Sherry Miller Brown Retires after 45 Years of Service to Pitt

After 45 years of dedicated service to the University of Pittsburgh, Sherry Miller Brown (BA ’78), director of the McCarl Center for Nontraditional Student Success at the College of General Studies (CGS), retired at the end of May. While her office is now bare of the many awards, photos (including a photo of her in Rolling Stone magazine), and seasonal decorations that became her trademark, Brown has left quite a legacy on Pitt’s campus.

Throughout her career, she taught and counseled thousands of nontraditional students who looked up to her as their role model, as Brown was a nontraditional student herself. Colleagues throughout the University continue to hold her in high esteem as a visionary in the field of nontraditional student education. She has been recognized nationally for her work in this area, particularly for her programming during National Nontraditional Student Week. In an effort to promote student work, Brown developed a photography exhibit showcasing the photographic work of students. Most recently, Brown worked with the Department of Athletics to put together Champions of Pitt, an exhibit featuring photos spanning Pitt’s athletic history from the 1936 Olympics to the 2014 NFL draft.

Student Ambassador Program

In 2012, Brown launched the Peer Mentoring Program, designed to provide opportunities for new students to engage with current students as well as provide guidance and support during the first year at Pitt. The goal for this program, now called the Student Ambassador Program, is to ease the transition into Pitt’s culture and administrative procedures. Welcome each new student to the CGS community, and help new students to access University resources.

What will Brown miss the most from her 45 years at the University of Pittsburgh? Without hesitation, she answers, “The students.”

“Acquiring a college education is a dream come true for many of our students,” says Brown. “So, while I am definitely proud of my accomplishments over the past 45 years at Pitt, there is nothing that is as rewarding and life fulfilling as when a student reaches out to me and tells me that I have really helped him or her to find his or her dream.”

In recognition of Brown’s many contributions to Pitt and to its students, CGS and the University established a named fund in her honor, that supports the student and alumni programming of the McCarl Center. Gifts to the Sherry Miller Brown Fund for Nontraditional Students may be made by visiting give.to.pitt.edu/millerbrown.

A special award was presented to Sherry Miller Brown, retired director of the McCarl Center for Nontraditional Student Success, for her 45 years of dedication to the College of General Studies at the CGS Student Government’s Excellence Awards ceremony in April.
Kristie Teorsky (BA ’19) was the graduating class speaker at the CGS graduation ceremony in April 2015. While at Pitt, she was a member of the cross-country and track teams. This summer, she begins a 12-month graduate program in the University of Pittsburgh School of Education.

“From the moment I decided I was going to college, I wanted to attend the University of Pittsburgh. I thought that in my perfect life I would apply, get accepted, continue to maintain a 4.0 GPA, and graduate, and after that, my life would continue to be perfect.

“What people don’t tell you when you are going through the college process is that it is not as glamorous as that, and nothing is perfect. You will trip and fall multiple times.

“My first fall came when I realized that I did not meet the requirements for admission as a freshman into the University of Pittsburgh. I had one option left that would enable me to easily commute and still have hopeful dreams of attending Pitt: Butler County Community College. Community college? What will people think of me? That was the last place I thought I would end up. Little did I know, this is where I would begin to grow up.

“My second fall came when I transferred to Pitt to begin my junior year. Although it was exhausting, the one thing that I will take away from the transfer process is that community college acted as a stepping-stone. It introduced me to college-level academics without the overwhelming university experience.

“After I declared my major in English writing in the Kenneth P. Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences, I learned that not all classes from a community college would apply to specific degree programs. The specificity of the English writing major helped me to realize that I wanted to focus on more than just English writing. I wanted to be an English teacher, so what were my options? I started searching and landed on the CGS Web site. This is where I found uplifting words: pre-education and discovered the natural sciences premed track offered by CGS.

“In 2009, he and his family were finally able to leave the refugee camp with the help of the International Organization for Migration, and they settled in a camp near Nepal, he was surrounded by suffering and death from diseases like dysentery and anemia. He received some schooling at the camp, but resources were scarce and the education he did receive was subpar. Dhital instinctively knew education would be his ticket to a better life, so he worked hard during his time in Nepal.

“In 2013, he transferred to the Pittsburgh campus and discovered the natural sciences premed track offered by CGS.

“Through this major, I had an opportunity to take diverse natural science classes from different departments while also having the freedom to take other nonscience classes,” said Dhital. As a Brackenridge Research Fellowship recipient, he also conducted extensive research on mental health and sleep among Bhutanese refugees who settled in Pittsburgh.
ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Dawn Gunning (BA ’90)

Dawn Gunning owns Gunning Inc., a mechanical contracting and sheet metal fabrication company, with her husband, Mike Gunning. In addition, they own two property management companies and a diamond brokerage business. Prior to starting Gunning Inc. in 2005, Dawn Gunning was president and owner of American Boiler and Chimney Co., an industrial contracting company founded in 1983 by her father, Jerry Kaelin.

**Why did you choose to pursue a degree from CGS at the University of Pittsburgh?**

“I chose to attend CGS because the school offered the degree program I wanted to study with the most flexibility of course scheduling. It was extremely important to me to earn a degree without incurring college debt, so I worked full time during the day at CGS and attended classes at night and on Saturdays.”

**Did you have a favorite class?**

“The one class that had the most profound impact on me was a public speaking course I took in my sophomore year. At the time, I was interested in earning a degree in psychology and was looking for an elective to fill my schedule. Although it was outside my comfort zone, I decided to take the public speaking class. I developed valuable skills and gained confidence in speaking in front of groups. After taking that class, I changed my major from psychology to communication.”

**How did your CGS degree prepare you for your career?**

“After graduating from CGS, I pursued a career in the training and development field. Not only did my degree prepare me for that field, but it also had a positive impact in all aspects of my life. I now own and operate several companies and believe that having strong communication skills has enabled me to be successful in my career.”

**What is your advice to current CGS students?**

“Work hard. You are responsible for your own success. Recognize and seize opportunities that come your way.”

**What do Pitt and the College of General Studies mean to you?**

“Everything! I have very fond memories of working for and attending CGS. I made many lifelong friends and gained valuable skills and experiences that have served me well in business as well as in my personal life.”

---

PROGRAM SPOTLIGHT

CGS Career Counseling Service: From Start to Finish

Through a partnership with the University of Pittsburgh’s Office of Career Development and Placement Assistance, the College of General Studies (CGS) provides students with a dedicated career consultant who is available to assist with all aspects of career planning, from choosing a major and defining a career path to finding an internship or a job.

Brianna McMeekin, a licensed professional counselor, encourages all CGS students to schedule an appointment with her as soon as possible. During individual strategy sessions, students can explore their goals, discover their strengths, and make decisions about their career and employment options or seek assistance in making a career transition.

For students who are not able to come to McMeekin’s office in Wesley W. Posvar Hall, McMeekin offers distance career counseling via Skype. This service provides great face-to-face interaction and support without requiring students to come to campus.

“The motto continually upheld by the career development and placement office is that we offer students career counseling services from start to finish,” says McMeekin. “For students who are undecided about their major and career path, CGS offers the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator assessment personally test as well as the Strong Interest Inventory. Through these tests, students are able to learn more about their interests and what motivates them as well as discover where they would feel most comfortable in the work environment.”

McMeekin offers workshops on résumé and cover letter writing, networking, interviewing, and graduate school preparation. She also provides students with valuable information on internship and full-time employment opportunities.

To learn more about career counseling services, visit cgs.pitt.edu/student-services/career-services.

---

Letter from the CGS Alumni Society President

**Dear CGS alumni,**

Happy summer! This is the time of the year when we look forward to welcoming a new class into the CGS Alumni Society and Pitt Alumni Association.

As your representative to the Pitt Alumni Association, I am pleased to report that the members of the School and College/Regional Campus Committee continue to meet and explore ways in which the many alumni groups and councils at the University can collaborate to benefit all Pitt alumni. We have seen several examples of jointly held events, and the feedback has been very positive.

The committee recently held its second annual round table, collaborating with members and staff to discuss future initiatives. I am very excited about where the committee is heading, and I believe that the outcome will result in the best use of alumni association resources and greater engagement for all Pitt alumni. In addition, the Pitt Alumni Association held its annual Alumni Awards Presentation and Gala on Friday, May 15, with CGS alumni well represented at the awards ceremony.

It is not too early to mark your calendars for Homecoming weekend 2015, scheduled for October 10–12 when the Pitt Panthers will host the University of Virginia Cavaliers. Make sure to check the alumni Web site alumni.pitt.edu and your e-mail for more details!

I encourage all CGS alumni to frequently visit the alumni Web site as well as the LinkedIn-based Pitt Career Network (https://www.linkedin.com/groups/Pitt-Career-Network-66406/about), which provides many opportunities for career search and interaction.

It is my great hope that all alumni, new and old, remain connected to the University of Pittsburgh through the Pitt Alumni Association and the CGS Alumni Society. As always, I welcome your comments and can be reached at bmountjoy@alumni.pitt.edu.

Thank you, and hail to Pitt!

**Bruce D. Mountjoy (BA ’91)**
**Word on the Street**

_How has CGS helped you in your career development?_

**Phuong Lee McDowell**  
Accounting certificate student

“I recently secured a new position with PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP (PWC), which is a huge jump in my position. My previous work experience helped, but an accounting background is key. The CGS certificate got me noticed by PWC. This wouldn’t have happened without the CGS accounting certificate.”

**Allison Sanders**  
Postbaccalaureate premedical nondegree student

“I am pursuing a complete career change with the help of CGS. I had a background in the arts, working in fundraising for 11 years. I am now seeking to study veterinary medicine and plan to begin in fall 2015.”

**Arpan Prabhu (BS ’14)**  
Natural sciences (Premed option)  
University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine student

“I initially came to the Kenneth P. Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences as an undeclared student and then later selected economics. I began to integrate courses and found the natural sciences major through CGS. In addition, CGS study abroad scholarships made it possible for me to travel to Bolivia and conduct research on intercultural medicine and relationships.”