor  
of Occupational  
Therapy*

**Dr. Jennifer Evans**, Associate Professor of Nursing, is the new Chair of the Undergraduate (BSN) Nursing Program.

**Jennifer Fehrenbacher** was promoted to Assistant Professor of Dental Hygiene.

**Emily Holt '00, B'01, M'04** was promoted to Clinical Professor of Dental Hygiene/Assisting, becoming USI's first clinical track full professor.

**Dr. Phoneshia Wells** was promoted to Contract Associate Professor of Health Services.



## EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING AWARDS

Each year, the College of Nursing and Health Professions presents the Melissa and John M. Lawrence Excellence in Teaching Award to shine a spotlight on faculty members who contribute significantly to students in the College. The 2020-2021 recipients of this award are Shawna Haywood, Instructor in Nursing and Sean Weir, Assistant Professor of Occupational Therapy Assistant.



Haywood



Weir

## FACULTY DEVELOPMENT AWARD

Dr. Mikel Hand, Associate Professor of Nursing, and Dr. Connie Swenty, Assistant Dean and Associate Professor of Nursing, received the 2021 College of Nursing and Health Professions Faculty Development Award. The funds from this award will be used to implement their project, *Lived Experience of Third Semester Transition: A Qualitative Study*.



## AROUND THE COLLEGE

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A new podcast from the University of Southern Indiana Center for Healthy Aging and Wellness is showcasing and exploring the dynamic lives of older adults in southwestern Indiana. *bOLDer People*, hosted by Dr. Katie Ehlman, USI Professor of Gerontology, features

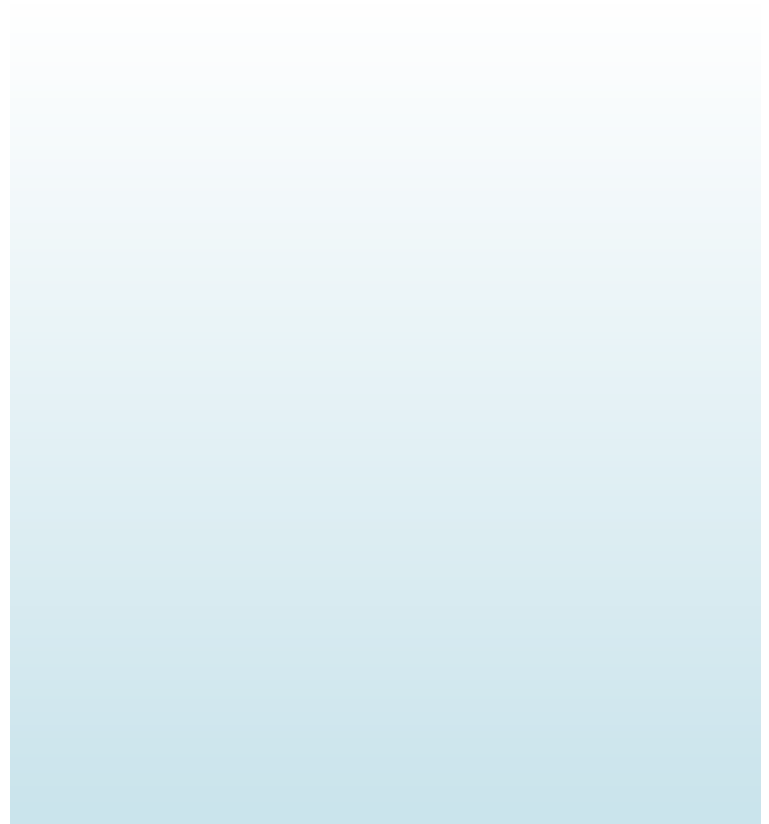
## Inspiring First

Emily Holt '00, B'01, M'04, faculty member in the USI Dental Hygiene/Assisting Program, knew the bar was set high when she started down the clinical faculty promotion road at USI. No other individual at USI had ever been promoted to clinical professor, but that didn't deter her from her goal to be the first, inspiring not only her colleagues, but her children.

"I love leaving behind a legacy that my family and I can be proud of," said Holt. "My pursuit of being the first clinical track faculty member to be promoted to clinical professor is a testament to my children that we can do hard things."

Holt said USI's decision to create a clinical track for promotion was a step in the right direction. "So many health professions' faculty members have a practice focus and fit nicely into this track," she said. "Recognizing the practice as an impactful component to teaching and employment at USI is beneficial to the students' learning and the growth of our education programs."

Holt began teaching as an adjunct in the clinical and lab settings in August 2001 and her full-time teaching assignment began in August 2006. She graduated from USI three times, earning an associate of



## 2021 Distinguished Nursing Award Recipient

Lois (Stallings) Welden '94 M'01 D'14, a clinical nurse specialist with more than 40 years of nursing, research and leadership experience, is the 2021 recipient of the University of Southern Indiana Distinguished Nursing Alumni Award.

"Lois is an outstanding mentor for nursing staff at all levels, sharing knowledge and critical thinking skills in a calm, compassionate and easily approachable manner," wrote one of her award nominators. "She educates on the importance of using nursing research and evidence to support practice changes to improve nursing care and patient outcomes. She is a nurse who exhibits passion for the nursing profession by being a role model and encouraging others to strive to improve and develop themselves."

Welden, one of seven children, was born in Indianapolis and raised on a farm in north central Indiana. When she was only 15 years old, she applied to work as a nurse aide at Clinton County Hospital in Frankfort, Indiana, with the intent to earn tuition and room and board money while attending a Christian high school and college that was a few hours from home. When she was denied employment because of her age, she returned three months later at the age of 16 to speak to the director of nursing, who abruptly said, "I will not hire 16-year-olds because they are not dependable!" Welden immediately reached out to her teachers and others to obtain letters of recommendation, giving the letters to the director as they came in. "She finally gave up and hired me, saying (while pointing her finger at me) that she would train me herself!" said Welden. "She was an old Army nurse whose uniform was heavily starched, and she had a stern, no nonsense look that was quite intimidating, but I refused to be diverted. I was determined to show her I was dependable."

This young farm girl with no prior nursing experience embraced the various tasks she was given at the hospital, which set the stage for her future career. "While working as a nurse's aide there, I realized the joy of caring for patients and that I could be instrumental in alleviating their pain and providing comfort," she said. "Growing up, I thought I wanted to be a missionary, but with my exposure working as a nurse's aide, I knew I wanted to be a nurse."

In 1979, when her four sons were age 7 and under, she made the decision to begin her nursing studies while working full-time as a nurse's aide at Deaconess Hospital, Evansville. "The hospital made a difference in my life," she said, recalling the tuition support offered by Deaconess to earn her associate degree in nursing. "They believed in their employees and believed in me. After I graduated [from college], I had other job offers, but I

felt like I had something to give back to Deaconess, so I started working as a staff nurse in the Cardiac Intensive Care Unit there. Deaconess has also been supportive of the other nursing degrees (bachelor, masters and doctorate) I have earned."

Throughout her career at Deaconess, she has held the titles of Assistant Head Nurse and Department Director, and today, at age 70, she still works full time in nursing leadership as a clinical nurse specialist in the Deaconess Magnet Program and Employee Education Department.

She has also served as adjunct faculty at USI since 2015, teaching online Clinical Synthesis and Nursing Informatics over the years.

Welden credits USI faculty for her decision to become a nurse manager.

## More Nursing Alumni

**Debra Wilson '10 M'11** was named Vice President of Oncology for Lee Health in southwest Florida in August 2021. In her new role, she is responsible for establishing the vision and strategic direction for cancer services at Lee Health. She worked at Deaconess Health System in Evansville for 19

years, five of which she served as the director of oncology services.

**Katrina Etter '13**, current student in USI's Doctorate of Nursing Program, shared that a presentation she created with an Anthem

medical director for a class project was added to the company's Sharepoint site and incorporated into new hire training for several other regional departments as well. "It's always so helpful when a class helps to spark an idea that ends up being beneficial for the organizations we serve," she said.



