

WHAT'S INSIDE

A Message from Micah Gross, CGS Student Government.....	2
Scholarship Provides Second Chance.....	2
Student Veteran Fulfills Lifelong Dream.....	2
Alumni Spotlight: Nicola DiCio.....	3

Office Spotlight: CGS Academic Advisors.....	3
Letter from the CGS Alumni Society President.....	3
News in Brief.....	4
Word on the Street.....	4

inside cgs

UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH • COLLEGE OF GENERAL STUDIES

WINTER 2016

*Pictured above: Frank Bullock
Read his story on page 2.*

New CGS Directors Find Collaboration Is Key to Success

The University of Pittsburgh College of General Studies (CGS) recently welcomed two new staff members: **Boryana Dobreva**, director of academic programs, and **Adam Robinson**, director of the McCarl Center for Nontraditional Student Success. Both have infectious enthusiasm for nontraditional education.

Boryana Dobreva

In her new role, Dobreva develops, manages, and assesses the college's academic programs and instructional curricula. She is passionate about working with the CGS-affiliated faculty to provide students with courses that are pedagogically sound.

"The hallmark of the College of General Studies' innovation is that courses are interdisciplinary in character, and I am looking forward to strengthening connections with instructors across the University in creating new interdisciplinary programs for our students," says Dobreva.

She also will work closely with faculty members on transitioning some of the face-to-face courses to an online modality. "We need to be in tune with the times and be able to provide academically rigorous programs that offer flexibility to a wider range of students, and online courses will definitely play a key role in that effort, as will self-paced and hybrid formats."

Before Dobreva begins to develop any new programs, however, she is rigorously reviewing and evaluating current CGS programs, assessing their strengths and where gap areas may exist. Dobreva explains, "As we evaluate our current programs, we are looking to identify courses that provide a high level of student satisfaction, meet the needs of our students, enhance their résumés, and prepare them for the demands of the job market."

"In the few months that I have been at CGS, I have seen the hard work and dedication of CGS staff to improve student satisfaction," says Dobreva. "My objective is to move the educational mission forward by creating and developing programs that are hands on and practice oriented so our students stand out in the job market and are able to successfully move to the next level."

Dobreva comes to the University of Pittsburgh from Northwestern College in Orange City, Iowa, where she most recently served as director of global education. She holds an MA in Germanic language and literature and PhD in German studies from the University of Pittsburgh in addition to an MA in German philology from Shumen University in Bulgaria. When she is not running after her two young sons, she enjoys traveling internationally and taking walks through her neighborhood.

Adam Robinson

As director of the McCarl Center, Robinson oversees and executes McCarl Center programs, works with student organizations, and supervises the academic advising unit and the Office of Veterans Services.

His first few months at CGS have been a whirlwind of getting to know staff and students as well as forming valuable partnerships with various entities across the University, including the University Honors College, Study Abroad Office, and Academic Resource Center.

"I am thrilled to have met such extraordinary professionals who are dedicated to student success. I now have a better understanding of the outstanding resources available to students and can direct the students appropriately," explains Robinson. In the future, Robinson would like to develop collaborative programming with these entities to provide additional support to CGS students.

One of Robinson's first priorities is to build student awareness about the McCarl Center. "My goal is to make the McCarl Center the hub for students—a comprehensive one-stop shop for all of their academic and social needs," says Robinson. "I invite and encourage all CGS students to come to the McCarl Center beyond what is required. Stop by and visit with our career consultant, meet with our math tutor, visit with the advising team, take our workshops, or just hang out and study. This space is for students, and I want students to know that it is their space to use."

Robinson, who has an open-door policy, encourages students to talk with him about resources that they would like to see offered through the McCarl Center. "I certainly understand that going back to school is an important decision that requires students to put themselves in a new environment, which can be daunting. By talking with students and hearing their concerns, I can better understand how CGS can help them to fit in, succeed, and have a more enjoyable and enriching experience."

Robinson will continue to schedule McCarl Center workshops, particularly on writing and math, which he feels are points of anxiety for students. "Through these discussion-based workshops, I would like students to come away with a better understanding of how to develop processes and habits that will not only be beneficial throughout their academic careers but also provide success outside Pitt."

Future plans for Robinson include working closely with the Pitt Alumni Association to discuss ways in which CGS can continue to be a resource to alumni as well as how alumni can partner with current CGS students through internships and mentorships.

Prior to coming to Pitt, Robinson served as the associate director of the University of Louisville Writing Center. He received an MA in English from the University of Louisville. In his spare time, Robinson loves to take long walks through his urban neighborhood; play guitar, bass, and ukulele; and take in the local history of Pittsburgh.



Boryana Dobreva and Adam Robinson

A Message from Micah Gross, CGS Student Government Representative

In summer 2014, I was at a crossroads. Do I stay in the U.S. Navy or do I get out? I had decided not to reenlist in the U.S. Navy and consequently needed to form a plan to transition out. The key part of this plan would be going back to school on the GI Bill.

The College of General Studies (CGS) at the University of Pittsburgh invited me to apply to this highly respected and prestigious public university through merit. This was fortunate, for despite my serious efforts, a learning disability, and other life factors, my standardized test scores were mixed but mostly on the side of not very good and relatively poor. I also had been away from school for 10 years.

I am thankful to CGS for its support of nontraditional student veteran applicants. CGS accepted letters of recommendation in lieu of my SAT/ACT scores. This allowed my commanders to provide their support for my admissions application, which they did.

In return for the College of General Studies' faith in accepting me into this university (one that is superior to any other school that I could have attended), I am enthusiastically dedicating as much of my time and energy as possible in support of CGS and, simultaneously, improving the value of my time at Pitt.

Most of my energy is spent volunteering with the CGS Student Government. I am a veteran liaison to the University Senate and represent CGS in the Educational Policies and Computer Usage committees of the University Senate. In addition to those worthwhile positions, I am active as a CGS student ambassador, helping first-year students to transition to CGS. I also enjoy organizing and participating in the annual welcome back barbecue and the CGS prefireworks celebration at homecoming, which are student government-sponsored events. I am here to help in any capacity because CGS Student Government is such a beneficial organization for nontraditional students at Pitt.

As a veteran, I can say without a doubt that the Office of Veterans Services and the College of General Studies are very supportive of student veterans. The Office of Veterans Services (OVS) makes using the GI Bill a painless process. It also organizes and provides veteran-oriented career fairs, internship events, employment support, and networking events all year round. In addition to its academic and career support, OVS also provides a variety of Pitt perks for veterans, which include free tickets to local sporting events.

I know that if it were not for the culture of service at the College of General Studies, I might not have volunteered for CGS Student Government. I will always be grateful to CGS for giving me the opportunity to succeed. Thanks, CGS!



SCHOLARSHIP SPOTLIGHT

Scholarship Provides Second Chance

College of General Studies (CGS) social sciences major and Students with Dependents Scholarship recipient **Shavon Blannon** began her undergraduate studies at the University of Pittsburgh as an excited 18-year-old eager to learn. As a first-generation college student, she knew that a college education would set her apart from others. However, by the beginning of her junior year, challenges in her personal life began to take over and she withdrew from school.

Now, 25 years after she left school, Blannon has returned to the University of Pittsburgh through the College of General Studies as a 43-year-old mother of two, enthusiastic and ready to complete her degree. Her fiancé, Cliff, a Pitt graduate, and her children—Bria, age 21, and Christopher, age 11—have been very encouraging and supportive.

“Completing my degree is important to me for many reasons,” explains Blannon. “First, it will allow me to establish a career in human resources with my current employer, to be more marketable in the field, and to have the ability to advance from my entry-level position. More importantly, however, is that by completing my degree, I will be a true example to my children that secondary education matters and can make a difference in your life. Besides the potential financial impact



Shavon Blannon

that obtaining a degree can make, upon graduating, I will be an example of courage, tenacity, and ambition to my children.

“Often, adult students are intimidated and apprehensive about returning to school. CGS and the Students with Dependents Scholarship provided me with the support I needed to continue my education and have enough funding to reach graduation.”

After graduating in spring 2016, Blannon plans to begin her graduate studies within a year.

The Students with Dependents Scholarship supports individuals who have a deep commitment to both reaching their educational goals and enriching the lives of their dependents. By educating parents and guardians, CGS is educating families and communities about the value of a college degree.

To help students like Shavon, visit giveto.pitt.edu/givecgs.

STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Student Veteran Fulfills Lifelong Dream

Frank Bullock, a public service major and a veteran of the U.S. Coast Guard, is living his dream of completing his undergraduate education. Initially excited about the possibility of going back to school, he also felt apprehensive and uneasy. He questioned whether he was up for the challenge of balancing long work hours and personal commitments with classes and homework and whether being out of the school system for so long would be a hindrance to him.

Bullock came to Pittsburgh by way of North Carolina, and when he stepped onto the University of Pittsburgh campus; saw the Cathedral of Learning; and met with Kaitlin Jacob, director of recruitment and enrollment for the College of General Studies (CGS), he knew Pitt was for him.

“Between Kaitlin; my advisor, Jessica Roscoe; and the Office of Veterans Services outreach coordinator, Leah Albert, I really felt like I found a home and community where I could fit in,” says Bullock. “While it was initially intimidating to be surrounded by people who are younger than I am and who seemed to be more plugged in with the academic setting, I have learned that the students are quite curious about me, my life, and the things that I have done. I am delighted by it and now see it as all of us being here for the same reason and working together to accomplish that goal.”

The College of General Studies' McCarl Center for Nontraditional Student Success is like a base camp to Bullock. It is where he can always find a quiet place to get away for some time to study or just collect his thoughts on what needs to be done that day or during the week.

“I am honored to have been given this opportunity at this point in my life to pursue a dream that I have had for so long. And I get to do it at an incredible

institution with the greatest people in a city that I love. I love being a CGS student, and I wholeheartedly recommend it to anyone who might be interested in taking a chance at going back to school,” says Bullock.

After he graduates in spring 2017, Bullock plans to continue his education at the Pitt Graduate School of Public and International Affairs. He is interested in pursuing a Master of Public Administration degree and an international organizations MBA in Geneva, Switzerland. Ultimately, he would like to work for the U.S. Department of State or an international nongovernmental organization or charity.



ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Nicola DiCio (BS '05)

Nicola DiCio owns Reyna Foods, located in Armstrong County, Pa., which manufactures tortillas, corn tortilla chips, and wholesale and retail Mexican food. He also owns Reyna Foods' Mexican grocery store and the Casa Reyna restaurant in Pittsburgh. By the end of 2015, he plans to open a winery in Pittsburgh's Strip District.

Why did you choose to pursue a degree from the College of General Studies (CGS) at the University of Pittsburgh?

"I chose to attend CGS to finish what I had started many years before. I did not finish college in my 20s because I was opening Reyna Foods. I was 24 years old at the time I went into business."

Did your degree prepare you for your career?

"Yes; I learned how to learn a subject quickly. My major was natural sciences with concentrations in chemistry, biology, and history and philosophy of science. Chemistry continues to relate to what I am doing today. Making food is all chemistry."



Photo courtesy of Jason Bridge | Trib Total Media

What was your most memorable moment as a student?

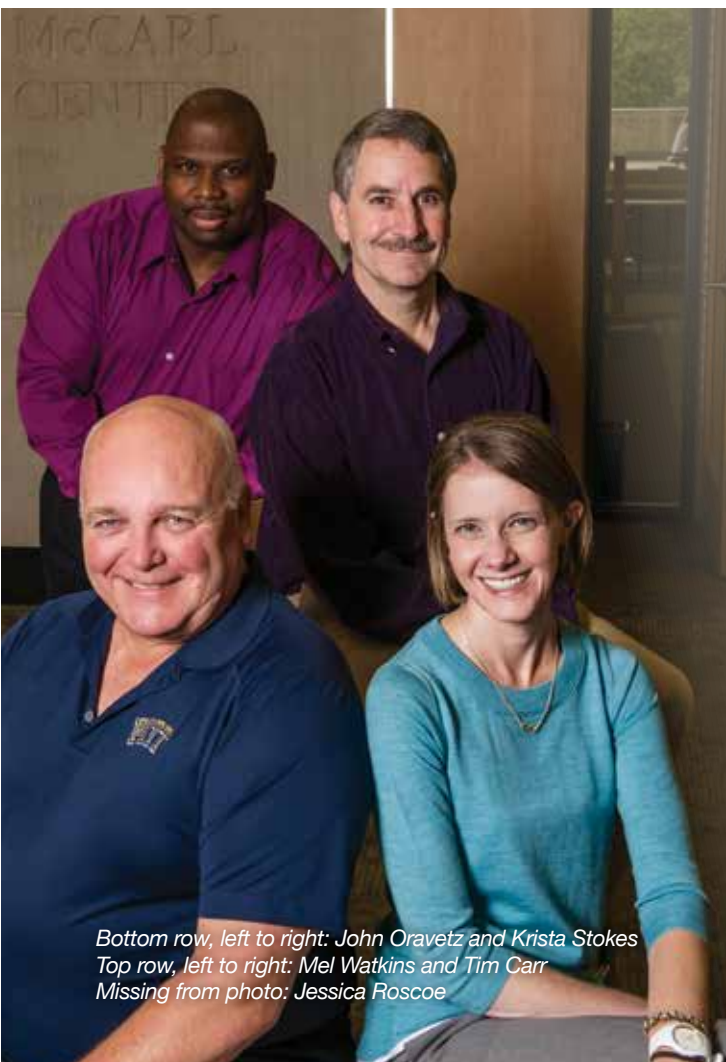
"Most definitely it was graduation. It felt really good [to be] finishing something that I had started so many years before."

What is your advice to current CGS students?

"It is important to learn to prioritize and know what is important. Learn to think outside the box and creatively solve problems."

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

"CGS allowed me, at my own pace to finish something that I had started, and I proudly have the diploma on my office wall."



Bottom row, left to right: John Oravetz and Krista Stokes
Top row, left to right: Mel Watkins and Tim Carr
Missing from photo: Jessica Roscoe

STAFF SPOTLIGHT

CGS Academic Advisors

The College of General Studies (CGS) academic advisors—**Tim Carr, John Oravetz, Jessica Roscoe, Krista Stokes, and Mel Watkins**—provide students with a full range of advising services, from evaluating previous college transcripts to formulating academic plans to writing graduate school letters of recommendation. One CGS student recalled, "When I transferred to CGS, I experienced the most welcoming attitude from my advisor, **Jessica Roscoe**, who showed sincere concern in helping me to find the program I wanted to complete."

Another CGS student commented, "I will be forever grateful to **John Oravetz** for his help and guidance as my advisor."

Students are required to see their advisors at least once each term before registering for classes. This provides the advisors with an opportunity to meet with students to discuss their academic progress and review their course selections. Reflecting on her advising appointment, one CGS student said, "My CGS advisor, **Krista Stokes**, happily answered all of my questions and was willing to go above and beyond to make sure that I had the information to succeed."

CGS advisors go well beyond just providing answers to questions about transfer credits, study abroad opportunities, or specific course requirements. Advisors are mentors, confidants, and advocates who empower students to make informed decisions about their academic choices and career plans. One CGS student recalled, "**Tim Carr** was more than my advisor; he became my friend. He never forgot who I was, and he supported me by giving me a listening ear. He would not let me fail!"

During personalized one-on-one appointments, the advising staff discuss goals and aspirations with their advisees and develop individualized academic plans that make sense for each student and that will fit with students' busy work schedules and family commitments. Another CGS student reflected, "**Mel Watkins** has been very supportive of me. Regardless of whether my issues were personal or school related, he has always been there to help me through them. He believed in me when I didn't believe in myself. How do you ever say thank you to someone like Mel? He is what Pitt is all about!"

Letter from the CGS Alumni Society President

Dear CGS alumni,

As your alumni society president and representative to the Pitt Alumni Association, I welcome these opportunities to share some thoughts regarding the CGS Alumni Society and the Pitt Alumni Association. Of particular interest at the moment is the presentation in June of Chancellor Patrick Gallagher's Plan for Pitt: Making a Difference Together. This plan, which consists of several strategies, may be viewed in its entirety at pitt.edu. I am interested in sharing his goal of strengthening communities where Pitt alumni live, whether near or far.

Recently, Kannu Sahni, director of community relations in the Office of Community and Governmental Relations, shared with the alumni association's School and College/Regional Campus Committee some of the many exciting projects in which Pitt is involved. As we move forward, there will be many opportunities for Pitt alumni and students to have a positive impact.

For instance, at Pitt's annual Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service, I personally saw hundreds of Pitt students, alumni, and staff contributing their time and talents to our region. It was fun to be involved, and there were many activities to appeal to any alumnus, whatever his or her interests. It was especially rewarding to see the Pitt community making a difference. As we move forward, we will receive more information about the Plan for Pitt; in the meantime, I urge you to visit the Community and Governmental Relations Web site at cgr.pitt.edu to view the latest news and information about opportunities to get involved.

Closer to home, in August, we welcomed Adam Robinson as the new director of the McCarl Center for Nontraditional Student Success. As we move forward, we are planning on some exciting collaborations involving the alumni society and the CGS Student Government. We also are seeking some CGS

alumni who would be interested in participating in the CGS Alumni Society and helping to make these activities happen.

As always, I appreciate the opportunity to keep you up to date on the alumni society's activities, and I welcome any comments you may have as well as expressions of interest in becoming involved in the CGS Alumni Society. I can be reached at bmountjoy@alumni.pitt.edu.

Thank you, and hail to Pitt!
Bruce Mountjoy
(BA '91)



Pictured from left to right are Adam Robinson and Bruce Mountjoy.



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NEWS IN BRIEF

BOBENAGE/SZCZEPANSKI HONORARY OLLI MEMBERSHIP FUND

The College of General Studies and the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute (OLLI) at Pitt are proud to announce the establishment of the Bobenage/Szczepanski Honorary OLLI Membership Fund to provide assistance to OLLI at Pitt members who cannot afford the full membership fee or other program fees. OLLI at Pitt is a membership-based community of adults ages 50 and better who are passionate about learning.

The fund was established in honor of Judi Bobenage, former OLLI at Pitt director, and Patricia Szczepanski, program assistant, both of whom spent the last 10 years working to ensure access to the programs and making sure that the OLLI offerings meet the needs of members. The fund was set up because scholarship requests have increased over the last few years, and the OLLI at Pitt staff members want to guarantee that anyone who wants to be a member of OLLI at Pitt has the funds to do so.

Gifts to the Bobenage/Szczepanski Honorary OLLI Membership Fund may be made by visiting giveto.pitt.edu/osher.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

Whether you graduated last year or 20 years ago, you are part of the CGS alumni community. We would like to hear from you. Please take a few minutes to complete an information form to tell us about your most recent achievements. Visit cgs.pitt.edu/tell-us-about-yourself today!

MAKE A YEAR-END CHARITABLE CONTRIBUTION

Making a charitable donation to the College of General Studies, the Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, or the Office of Veterans Services is quick and easy. You can make your gift online at giveto.pitt.edu/givecgs; by phone at 1-800-817-8943; or by mail at the University of Pittsburgh, Office of Institutional Advancement, Park Plaza Building, 128 North Craig Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15260. Checks should be made payable to the University of Pittsburgh. Please indicate College of General Studies, Osher Lifelong Learning Institute, or Office of Veterans Services on the memo line of your check. We thank you for your continued support of the College of General Studies.



The Bobenage/Szczepanski Honorary OLLI Membership Fund was announced at OLLI at Pitt's 10th anniversary celebration on Friday, October 2, 2015.

Pictured from left to right are Judi Bobenage and Pat Szczepanski.

CGS wishes you a joyous season with family and friends.

Word on the Street How have the CGS advisors been instrumental in your success?

Beth Ann Nash

Writing for the Professions certificate recipient

"I always leave my advisor's office feeling motivated and as if completing a degree is possible. Some days, I have gone in to talk with John Oravetz thinking I am done. I always leave thinking I can do more!"



Stephan Nordsiek

CGS graduate, Administration of Justice

"My advisor, Mel Watkins, ensured that all requirements for my dual degree were met and helped me to identify classes that could satisfy both degrees so that there was no doubling up on classes."



Abigail Takacs

Leadership certificate and natural sciences student

"When I transferred in to CGS, my advisor, Jessica Roscoe, was super helpful. She cares about what I am doing and lays out all of my options for me."

