



# ALUMNI

CHRONICLES MAGAZINE

ISSUE : 03

A ST. LOUIS HOMECOMING



20  
23

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Homecoming

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UOPX

PRESIDENT CHRIS LYNNE

Dear Alum,

At University of Phoenix, our alumni are over 1 million strong — and connected! We have a broad network of alumni with 50 chapters across the country. And everywhere there are Phoenixes, there is pride in their connection with each other and their communities.

It is the strength of this communal bond that drives our new initiative: transitioning to nonprofit status. Once this transition is complete, University of Phoenix will actively partner with the University of Idaho (U of I) through an affiliation to bolster our efforts in supporting our alumni and working adult students as they pursue their education and career dreams.

The timing of this transition is very intentional. Higher education is changing at a rapid pace. As a result, we must channel our pioneering spirit and commitment to innovation into new ways that will expand and enhance higher education opportunities for working adults as well as others who seek a flexible, affordable, accessible and innovative path to career-relevant skills.

Our nonprofit status and new affiliation with U of I will foster an even greater focus on University of Phoenix student success and community. It will enable us to reinvest in our institution, which will facilitate increased student support services, technology sharing and more, both for University of Phoenix and U of I students and alumni.

We are proud to move forward, side by side, with a highly respected, 135-year-old land grant institution to ensure students and alumni at both schools receive the resources and opportunities they need.

University of Phoenix has built a sense of connection, one that our alumni can share no matter where they are in the world. Now, that will extend even further to U of I students and alumni who will join a community where working adults feel they belong and where their experience is embraced alongside their learning. It is a new kind of homecoming as we rise toward the future, together.

Sincerely,



**Chris Lynne**  
President, University of Phoenix

PRIDE  
in moving forward



thrive on the

nontraditional

Renee Burleson, Vice President, Communications, Seattle Chapter; Patrick Kendrick, President, Seattle Chapter; and Chris Celauro, Director, Alumni Experience at UOPX, all come together at the Seattle homecoming event aboard a cruise.



Dear Alum,

Welcome to the third edition of *Alumni Chronicles Magazine*.

We are just coming out of homecoming season, and many of you will have attended one of our chapter-led events throughout the country. If you have, I bet you had a great time. Our photo essay, "Homecoming, UOPX Style," may look familiar to you as it documents in pictures the different ways University of Phoenix celebrates homecoming, from a lunchtime cruise outside Honolulu to a networking event in St. Louis.

If you haven't attended one of these events, please check one out in 2024! It isn't necessarily what you'd expect.

Homecoming at a traditional university might see alumni returning to the campus of their alma mater during one designated long weekend. There's usually a pep rally, a parade, a football game, the coronation of a queen and king, activities where freshmen and alumni can interact and, at the culmination of it all, a formal dance.

UOPX does things differently. Our homecoming events happen throughout the year and across the country. Ten to 12 local chapters host these events each year with the support of the University. Everyone attending is a queen and king. We don't do pep rallies, because our students rallied every day to juggle life and school. You can attend one in your hometown if it's available or you can travel to one. (Just know they fill up fast!)

We sometimes go to a professional football, soccer or baseball game, as we did in Phoenix this year.

And while there may not be a formal dance, we often break into dance.

We don't do traditional at University of Phoenix. Like our students, we do the opposite. We thrive on the nontraditional, and our homecomings are no different.

Thinking differently is also how we approach this magazine. We strive to create content we know our alumni can use, like our feature on how to beat burnout. We know you're busy, even after your diploma is on your wall, and we want to encourage you to find the kind of balance that will bring you fulfillment.

Speaking of diplomas, this issue's alumni profile centers on recent doctoral graduate and former NFL player Donald "Butch" Rolle. Read his story to see how doing things differently has translated to a diverse range of opportunities and experiences.

Above all, please enjoy this edition of *Alumni Chronicles Magazine*. Then, get yourself to a homecoming — and let's dance.

Ciao, Ciao,

Chris Celauro, Director, Alumni Experience

**You have friends in local places**

**PHOENIX**

**RALEIGH**

**JACKSONVILLE**

**CHICAGO**

**Network with UOPX graduates, volunteer locally — and have some fun. Join one of 50 chapters nationwide.**

[phoenix.edu/chapters](http://phoenix.edu/chapters) →



**07** **New at the U**

From a new YouTube playlist inspired by recent research to ways Phoenixes can enhance and expand their job searches, this is your guide to the latest and greatest happenings at the University.

**11** **Alumni Profile: Butch Rolle Uses Brawn – and Brains – to Help Others Win**

Former NFL player and University of Phoenix alumnus Donald “Butch” Rolle takes his passion for winning to his community.

**13** **Help Wanted: Influencer Generation**

Gen Z is in the house! Career advisor Jamie Johnson shares what they have to learn and what they have to share when it comes to succeeding in the workplace.

**15** **Alumni Chapter Spotlight: Building Bridges**

Three alumni-chapter leaders reveal how they build engagement, enhance networking opportunities and give back to the community, all while having fun.

**17** **Homecoming, UOPX Style**

University of Phoenix does homecoming differently. This photographic journey shows how.

**21** **Don't Get Burned by Burnout**

Just because you've completed your degree doesn't mean you don't have stress. Find out four ways to get off the burnout track.

**25** **Research Rising: Problem? Meet Your Solution.**

There are no ivory towers here. At University of Phoenix's College of Doctoral Studies, research focuses on practical solutions to real-world problems. Discover the latest findings on addiction, diversity in management and women leaders.

**27** **Faculty Features: Connecting in the Classroom and Beyond**

Get to know two instructors who are shaping the educational experience at UOPX.

**31** **Alumni Why**

The motivation behind the degree for three UOPX alumni.



**07**

**New at the U**

Innovation is always underway at University of Phoenix. Explore the latest and greatest news and opportunities.



**11**

**Helping Others Win**

Donald “Butch” Rolle takes his winning streak off the football field and into his community.



**13**

**Influencer Generation**

Gen Z is going to work. Find out what that means for everyone else.



**17**

**Homecoming, UOPX Style**

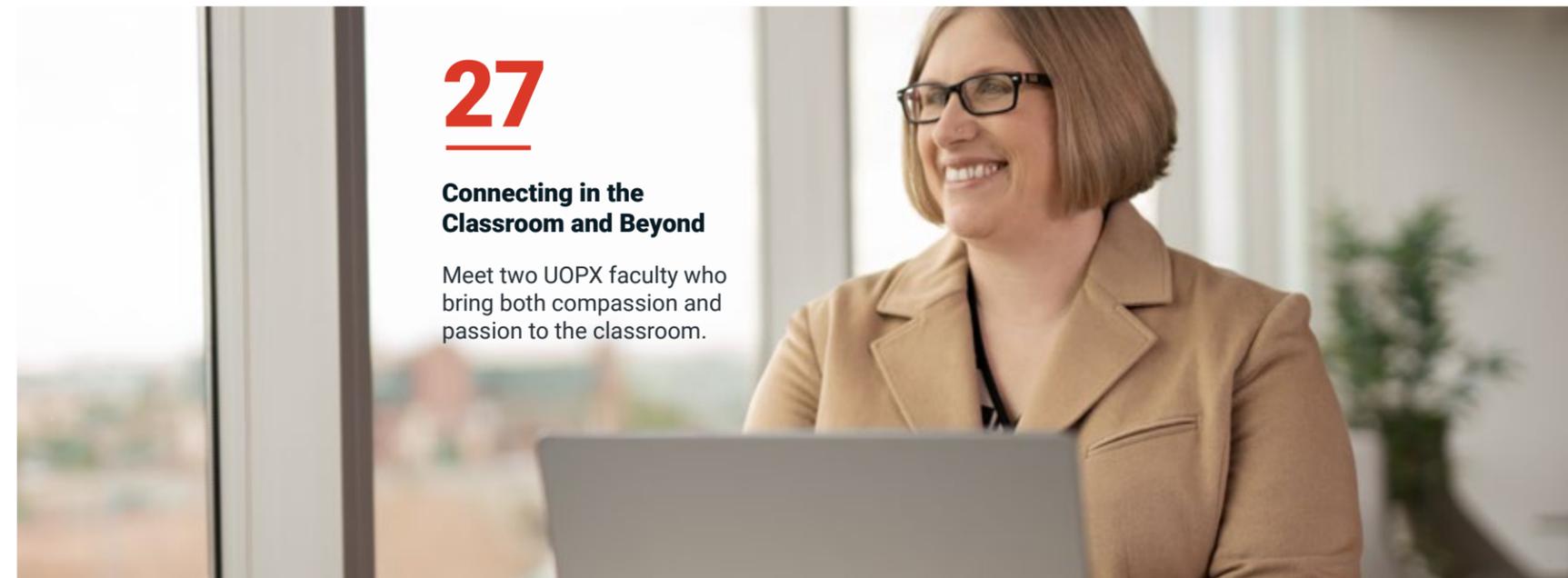
See how UOPX does homecoming, from cruises on the Pacific to networking events in the Midwest.

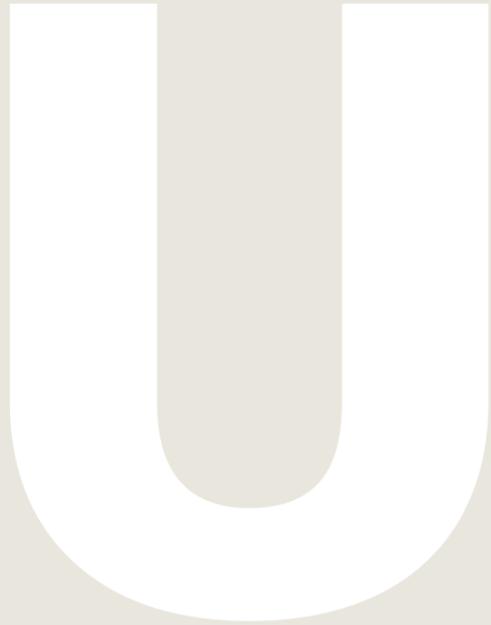


**27**

**Connecting in the Classroom and Beyond**

Meet two UOPX faculty who bring both compassion and passion to the classroom.





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By Kaleigh Moore

Ever committed to career enhancement for its students and alumni, University of Phoenix (UOPX) has made strides in research, initiatives and tools that help professionals get more out of their work.

From active collaborations that remove barriers to education and jobs, to research that adds context and perspective to larger conversations about workplace issues, UOPX is working to transform the landscape for working professionals everywhere. Read on for the latest and greatest news.

## How Optimistic Are You? (About Your Career, That Is)

Knowledge is power, especially when it comes to understanding career trends. That’s just one reason the 2023 Career Optimism Index® report is so powerful. Conducted by the University of Phoenix Career Institute® enterprise, the Index reveals significant insight into the state of American workers’ (and employers’) mindsets.

For starters, the Career Optimism Index mined surveys of 5,000 adult workers and 500 U.S. employers to determine that workers are in fact optimistic about their professional futures — but not because they think their employers will pave the way to their success. They believe in themselves.

Key insights at the time of the survey include:

- 53% of Americans are looking for a new job or plan to in the next six months.
- 47% of workers are experiencing burnout at work.
- Employers could improve worker retention by investing in mentorship and upskilling opportunities.

How will this impact the job market? That depends on what employers — and employees — do with the information.

→ **Learn more:** [phoenix.edu/career-institute](https://phoenix.edu/career-institute)

**Get more insights from our YouTube series!**  
[bit.ly/2023CareerOptimismIndex](https://bit.ly/2023CareerOptimismIndex)

## Get Smart(er)

If you thought watching videos couldn’t improve your intellect, UOPX is here to prove you wrong with its new *Research Rising* series on YouTube. Designed to share some of the most exciting research and discoveries coming out of the University, this series distills big ideas into engaging, informative videos that last less than one minute each.

Curious to learn more? Then not only is the series perfect for you but especially consider the first episode. It spotlights a graduate whose dissertation focused on the application of holographic teleportation technology so that doctors can talk to astronauts on the International Space Station.

Other videos explore topics like the impact of millennials in the workplace and how to effectively manage intrusive thoughts. Getting smarter — and more informed — just got faster *and* more fun.

→ **Learn more:** [bit.ly/ResearchRising](https://bit.ly/ResearchRising)



## Learning to Navigate the Career Jungle

University of Phoenix offers its graduates a Career Services for Life® commitment and is building upon that dedication to student career readiness with the new Career Navigator platform. This personalized career guidance platform lets students and alumni explore careers and knowledgeably plan their next steps by housing UOPX's career-readiness tools in one, user-friendly space. Students and alumni can connect to it via their secure student portal.

Using Career Navigator, students and alumni can:

- Learn through the Career Explorer tool about careers based on fields or industries they are interested in.
- Plan and identify their next steps in the Career Planner tool by saving careers and job titles that best align with their goals.
- View their demonstrated or self-identified skills in their Skills Profile.
- Explore job postings relevant to their most recent program of study using the Job Explorer feature.

Launched in June 2023, Career Navigator brings UOPX students and alumni many steps closer to identifying and pursuing their career goals.

→ **Learn more:** [phoenix.edu/career-services](https://phoenix.edu/career-services)

## Got Social Capital?

One axiom of the professional world has long been that, when it comes to moving up the corporate ladder, who you know matters at least as much as what you know. Today, that idea of developing and leveraging a professional network is known as social capital. And it's something to which Black workers historically have not had access.

Enter a collaboration between University of Phoenix Career Institute® enterprise and Jobs for the Future (JFF), a national nonprofit dedicated to achieving equitable economic advancement for everyone.

Through funding from University of Phoenix, JFF is researching the strategies of higher education institutions and employers to develop social capital for Black learners and workers. The idea is to use those insights to shape an evidence-based framework that both higher education and employers can use to drive career advancement.

This marks a significant milestone for University of Phoenix Career Institute enterprise, which was established in 2021 to dismantle barriers to career growth.

→ **Learn more:** [bit.ly/equitable-advancement](https://bit.ly/equitable-advancement)

## Commencement Corner

Commencement is a big deal, and UOPX emphasizes flexibility by offering options that are both versatile and varied. Eligible students and graduates can attend the annual ceremony in Phoenix or at one of the other destinations selected each year. (Selected destinations vary by year and are chosen based on multiple factors, including venue locations, availability and capacity.)

Recognizing that travel costs and personal schedules can be barriers to attending commencement, the University also offers virtual ceremonies, which graduates can attend in lieu of an in-person ceremony or in addition to one.

Eligibility requirements, registration deadlines and regalia information can be accessed through the student portal or by visiting the University's dedicated landing page.

→ **Learn more:** [phoenix.edu/commencement](https://phoenix.edu/commencement)

## Thought Leadership

Many conversations are happening in the world today about leadership, careers, technology, and diversity and inclusion. Although numerous voices are joining in the dialogue, it's the ones informed by data and research that carry the most authority.

With its robust research offerings, University of Phoenix has stepped into this proverbial town hall through its newly launched Together We Lead section of the Media Center on phoenix.edu. Together We Lead is dedicated to thought-leadership content that highlights research, data and original voices from across the University.

Together We Lead is organized into two areas: Perspectives & Findings, which includes original white papers; and Experts & Scholars, which showcases externally published articles whose content resonates with UOPX's audience. Additionally, the Together We Lead landing page has a video feature to amplify external interviews or thought leadership.

Together We Lead also directs visitors to other established thought leadership settings at the University, including the College of Doctoral Studies research centers, the Career Institute, and the research and scholarship journal *Phoenix Scholar*™.

→ **Learn more:** [phoenix.edu/media-center/thought-leadership](https://phoenix.edu/media-center/thought-leadership)



## ALUMNI PROFILE

# Butch Rolle uses brawn & brains TO HELP OTHERS WIN

By Laurie Davies

*Butch Rolle takes a break in South Florida.*

The problem that former Buffalo Bills tight end Donald “Butch” Rolle tackles daily — the lack of resources for inner-city kids — requires the same skill set he needed in football: vision, blocking and leadership. **It’s that blocking that gets him.**



Through his Butch Rolle Caring for Kids Foundation, Rolle (MBA, 2010; EdD, 2023) is trying to block inner-city kids from the life that could have swallowed him up too. “I could have easily fallen through the cracks,” he says, describing the pull toward drugs, alcohol and street life that sucked in many of his classmates. “I go home, and I still see all the same guys, sitting under trees, drinking liquor from a bottle.”

Rolle’s Pentecostal preacher dad tried hard to protect Rolle and his eight siblings from that life. One way he succeeded was by making sure the kids grew up in church. Maybe that’s why Rolle didn’t give football much thought until high school, when he played bass drum in the band. “I was a 215-pound freshman,” he recalls. “The varsity coach saw me and said, ‘What in the bleepety-bleep are you doing in the band?’”

The coach had to win over Rolle’s skeptical father, who relented with this condition: Butch would still go to church. “Even when I was playing professional football, when I came home, I would go to church,” Rolle says. “Church gave me a faith anchor.”

### The Twin Roles of Brawn and Brains

The rest, as they say, is history. Rolle enrolled at Michigan State University, where he flourished as a Spartan and earned his bachelor’s degree in elementary education. Drafted in the seventh round of the 1986 NFL draft, Rolle played for Buffalo, Arizona and Houston (now the Tennessee Titans).

Rolle retired from football in 1998 and started a mortgage company. Ten years later, he began his MBA with University of Phoenix. When he came knocking again on University of Phoenix’s door in 2018 to add a second master’s degree, this time in leadership, his advisor asked, “Why do you want to do another master’s? Why not get your doctorate?”

Rolle thought about it. For about a second.

“You know what? That sounds like a good idea.

“*Can’t.* I don’t even know that word. That word doesn’t apply to me. I don’t want it to apply to kids either.”

Let me do it,” he said. He enrolled in the Doctor of Education program.

This past summer, he added this rarest of educational accomplishments to his resumé. But Rolle is more than his degrees or his career. His other callings include playing in a rock band and working as a physical education teacher and coach at the Central Miramar campus of Somerset Academy in Florida. There, he encourages kids to capture a big vision for their life.

In fact, when considering a single word to describe Rolle, his foundation’s programs manager, Tracie Jones, offers *big*.

“He’s a consummate football player, big and muscular. He’s got a big voice, big personality, big heart. He’s big at everything,” she says.

And that includes his vision. “He took that ‘bigness’ and built an amazing life,” Jones says.

### Big Dreams, Big Rewards

Through his Caring for Kids Foundation, Rolle extends that vision to others. His foundation offers tutoring, meals and college scholarships to help students in marginalized areas advance in life.

For his efforts with the foundation, Rolle was named 2022 Buffalo Bills Legend of the Year. More recently, he was named one of the 2023 Presidential Volunteer Service Lifetime Achievement Award recipients. The bipartisan award was established under President George H.W. Bush for honorees who have accumulated more than 4,000 humanitarian and philanthropic service hours, among other criteria.

The kids in Rolle’s orbit are no doubt glad for his endless hours too. “Some are go-getters,” Rolle says. “But some don’t have inspiration because they just don’t think they’re going to have anything else in life. ... They think, ‘Well, others don’t care about me, so why I should I care?’ I step in and say, ‘No, you should care.’ I can say that because I look like them. *I was them when I was their age.*”

Today, Rolle exemplifies what’s possible when you care. And while he’s proud of his educational accomplishments, he’s most excited by what it can do for others.

“This degree will help me bring confidence and magnitude to my work on behalf of kids who need the same resources as everyone else,” he says. “*Can’t.* I don’t even know that word. That word doesn’t apply to me. I don’t want it to apply to kids either.”

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## HELP WANTED

# Influencer generation

## How Gen Z Can Learn From and Change the Workplace

By Aleece Reynaga

Born between 1997 and 2012, Gen Z has made headlines for making bold choices, taking chances and setting new trends. So, what else do we know about them?

A recent survey conducted by Deloitte indicates that Gen Z is ready to spearhead some change. For starters, they want more flexibility to create a better work-life balance. They also have serious concerns about the high cost of living, especially since many of them must take on a side hustle or second job just to make ends meet.



But those are only the data points. What do people in the field see? For that, we turned to University of Phoenix (UOPX) career advisor Jamie Johnson, who has more than 25 years' experience. She's advised Gen X, millennials and now Gen Z in navigating the ever-changing career landscape.

Here, she separates fact from fiction when it comes to Gen Z in the workplace.

**Many people feel each generation has its own approach to work.**

**Do you feel this is true? If so, what differences have you noticed?**

We have five generations in the workplace that have gone through different stages of global life experience. That means that, while we have common life

experiences, we need to learn to appreciate people for what they bring individually to the workplace.

We regularly get the characterization of the multigenerational workplace through the eyes of media sharing broad, sweeping statements about the traits, wants, beliefs and communication styles, stereotyping Gen Z's thoughts, actions and work style.

However, if you begin to look deeper, you will see there are baby boomers who are tech-savvy and Gen Zers who are more traditional in their work style and self-observational views.

It is important to recognize the impact of the world and the influences each generation grew up with and how their individual perceptions can shape the intersection of their approach to work.

### What do you feel other generations might be able to learn from Gen Z in the workplace?

Before the pandemic, I observed that Gen Z appeared to follow some of the cultural values and thinking of the Traditionalists [those born before 1945] in their approach to the world of work. When the pandemic hit, Gen Z, along with everyone else, had life interrupted. The world of work changed, and only those who were deemed "essential" became the priority.

Everyone else had to work virtually, including the schools, colleges and universities. We were forced to rethink what work meant and how we would work and live during times of stress. Gen Z experienced a loss on many levels that impacted them in academic, social, emotional and personal development. Ultimately everyone, including Gen Z, began to consider the "new norm" as "the norm."

New opportunities arose in entrepreneurialism through gig work and startup and virtual employment. But traditional employment, academic pursuits, and regular experiences and social activities were interrupted or slowed down, sometimes being replaced by online pursuits. This created greater independence from the traditional structure of work, life and education.

roles, we will see a new attitude and definition of the meaning of work. Their attitude is: "Let's make this world a better place and beneficial for everybody."

### What competitive advantage does Gen Z bring to the table?

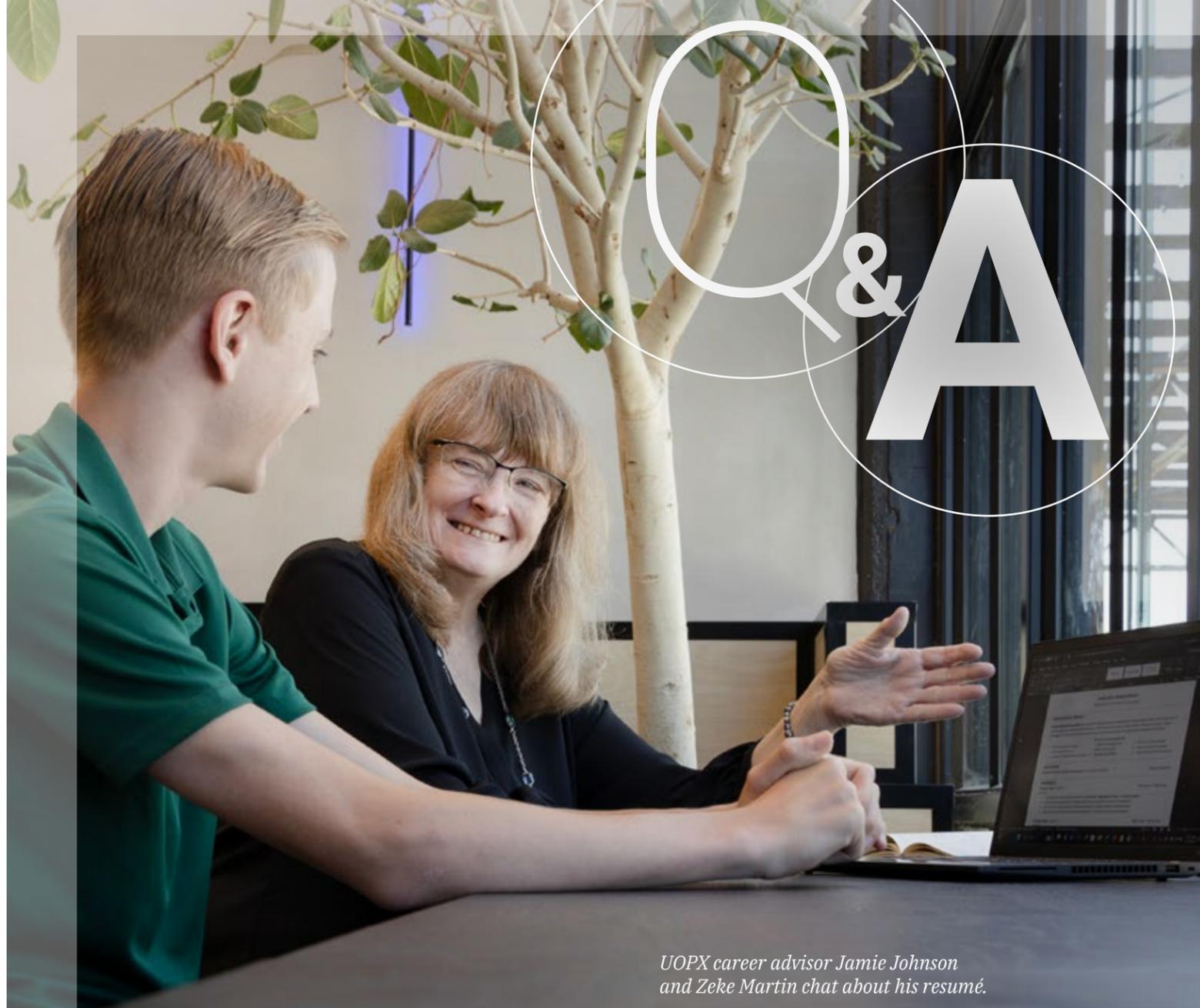
Gen Z is the true digital native, and due to the influence of the pandemic, remote work along with independent projects is a comfortable method for their work style. They can bring a fresh perspective about what productivity may

*UOPX career advisor Jamie Johnson and Zeke Martin chat about his resumé.*

mean on the job. They can share their natural technical aptitude with others who can in turn share their strengths and skills for personal growth and development.

It's important to recognize each person, no matter what generational group they belong to, has something to give. I honestly feel that if we can all recognize that each of us has something to share, and if we choose to learn from each other, it will only help us continue as a community, not just as a generation. 🐦

→ **Learn more: [phoenix.edu/career-services.html](https://phoenix.edu/career-services.html)**



## Alumni Chapter Spotlight

# Finding Friends & Purpose

## AFTER THE DEGREE

By Claire O'Brien

For many University of Phoenix alumni, learning is a lifelong journey.

What perhaps began as a way of achieving their higher education goals soon morphs into a passion for knowledge. So much so that some UOPX graduates find themselves returning for a second or even third degree – and the journey might not end there.

For the truly committed and connected, volunteering for leadership roles in the UOPX alumni network offers both hard work and opportunities to connect and grow. Throughout the country, 50 UOPX alumni chapters play a crucial role in developing relationships between former and current students through in-person networking events, virtual connections, social media and community service. Plus, it's just fun.

Here, three alumni chapter leaders share why they answered the call to lead and how other alumni can benefit from joining a local chapter.

→ **Learn more:** [phoenix.edu/alumni/chapters](https://phoenix.edu/alumni/chapters)

### What is the best part about being an alumni chapter leader?

I love networking, socializing and representing the Philadelphia alumni chapter so others can join by my example.

### What made you decide to lead?

I love working in the advocacy and nonprofit sector, especially regarding literacy, mental health and entrepreneurship in our community. I choose to lead to demonstrate what the impossible looks like when others doubt our credibility. We're always looking for volunteers, so if an alum would like to get involved, they can reach out at 833-899-4280 [which is the Broken Wings Literacy Center, where Harris is founder and CEO] or join our Facebook group.

### What has been your most memorable chapter event so far?

We are extremely active in our community and have won more than 40 awards for our service work. Recently, we had a community baby shower where 65 mothers attended and received resources, including medical screenings.

Our most memorable event is happening now: We're helping collect six barrels of school supplies and shipping them to Haiti through a collaboration with the Crayons for Haiti nonprofit organization.



**Natasha Harris Foster**

AAHSM, 2012

**President,  
Philadelphia chapter**

### What is the best part about being an alumni chapter leader?

Working with our president, Len Henley, and meeting so many people who are eager to build relationships.

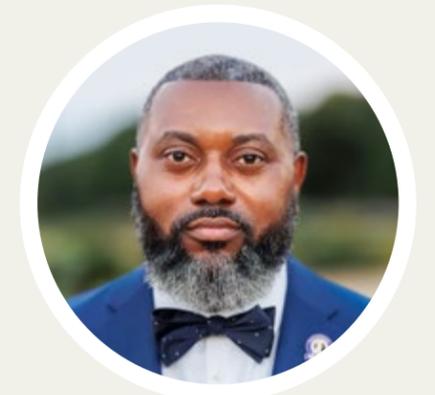
### What made you decide to lead?

It was brought to my attention that I could be an asset to the team. My responsibilities include working with the president on events, creating opportunities to get alumni together and maintaining our social media presence. Above all, I want to encourage people to meet and grow.

### What has been your most memorable chapter event so far?

During COVID, we couldn't get together, so we put on a virtual vision board event. It was an opportunity for us to create goals and then check in with each other in the future. It brought so many ideas to the forefront of my life, like health, chess, reading, my dissertation, networking and writing a book.

We're currently working with the local food depository for an event this fall.



**Vince David Jr.**

AAEE, 2012;  
BSHA/FCS\*, 2015

**VP, Chicago chapter**



**Renee Burleson**

BSM, 2020; MM, 2022;  
G-PM, 2023; DBA, in progress

**VP of Communications,  
Seattle chapter**

### What is the best part about being an alumni chapter leader?

During my career, I learned that success has a lot to do with the relationships you make along the way. Networking is important, and the alumni association is focused on building friendships and relationships with people on the same path.

### What made you decide to lead?

I was involved with the executive board of the National Society of Leadership and Success and discovered I enjoyed working with students. I wondered if there was an alumni association in Washington state, and when I found out there was, I wanted to help by volunteering in whatever position was available. I also like making a difference in students' lives, especially women, who might not think a leadership role in the maritime and petroleum fields, where I work, is an option for them.

### What has been your most memorable chapter event so far?

Last year we had a pizza and bowling night that was really fun. I didn't know anyone, but I remember walking up to a group and everyone was wearing red shirts. I thought, "That must be them!"

Building on the success of the bowling event, we are thinking about doing a fun family event, and we want alumni to bring their families. People shouldn't have to choose between spending a Saturday with their family or attending the event!

*\*The Bachelor of Science in Human Services/Family and Child Services program has been retired at University of Phoenix.*

# Home coming

UOPX STYLE



*Alumni Chapter President Devon Moody-Graham welcomes celebrants to an intimate St. Louis homecoming.*



*Honolulu's island skyline forms an inspired backdrop for this year's homecoming cruise.*



*Kingston, the grandson of alumna Janae Oliver (not pictured), gets his face painted while his grandmother observes the best part of this homecoming was watching him have so much fun.*



By Elizabeth Exline Photography by Samantha Jones, Chris Paxman and Mariah Standal

When other schools saw only 18-year-old high school graduates as viable college students, University of Phoenix did things differently.

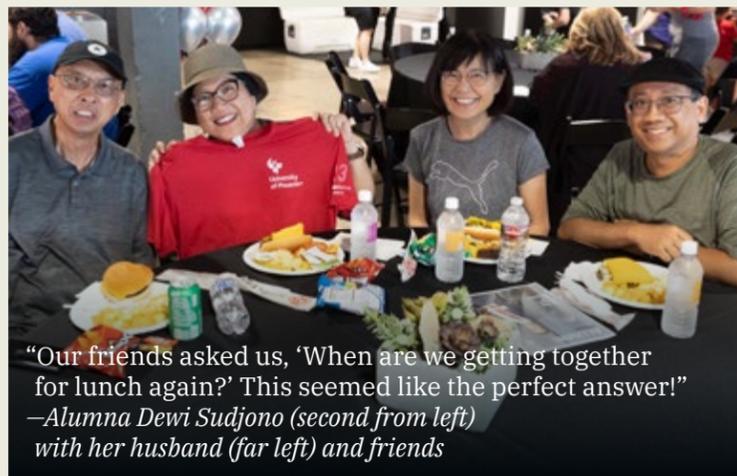


*"The best part of homecoming is meeting new people."  
— Alumnus Omar Yeager (far right) with his wife and family*

When other colleges insisted on offering only in-person classes, UOPX did things differently. When traditional institutions sought instructors from the ivory tower of academia, UOPX turned to the real world and, you guessed it, did things differently.

Is it any wonder then that homecoming at UOPX is different?

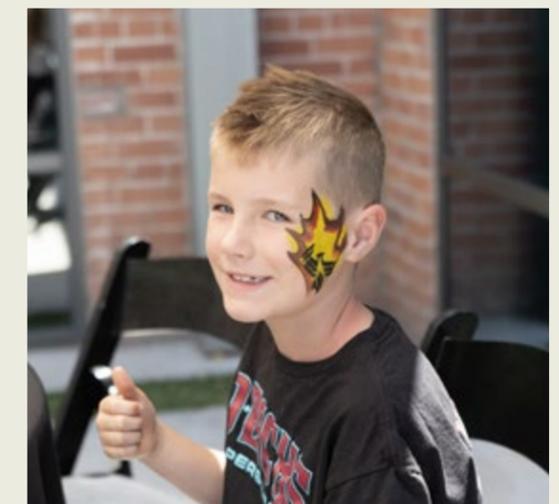
Here, we look at events in Honolulu, Seattle, Phoenix and St. Louis to see how UOPX continues to take an innovative approach to celebrating alumni and their connections at homecoming.

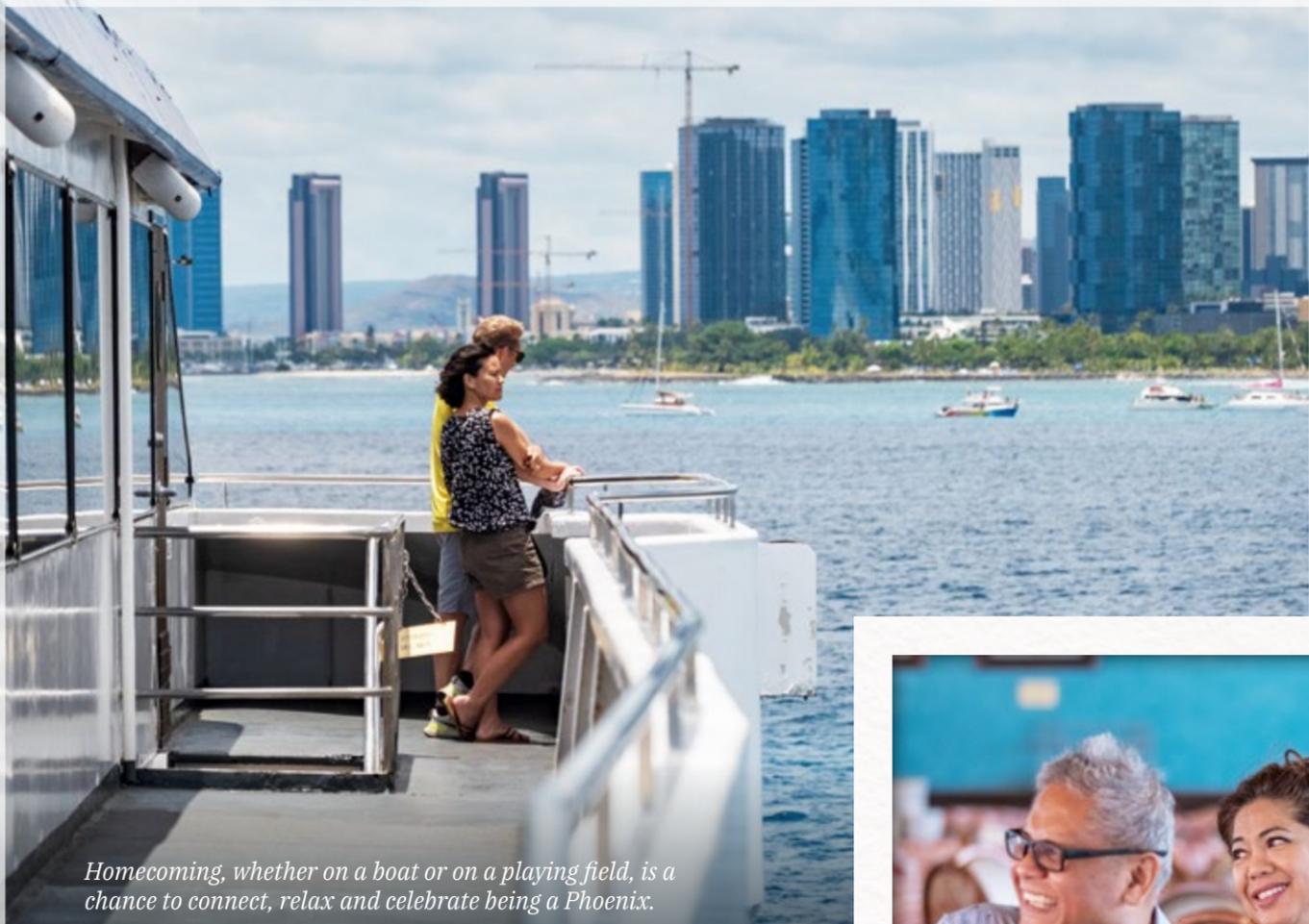


*"Our friends asked us, 'When are we getting together for lunch again?' This seemed like the perfect answer!"  
— Alumna Dewi Sudjono (second from left) with her husband (far left) and friends*



*Alumni take in the view during homecoming in Honolulu.*



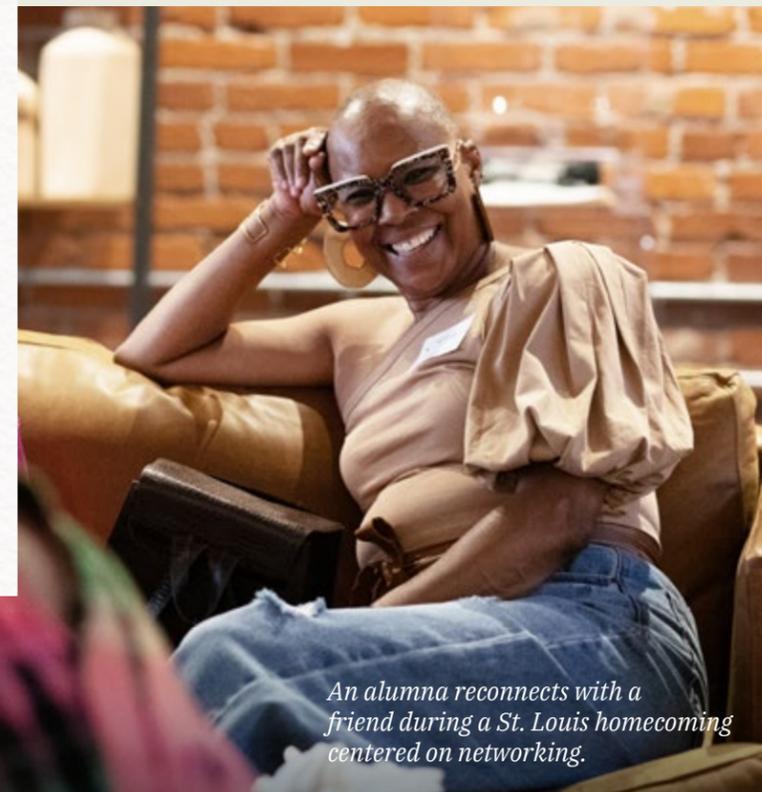


*Homecoming, whether on a boat or on a playing field, is a chance to connect, relax and celebrate being a Phoenix.*

*Homecoming events are tailored to their location. In Honolulu, for example, alumni could make traditional floral leis.*



*Families who have supported their loved ones on their academic journeys are central to UOPX homecoming events.*



*An alumna reconnects with a friend during a St. Louis homecoming centered on networking.*



*Alumna Yolanda Logan (right) soaks up the sun and sea during a Seattle boat trip.*



*UOPX alumni parade on the field ahead of an Arizona Diamondbacks game.*



**Join UOPX in supporting those impacted by wildfires in Maui.**  
*Every donation counts!*



# Don't Get Burned by Burnout

By Laurie Davies

If we're honest, most of us live stressful lives without much margin. So, when something like an unexpected visitor, a child's broken arm — or a global pandemic — strikes, our close proximity to the cliff of burnout becomes a full-blown free-fall. Alumni may know this better than most. Just because the degree is done doesn't mean the war with stress is won.

**The good news is, you can beat — or at least beat back — burnout.**

**Read on to discover how.**



Illustration by Stephen Michal

## Sign, Sign, Everywhere a Sign

The first step is to recognize the signs of burnout. This can be tricky because, according to Rodney Luster, PhD, chair for the Center for Leadership Studies and Organizational Research at University of Phoenix (UOPX), burnout mimics some of the symptoms of depression, including exhaustion, fatigue and lethargy.

The dividing line between burnout and depression is hope. “The person who is burned out still feels like there’s hope,” Luster says.

If you think you’re suffering from depression, your physician can help put you on a path to clinical help. If you suspect burnout, it’s still important to get a handle on it. The good news is, you can!

## Managing Burnout

Burnout is a slow burn, says Luster, who acknowledges he went through a mean season of burnout this year. “Burnout is one of those things that creeps up on you.”

He began looking into the history of burnout, as well as ways to challenge it. That work became an article he recently penned for *Psychology Today* in which he identified four strategies to outsmart burnout:

**1. Reserve Time**  
Luster turned to Dr. Kimberly Underwood, a researcher and the chair for UOPX’s Center for Workplace Diversity and Inclusion Research. She suggests that individuals block out “me” time in their daily calendar. Even if it’s just a short while, knowing there’s a period to refocus and recenter can help improve productivity and battle burnout.

**2. Introduce New Activities**  
This may seem counterintuitive. (Because you’re already bursting with work and stress that’s leading to burnout, right?) However, Luster says the introduction of something new can relieve “cyclical sameness” that leads to burnout.

“When we want to tackle burnout, we need to throw something in the mix that adds variety,” he says.

**3. Recognize Limitations**  
“Know when you’re taking on too much,” Luster says. You can figure out when it’s time to decline by asking yourself, “Is my day overly weighted on the side of work [or fill in the blank] so that I feel I invisible to myself and that my needs aren’t as important?”

Dr. Jodi Ashbrook (EdD, 2014)

offers another opportunity for reflection. As an inspirational thought leader, entrepreneur and founder of ZenLeader, a wellness and leadership program for women, Ashbrook is familiar with the way daily life and stress can rob many of their energy and joy. She says deciding if an activity is inside or outside your limitations hinges on your answer to: “Is it feeding my ego or is it feeding my soul?” Too many “ego” answers will disconnect you from purpose. And that may lead to burnout.



**4. Ask for Help**  
Many of us have been conditioned to think that asking for help is weakness, but Luster says “cognitive reframing” — or thinking about it differently — can help. If we ask for help, we get certain benefits, *plus* we get to let others feel good for helping.

## Avoiding Burnout

The same strategies Luster offers for managing burnout can also keep burnout at bay. And Ashbrook, who connects burnout to energy, agrees. “Where am I losing energy,” she asks, calling to mind the image of a bucket. “Where are the holes in my bucket?”

Ashbrook urges clients to go beyond a surface-level answer. “It’s easy to look for the big things. ‘I’m burned out at work,’ or, ‘I’m burned out at home,’ but it’s important to get to the micro-level of what’s feeding you and what’s depleting you.”

Think about it in business terms, she recommends. “Where are you in the red and where are you in the black? Once you’ve got the answer, then look at the feelings that come up as a result. Then look at what you do based on those feelings.”

For example, you might say, “I’m burned out at work,” but discover you really pick up a co-worker’s slack out of obligation. Then you feel resentment. Then, to take the edge off that feeling, you drink every night. Ashbrook says it’s important to ask yourself: “What are the behaviors I engage in because of how I feel? And are those behaviors serving me?”

It’s also important to put yourself in the gentle cycle before you come down too hard on yourself. “People don’t always want to go through this process because it doesn’t always feel good. But there doesn’t have to be shame and self-judgment,” she says.

Of course, with the above scenario, a great goal would be to drink less. “But that only addresses the symptom. We want to get to the cause of the symptoms. Tactical assessment is really important,” she says. “Ask yourself: Why do I keep doing these things that make me feel depleted?” Is it:

- Out of obligation?
- Out of a need to people-please?
- To avoid conflict?
- My need to feel validated?
- Fear that my own standing will be threatened?

“Do that assessment first,” Ashbrook says. “Then, look at what is controllable. If you discover it’s a job you go to every day but it’s not what you want to do, it can help you avoid burnout to say, ‘Long term, I want to move in this direction.’”

Then, start taking steps in that direction. For example, you could build up your savings and perhaps take a professional development course or network through an alumni chapter to position yourself to make a move. At the end of the day, you get to ask yourself what you want for your life.

“Ask yourself: Why do I keep doing these things that make me feel depleted?”

What Luster realized is he loves what he does and is deeply fulfilled — he just needed to hop off the carousel of sameness. “I brought my guitar into my office so I can reach out at arm’s length and play. I bought a bike and I get outside for rides,” he says. “And I literally go outside and smell the roses.”

Ashbrook’s strategy was a little more extreme.

“It’s easy to get pulled into a pattern of what we should be or what we’re supposed to be, and then we end up living this life we’re burned out from,” she says.

She should know. She climbed the ladder, had the job and drove the car. “I went through this transition where I literally donated anything I thought had material value. I removed all the things that told me I ‘made it,’ because I knew I was just going to continue to chase things I thought would bring fulfillment.

“That’s not to say you can’t have both. But we do have to find what will bring our soul purpose and fulfillment,” she says. “And it’s not always in money, title and salary.” 🍀

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## RESEARCH RISING

# Problem? Meet Your Solution

By Claire O'Brien

At University of Phoenix, the College of Doctoral Studies focuses on real-world solutions to real-world challenges.

Often, these predicaments fall within one of the college's three research centers, which study organizational strategy, workplace diversity and educational technology. Here, the centers' leaders share pivotal research that can shape the landscape of tomorrow.



Visit our YouTube channel at [bit.ly/ResearchRising](https://bit.ly/ResearchRising) to see more "Research Rising" content

### Fighting Addiction With Knowledge

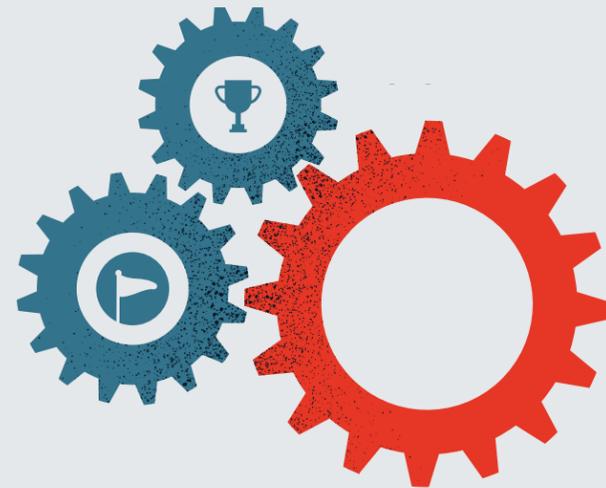
CENTER OF LEADERSHIP STUDIES AND ORGANIZATIONAL RESEARCH

**Chair:** Rodney Luster, PhD, LPC

**Challenge:** Addictive behaviors

**Research-Based Solution:** Luster is a psychotherapist in Austin, Texas, and he draws inspiration from his private practice to research the biological and emotional connections to addiction.

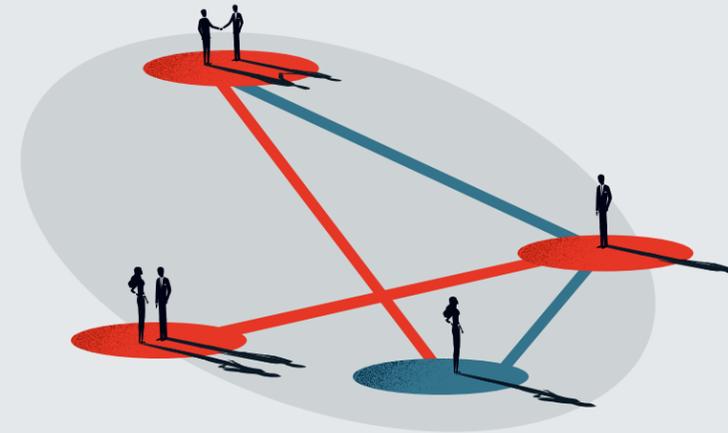
"One of the first questions I ask patients who reveal an issue with addiction or compulsion is if they can name the feeling that occurred right before they decided to engage in the substance, thing or activity that is the issue," Luster says.



He asks because when we experience sadness, loneliness, grief or stress, our executive function recedes, which makes us more susceptible to impulsive decisions. The brain protein FosB, he says, "may promote motivation and reward processes in the brain, thus serving to incentivize repeat performances with a stronger tenacity."

Understanding the role this protein plays may impact addiction treatment down the road.

**Also in the Pipeline:** Luster contributed the foreword to the recently released book *Measuring the Effectiveness of Organizational Development Strategies During Unprecedented Times*, which examines organizational development through the lenses of research and innovative practices.



### Exploring How Effective DEIB Programs Really Are

CENTER FOR WORKPLACE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION RESEARCH

**Chair:** Kimberly Underwood, PhD, MBA

**Challenge:** Belonging in diversity management, including how well DEIB programs perform

**Research-Based Solution:** "Assessment and evaluation are often overlooked in the diversity management process," Underwood explains. "However, it is the process of gauging the effectiveness of your policies, programs and practices through employee lenses that allows organizations to understand the effectiveness of many of their DEIB strategies. Do these practices and initiatives truly support feelings of belonging?"

**Also in the Pipeline:** The center recently launched six new research initiatives related to women in technology and to professional social capital in higher education and the workplace.

Underwood also serves as executive sponsor of the Research, Scholarship and Thought Leadership working group within the UOPX President's Advisory Council on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging. This fall, the group will present several new initiatives, including new research and scholarship awards and a researcher highlight series.

### Transforming Education for Empowerment

CENTER FOR EDUCATIONAL AND INSTRUCTIONAL TECHNOLOGY RESEARCH

**Chair:** Mansureh Kebritchi, PhD

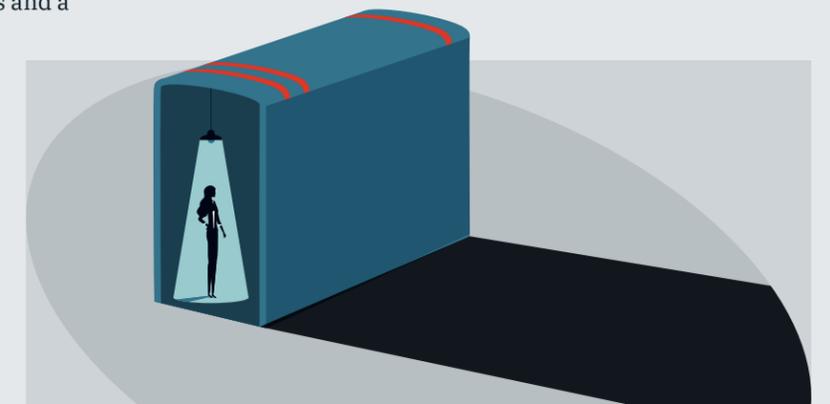
**Challenge:** How to ensure the success of female leaders

**Research-Based Solution:** A one-year research project known as Women in Leadership, which encompasses a systematic literature review of female leaders in specific industries, like nursing and business. The goal? To understand their experiences and leadership styles.

Dr. Stella L. Smith, the center's associate research chair, is leading the project. Smith focused her doctoral research on the experience of African American women in leadership roles within higher education and saw a gap. "There was so much work going toward inclusion, but I wasn't sure how that was trickling down to help women leaders."

Smith and her team (Drs. Ela-Joy Lehrman, Valerie Bradley-Holliday, Tiffany Lemmen, TaMika Fuller and Martha Zepeda) have high hopes of being able to answer that question. "We would like to propose a theory about women's leadership. For example, if there's support to create a framework for identifying women leaders, either already within the organization or as potential hires," Smith explains.

**Also in the Pipeline:** The Center for Educational and Instructional Technology Research explores innovative methods for enhancing teaching and learning in multiple spaces, including K-12 classrooms, higher education and corporate settings. The team delves into topics such as the impact of artificial intelligence in higher education; online education; factors influencing student success; faculty burnout; and curriculum revision to increase students' job prospects. 🌟



# Connecting in the classroom & Beyond

By Sharla Hooper

An instructor's presence and approach can breathe new life into a student's educational journey, even (or especially?) when that journey is online and being undertaken by a nontraditional student. Here, we look at two University of Phoenix (UOPX) instructors who know how to create classroom gold: environments in which students are simultaneously engaged, supported and challenged to take their thinking further.



**Charity Jennings,  
EdD, MIS, MAEd**

## Teaching Teachers

A recipient of multiple faculty awards at the University, Charity Jennings, EdD, MIS, MAEd, celebrated 20 years as a UOPX instructor this past June. Her tenure is impressive, and it's matched by her commitment to her craft.

"I see the role of preparing new educators as having a multiplier effect in expanding educational opportunities for all," Jennings explains.

Jennings was drawn to teaching in higher education, which she views as a natural extension of her work as a K-12 educator. "During a job search, I came across a faculty opening for University of Phoenix's College of Education," she recalls. "This intrigued me as an opportunity to pay it forward to help train future teachers and educators who could be a positive force for learners and for society."

Jennings currently works in education, learning and development for both higher education and corporations. She brings that cross-section of experience to the corresponding curricula of programs in the College of Education and the College of Business and Information Technology at UOPX.

Jennings sees the difference UOPX makes for her students, especially those who are juggling family and work obligations. "So many of my students tell me they would not be able to earn their degree without the flexibility and access that the University provides," she says.

Jennings sees her own role as pivotal in that discussion. She is hands-on and as committed to her students' success today as she was 20 years ago.

"When students reach out who are struggling to keep up with school in the face of personal challenges, we talk together about resources the University offers, what they need to do in class to be successful, and how I can support them to succeed in my classes within my scope as a faculty member," Jennings says.

This includes a student who was facing terrorist attacks on family members overseas, a student who was persisting in school while surviving PTSD from his military service and a student with a severe chronic illness.

Jennings was there for all of them. But just as important as removing roadblocks to education is the education itself. And that, as it turns out, is a particular point of pride for Jennings. Her students often share that what they learn in class applies immediately to their workplaces, which speaks to the relevance of what Jennings does. And while it's been 20 years of tomorrows, Jennings remains focused on how she can continue to help shape the future.

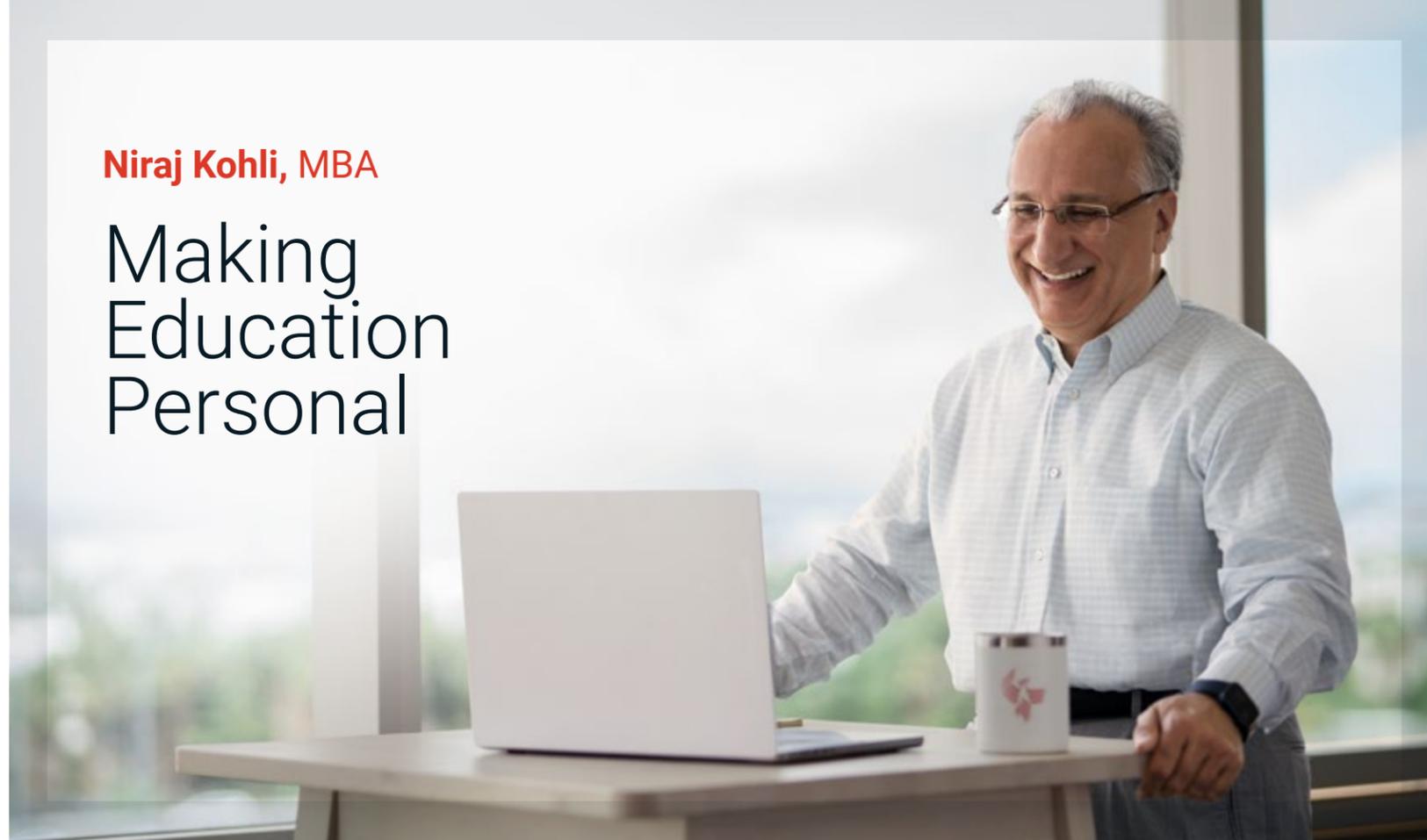
“ I see the role of preparing new educators as having a multiplier effect in expanding educational opportunities for all.”

**Watch Dr. Jennings in action as she teaches how to become a better leader.**

→ **Check it out:**  
[youtu.be/U8SWJYFdaIQ](https://youtu.be/U8SWJYFdaIQ)

**Niraj Kohli, MBA**

## Making Education Personal



A faculty member and a Phoenix, Niraj Kohli, MBA, finds great joy in building relationships and connections. Kohli immigrated to the United States from India in 1979 with \$50 in his pocket.

The youngest of 10 kids, he remembers his father, a senior advocate in the Supreme Court of India, telling him before he left for America: “Work hard, get an education, and if you can help somebody, help somebody.”

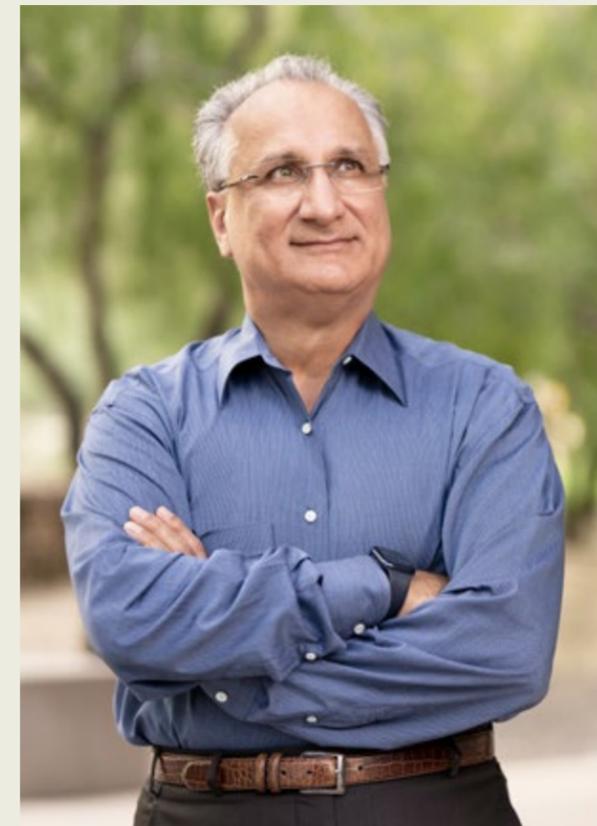
This became Kohli’s guiding principle. A recipient of the 2021 Faculty of the Year Award, Kohli has a long affiliation with University of Phoenix. He was a member of the second graduating class, earning his MBA in 1983. He was working at Motorola at the time, and University of Phoenix was the only path to an MBA that accommodated his busy life.

Kohli returned as a faculty member in 2002, keen to give back by sharing his knowledge as a practitioner faculty member. “I was interested in learning myself,” he says, “because I wanted to keep on learning, and I wanted to help people. Teaching allowed me to do both.”

Kohli currently teaches in the College of Business and Information Technology and, in recent years, jumped at a faculty mentor role with the Competency-Based MBA program — a faster, more affordable MBA that helps business professionals leverage their experience.

“ I was interested in learning myself because I wanted to keep on learning, and I wanted to help people. Teaching allowed me to do both.”

The role of mentor comes naturally to Kohli. He understands that his students are juggling work, life and school, because that was his own experience, and he is a firm believer in building lifelong connections. “Most people see



university as a transition point, but I see it as longevity, part of long-lasting relationship – I bring this to my mentoring of instructors as well as students,” he says.

At this year’s commencement, Kohli met with his graduating students for dinner with their spouses, and he took pictures while they were walking across the stage. For Kohli, this is nothing new. “My students stay in touch with me,” he says. “I have one whom I taught 17 years ago in undergrad, mentored him and nurtured a friendship.”

Kohli gives back within the communities where he lives and works and encourages his students to do the same. He has found, he says, that “personal, authentic relationship-building turns into professional relationships.”

For that to happen, people must put in the work. “Stay connected. Stay engaged,” he urges. “What you give comes back 10 times.”

Being an educator and celebrating his students’ successes goes to the core of Kohli’s life principles. “Teaching is part of my value system. It has been reinforced by my student successes. What my students see and experience are their own rewards.”

“ Most people see university as a transition point, but I see it as longevity, part of long-lasting relationship. I bring this to my mentoring of instructors as well as students.”

# Alumni Why

University of Phoenix alumni come from all walks of life with dreams that are as diverse as they are. Here, three alumni reflect on the ways their degrees have impacted their lives.



## Juanyetta Beasley, DHA, RN

Doctor of Health Administration (2018)

“ My doctoral degree gave me a new sense of confidence. I realized I created the life I desired, and it wasn’t dictated by what a corporation deemed as success. I am the measurer and provider of my own success.”



## Will Irey

Bachelor of Science in Management (2021)

“ I tell people to stay hungry and to look for ways to add new tools to their mental toolbox. I was able to use the tools I gained in my courses to become a more confident and efficient leader in the areas I was lacking, and prove why I was the best fit for my promotion in less than a year after graduation.”



## Ketan Rahangdale

Bachelor of Science in Management (2017)

“ This degree gave me the foundational tools to understand basic financial skills, personality profiles and how to be a good manager for the C-suite while balancing doing, delegating and architecting as a CEO.”