

Responding to COVID-19

Bias in the Machines

A Supreme Presence

RUTGERS CAMDEN

MAGAZINE

FALL 2020



HOPE (AND)
HEALING

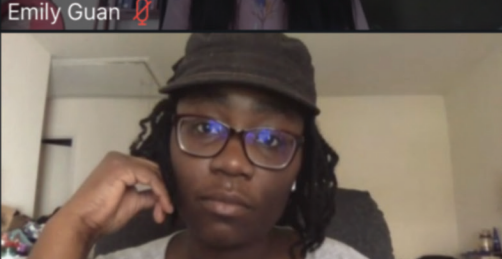
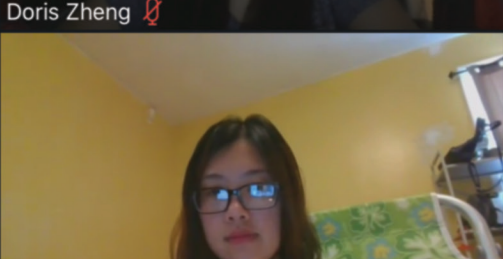
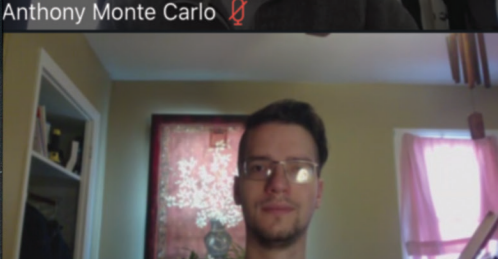
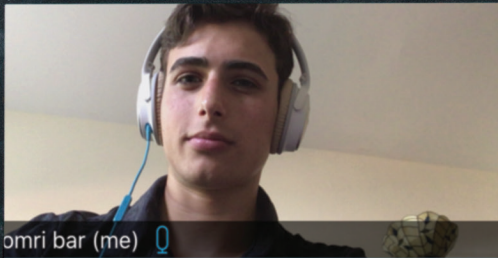
**Rutgers–Camden students, faculty,
alumni, and staff remain hopeful in
this challenging year.**

RUTGERS CAMDEN

Rutgers-Camden Magazine Vol. IV, No. 1 Fall 2020

With only a handful of laboratory, clinical, and studio art classes offered in person within social-distancing guidelines on the Rutgers University-Camden campus in fall 2020, the majority of students convened remotely. Faculty and students—including this course taught by Jinglin Fu, associate professor of chemistry—developed innovative methods for conducting research and collaborating online.





CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE EDITOR

Michael Sepanic

EDITOR

Sam Starnes

ART DIRECTION

Karaamat Abdullah

CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

James Foley

Jeanne Leong

PHOTOGRAPHERS

Jonathan Kolbe

Nick Romanenko

EDITORIAL SUPPORT

Akua Asiamah Andrade

Michael Ballard

Kate Blair CCAS'11

Kate Brennan CCAS'02

Margie Brining Berenato CCAS'15

Stefanie Charles

Jeanne Leong

Todd Lineburger

Cal Maradonna SBC'74, GSBC'79

Tom McLaughlin

Scott D. Owens CCAS'04, GSC'10

Julie Roncinske GSC'13

Beatris Santos

Joseph C. Schiavo CCAS'82

Julie Still

Mary Clare Venuto CCAS'07, GSC'09

Kristin Walker CCAS'88

Patrick Wallace CCAS'02

Nyeema C. Watson CCAS'00, GSC'15

Rutgers-Camden Magazine

303 Cooper Street

Camden, NJ 08102-1519

FEATURES

6 HOPE AND HEALING

Rutgers-Camden students, faculty, alumni, and staff remain optimistic in the face of COVID-19 and the global racial reckoning.

12 BIAS IN THE MACHINES

Two stories, "Harnessing Hatefulware" and "Striving for Algorithmic Justice," highlight research efforts by faculty, undergraduates, and law students who investigate bias online.

16 A SUPREME PRESENCE

Rutgers Law School in Camden has significant impact on the state and the nation's highest courts. Two New Jersey Supreme Court justices are alumni, and a law professor's argument proved instrumental in a major 2020 U.S. Supreme Court decision.

DEPARTMENTS

4 ON CAMPUS

Rutgers-Camden rallies to support students affected by the pandemic and economic downturn.

5 COVID-19 RESPONSE

Rutgers School of Nursing-Camden faculty and alumni step up to staff COVID-19 field hospital; Rutgers School of Business-Camden professor seeks to support small businesses in challenging times.

20 SCARLET PROFILES

First-generation alumnus from Class of 1965 gives back; Rutgers Law School alumna transitioned from juvenile court defendant to award-winning attorney.

24 ALUMNI NEWS

The Rutgers University-Camden Alumni Association gives to scholarships; the nursing school forms alumni association.

We welcome your feedback on this issue of Rutgers-Camden Magazine. If you have questions or comments regarding the content of the magazine, please contact Sam Starnes at [sstarnes@camden.rutgers.edu](mailto:ssstarnes@camden.rutgers.edu) or 856-225-6857. For alumni address changes, please visit ralumni.com/mynews or call 848-932-7260.

CHANCELLOR'S MESSAGE

It would be an understatement to call this semester a singular experience. We haven't had a pandemic this severe since 1918. I am proud to say, however, that the Rutgers University–Camden community has responded with grace and strength. In these challenging times, I am so grateful to be part of such a supportive community. My heartfelt thanks go out to our staff, faculty, alumni, and donors for their unflagging commitment to our students and each other. Our amazing students are demonstrating their resilience and generosity of spirit, and our faculty have developed new ways to teach and engage their students. Our alumni and friends have stepped up to make timely gifts in order to support our students. Thank you all so much.

Even as we ensure that our students continue to make progress in spite of the health concerns created by the pandemic and the hardships of the resulting economic downturn, we know that the future does not wait. We are hard at work developing academic programs to tackle the challenges of the twenty-first century. We are also addressing in multiple ways the long-overdue racial reckoning that the United States is facing, one of which focuses on our physical environment. I recently empaneled a Committee on Public Art and History to consider existing public art on the campus and also recommend ways in which the campus—through such means as historical markers, public art, exhibits, or walking tours—can represent the past lives of the land on which our campus sits in ways that honor its rich diversity and complexity.

Rutgers faces many challenges in the uncertainty of this moment. We are committed to providing the services our students need to succeed and graduate on time, and we are finding new ways to do that in order to safeguard the health of our community. Many of us have friends and loved ones with medical conditions that place them at risk of suffering debilitating impacts from the coronavirus, and some of us might already have experienced that trauma. These serious problems require our unwavering attention. As a supporter of Rutgers University–Camden, you are among a select group receiving this limited print edition of the magazine. We felt it important to keep you informed, and to thank you for your commitment to Rutgers–Camden, especially in this difficult year. The pandemic has not slowed the pursuit of our aspirations and ambitions. It's difficult for everyone, but we *are* Rutgers–Camden. We persevere and we prevail. That's who we are and what we do.

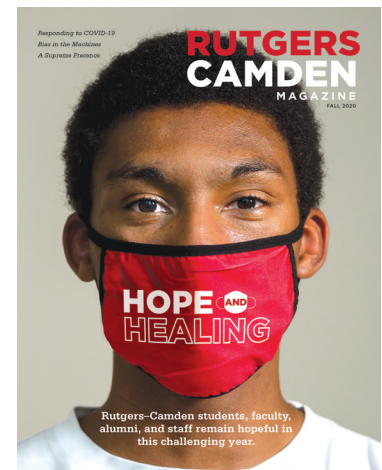
This magazine's cover story, "Hope and Healing," features Rutgers–Camden voices who are optimistic, as am I. The task is daunting, but I remain confident in the ability of Rutgers University–Camden to grow from the challenges of this year as we work with and for each other. We will emerge from this crisis stronger as individuals and as a community.



Margaret Marsh

Margaret Marsh, Ph.D.
Interim Chancellor

ON THE COVER



English major Keith Schlapfer, who is pursuing plans to earn a law degree and aspirations to become an actor, remains hopeful despite the challenges of 2020. Read his and other stories starting on page 6. Cover photo by Jonathan Kolbe.

ONLINE UPDATES

Please visit the following for frequent updates:

Universitywide COVID-19 information: coronavirus.rutgers.edu.

Rutgers–Camden COVID-19 information: camden.rutgers.edu/about/responses-covid-19-rutgers-university-camden.

Updates on Rutgers–Camden events: camden.rutgers.edu/calendar.

Alumni activity: alumni.rutgers.edu.

Rallying to Support Students

Rutgers–Camden strives to help students in need



PHOTO BY SAM STARNES

While most fall classes were offered remotely, some met in person with social-distancing measures, including this Painting 1 class taught by Stanislav Shpanin, an assistant teaching professor.

By Sam Starnes

The professor reached out to the Dean of Students office with a request for help: A student of his was struggling to write a 10-page paper on a smartphone because he didn't have access to a computer. Courses in March had transitioned to remote learning and campus computer labs were closed due to efforts to slow the spread of the coronavirus. Through an innovative program set up by the Dean of Students office and Rutgers–Camden Information Technology, the student was loaned a laptop from the university to use for the semester and complete his paper.

The program, which loaned more than 50 computers to students, is one of myriad ways Rutgers–Camden reacted rapidly to the pandemic. From emergency financial aid to additional academic support, the university rallied to support students. “If faculty saw

students dropping off the radar, they referred them very quickly to the Dean of Students office so we were able to find them as many options to help them as possible, including helping them to keep their class,” said Mary Beth Daisey, vice chancellor of student affairs. “That family feeling that we are all here together and are here to support each other is one of the values that Rutgers–Camden holds dear.”

Daisey said many students lost part-time jobs, including several hundred who worked on campus, and often family hardships caused financial crises. A few students were discovered to be homeless, she said, noting that staff worked to find resources and support them, and many more dealt with other issues. The Rutgers University–Camden Chancellor's Emergency Fund, which is funded by donations, helped many students with emergency grants. “We helped pay for

books, and we helped with a cell phone payment here and there or a gift card for food for students that needed it and lived in off-campus apartments,” Daisey said. “We helped with all different kinds of emergencies, and provided funds that would help students get over the edge.”

Daisey said \$16,000 was given out from the emergency fund, exhausting it for the 2019–2020 academic year. “We used every penny that we could for students,” she said. The emergency fund has since benefitted from increased donations, including a \$50,000 gift from the Teagle Foundation and a \$5,000 gift from the Rutgers University–Camden Alumni Association.

Craig Westman, vice chancellor of enrollment management who directs the offices of admissions, financial aid, and the registrar, said his staff developed numerous additional programs and procedures to serve students remotely in the new world of the pandemic. Westman said his staff has responded to many students who receive financial aid who experienced a change in family circumstance that enabled them to receive increased financial aid.

Westman also said the university made the decision to redistribute funds it received from the Higher Education Emergency Relief Fund, which was part of the federal Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, to students. Students could apply to the university to receive between \$500 to \$1,500 depending on their financial situation. The university had options to use the funds for technology or in other ways, but Westman said, “We wanted to get the funds directly into the hands of students.”

COVID-19 RESPONSE

School of Nursing Staffs COVID-19 Hospital

By Sam Starnes

When Kevin Emmons, an associate clinical professor at the Rutgers School of Nursing–Camden, was tapped to be the chief nursing officer for the field medical site set up in Atlantic City to handle an overflow of coronavirus patients from hospitals, he knew exactly where to turn to recruit nurses. He put out a call that brought in eight Rutgers–Camden nursing alumni, three nursing faculty members, and a graduate student in social work to join the field hospital staff. “Everyone worked as a team and chipped in and served South Jersey,” said Emmons, who is a 2004 graduate of the School of Nursing–Camden. “This was a call to serve the state, and a lot of Rutgers–Camden nurses stepped up to do the job.”

The 250-bed hospital, one of three in the state set up by the New Jersey Department of Health and coordinated with the Federal Emergency Management Agency and the Department of Defense, opened during

the pandemic in late April and was in operation through early July. Margo Wallace SNC’08, director of the Rutgers School of Nursing–Camden’s Center for Academic Resources, Engagement, and Services (CARES), served as nighttime nursing supervisor at the field hospital. “Everyone coming together to care for these patients was a very bonding experience,” Wallace said. “It really restored my faith in humanity that so many people were willing to take care of others in the worst of times.”

Emmons and Wallace said setting up the field hospital quickly in the early days of the pandemic in April was an enormous task. Ultimately, the hospital was far from reaching capacity, serving almost 50 patients with COVID-19. In the uncertainty of the first months of the pandemic when it appeared hospitals would be overwhelmed, being prepared for the worst was critical, Emmons

said. “We were ready,” said Emmons, a U.S. Army veteran who has worked in combat field hospitals in Iraq. “It’s better to set up for what could potentially have happened and be prepared then to not be prepared at all.”



Pictured, from left to right, at the Atlantic City field hospital, are Kevin Emmons SNC’04; Margo Wallace SNC’08; Joseph Cipriano CCAS’06, SNC’15, ’17; Laris Brkic SNC’18, and Virginia Girard, a clinical instructor. Field hospital staff from Rutgers–Camden who are not pictured include Valerie Caraballo, clinical nursing instructor; Stacy Carter SNC’19; Daniel Van Fossen SNC’18; Brianna Flournoy SNC’19; Latisha Hayes CCAS’08, SNC’19; Regina Mangano SNC’17; and Khadijah Muhammad, a graduate student in the School of Social Work.

Assisting Small Businesses Locally and Globally

By Jeanne Leong

In the aftermath of the economic downturn brought on by the pandemic, Justin Deng, an assistant professor at the Rutgers School of Business–Camden, is helping communities in Camden and Haiti to combat poverty by offering assistance to small business owners. He is working with the Partners Worldwide organization to start a COVID-19 small business grant program to distribute funds to local businesses in Haiti that

provide essential services. He also is working with the Latin American Economic Development Association (LAEDA) in Camden to explore the feasibility of creating a commissary kitchen—a shared rental workspace that would offer commercial-quality equipment for food truck owners and other food entrepreneurs. “Small business development is one of the most effective and sustainable ways to improve people’s lives,” Deng said.



DENG

HOPE (AND) HEALING

COVID-19 and the Global Racial Reckoning at Rutgers-Camden

By Sam Starnes

The first day of the fall 2020 semester on Rutgers University-Camden's campus was a first day of classes like no other. The walkways through the quad and the Campus Center that traditionally teem with students excited about the promise of a new academic year were quiet, with only an occasional lone masked student passing by. Most classrooms that normally buzz with students sat empty. The vast majority of fall Rutgers-Camden classes were held remotely, with students logging in from their homes to join discussions and fulfill assignments online to avoid spreading the coronavirus.

There hasn't been a year comparable to this one in more than a century. The threefold challenges of the pandemic, the resulting economic downturn, and the heightened awareness of systemic racism in the aftermath of the killing of George Floyd, described by Rutgers University President Jonathan Holloway as a "global



"I am extremely optimistic for the future. I feel as though my future is nothing less than bright."

- Keith Schlapfer, English major, Class of 2022, from Point Pleasant, New Jersey.

racial reckoning," have shaken the foundations of our university, our state, our nation, and our world. The impact of these crises on Rutgers-Camden has been significant, but through innovative faculty and creative methods to stifle COVID-19, the university has continued to offer world-class educations.

Through it all, students, faculty, staff, administrators, and alumni have maintained hope for the future as healing begins.

Keith Schlapfer, a Point Pleasant, New Jersey, resident who has dual goals of becoming an actor and attending law school, said while he wishes that his classes were in person instead of offered remotely, he has not slowed down on his dreams. He was accepted into an online class with a prominent acting coach in Hollywood, and he also buckled down on his studies for the Law School Admissions Test (LSAT), noting that he made the most of the pandemic limitations on activity by studying more than he might have in normal times.

Schlapfer, a junior English major in the dual-degree program with Rutgers Law School, is on track to earn both undergraduate and law degrees in only six years. He also is pursuing aspirations to act, which included performing in the Rutgers-Camden theater production of *Clybourne Park* in February 2019.



Keith Schlapfer, center, shown here in a Rutgers-Camden theater production in 2019, is pursuing his goals of attending law school and acting.



“In terms of COVID-19, what has been so difficult on so many levels is that none of us have lived through anything like this before. It has been such a disruption in the way that we live, and it has forced us to think about other ways to engage with each other and how to do our work. But our campus has met the disruption, and everyone’s commitment and hard work have shown us to be a close-knit community . . . One of the things that I find incredibly hopeful is working with our students. The incoming students are particularly attuned to social justice issues and want to use their law degrees to make the world a better place.”

- Kimberly Mutcherson, co-dean, Rutgers Law School in Camden.



“When this pandemic is all over, everyone is going to want to give each other a huge hug. Not being able to give a big hug or a high five has been hard. We’ll be a little kinder and really value those moments that we get to spend together a little bit more.”

- Margo Wallace SNC’08, director of the Rutgers School of Nursing-Camden’s Center for Academic Resources, Engagement, and Services (CARES) who also served as nighttime nursing supervisor at the Atlantic City COVID-19 field hospital (see story on page 5).



“The George Floyd killing was an absolute atrocity. People of all backgrounds and all shades and all religions have come together to say ‘Enough is enough.’ This rallying cry is so deafening at this point that I absolutely have hope that something is going to change. People who would not have protested before have protested, and people who haven’t spoken up about racial injustice have spoken up. I’m extremely hopeful that significant change is going to come.”

- Nyeema Watson, associate chancellor for civic engagement.

How Can Alumni Support Students?

Giving: Rutgers-Camden students need financial aid now more than ever, and a large majority require assistance in order to attend the university. Philanthropy plays an increasingly critical role in student success.

The Rutgers-Camden Chancellor’s Emergency Fund supports students in need and is administered by the Dean of Students Office. In addition, Scarlet Promise Grants is a universitywide program that awards students grants in amounts between \$500 and \$5,000 per academic year as part of their financial aid packages. These grants offer essential financial support to talented students for whom a Rutgers education might otherwise be impossible.

Donors can also give to areas and programs of their choice. For more about supporting Rutgers-Camden students, visit support.rutgers.edu or call 856-225-6028.

Hiring Students: The Rutgers-Camden Career Center is seeking opportunities for students, including internships, and part- and full-time jobs. Visit careercenter.camden.rutgers.edu, email careercenter@camden.rutgers.edu, or call 856-225-6046.

Overcoming COVID-19

A first-year student, Priyal Shah this fall began pursuing her dream of becoming a physician by embarking on a course of study that will prepare her for medical school. “I’m excited about my future at Rutgers–Camden because there are so many opportunities that are offered and they are on so many different platforms,” she said.

Before she started her senior year of high school, she began volunteering with an EMS squad near her home in Edison, New Jersey. “I enjoyed the patient-care

experience and helping patients in need,” said Shah, who was certified as an EMT. “It was really inspiring for me.”

She said she is committed to overcoming the challenges raised by the pandemic.

Scientists’ Perspectives

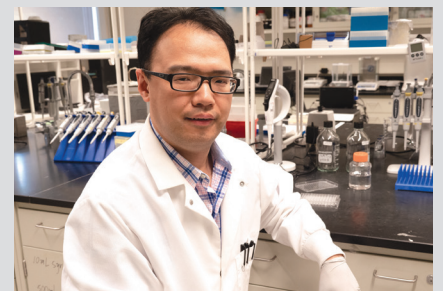
Jinglin Fu, an award-winning associate professor of chemistry, said the 1918 flu pandemic, which killed more than half a million Americans and approximately 50 million people worldwide, was far more

severe than the COVID-19 crisis has been thus far. “If we compare this year with the 1918 pandemic, we know much more,” he said. “The technology we have today has saved many thousands of lives.” Fu added that the 1918 pandemic, as bad as it was, was followed by a “golden age” of economic growth in America in the 1920s.

Fu said teaching remotely can be effective. He used computational programs and online resources to allow students in a summer project to conduct research from home on a new virus detection process for diagnosing diseases such as COVID-19 and cancer. “The students are highly motivated,” he said. “They are learning much about the virus and how to fight it.”

“These are hard times. People are going through a lot of things. It’s hard to be in school at home by yourself. However, I think students like myself will overcome these challenges with the three Cs—collaboration, cooperation, and compassion. I collaborate with my peers online in order to make sure that we are all on the same page and understand the material and requirements for shared classes. With cooperation, I ensure that I am flexible and work with the instructor and my peers to achieve success. Showing compassion and allowing my peers and others to know that I am there for them through their difficulties will provide a united front and hope.”

- Priyal Shah, a first-year student from Edison, New Jersey, double-majoring in biology and psychology in Rutgers University–Camden’s joint B.S./D.O. program, a seven-year track in partnership with the Rowan University School of Osteopathic Medicine.



“COVID-19 is not the end of the world. I’m very confident that we will survive the pandemic, just as we’ve survived many other pandemic viruses in history. As a scientist, I’m quite optimistic about vaccine development . . . This moment is quite historic. It’s important we keep hope for a bright future.”

- Jinglin Fu, associate professor of chemistry and recipient of the Presidential Early Career Award for Scientists and Engineers.

Sandy Stewart, whose storied career in biotechnology includes founding several companies, said he believes that an effective vaccine will be available, but not before spring 2021. He is optimistic that the nation has learned a lesson regarding viruses and health care issues. “I hope that we get over politicizing science,” Stewart said. “I hope we come together and get back to listening to scientists and medical professionals.” He also said he believes the lessons regarding preventing germs through handwashing and wearing masks and other methods will persist. “People now understand how easy it is to pass germs on,” he said. “That will take hold and hopefully will be forever in everyone’s mind.”



“I’ve seen some of the most incredible people I’ve known work tirelessly for the safety of students, faculty, and staff while faculty and staff continued delivering a Rutgers education to students who did their best to take things in stride. However, we need to remain vigilant and united.”

-Sandy Stewart CCAS’81, GSC’87, member and former chair of the Rutgers University Board of Governors, as well as a member of the Rutgers–Camden Board of Directors.

Leadership and Innovation

Monica Adya, who began her tenure as dean of the Rutgers School of Business–Camden on March 30, arrived from her position at Marquette University two weeks after Rutgers went remote due to COVID-19. She said the pandemic has been an unprecedented test for leaders of businesses and organizations. “The ongoing pandemic has caused us all to pivot in unanticipated ways. But it has also brought forth the positive character of individuals and institutions—from businesses that stepped up innovation



“When you look at this nation and the institution of Rutgers University, we have nearly a parallel 250-year history. Both have seen downturns through decades but have emerged more robust. Each time we have experienced challenges, we have learned that companies must rethink and revisit how things are done and we have found that innovations during these times grow. It’s important to keep in perspective that we will get past this pandemic and past this economic downturn, and to look forward strategically.”

- Monica Adya, dean, Rutgers School of Business–Camden.

and adapted their operations to meet the needs of our nation, to individuals who have put their own lives at the forefront to improve those of others. Positive, transparent, and empathetic leadership is more crucial now than ever before for creating and sustaining an empowered work culture that can adapt under any circumstance.”



“This is not the first time in this nation where we have confronted a crisis, and it certainly won’t be the last. We’ve been to war, and we have experienced illness and infectious diseases. I remember being a young girl and getting vaccinated with the polio vaccine. We’ve also gone through tuberculosis, HIV and AIDS, several different SARS viruses, and now the novel coronavirus. It’s important to remember that we should be hopeful. Americans have endured huge sacrifice and human suffering. It’s part of our fabric as a nation. Our nation has a lot of grit. Our Rutgers–Camden community has a lot of grit. We always get to the other side. This has been a difficult year, but it has made us stronger and more determined.”

- Donna Nickitas, dean, Rutgers School of Nursing–Camden and retired U.S. Air Force Reserve Corps major.

Global Racial Reckoning

In her first two years at Rutgers–Camden, Melani Cruz Stokes has pursued numerous opportunities to help others, including serving as president of the Rutgers–Camden chapter of Define American, a national organization that advocates for undocumented students, and volunteering for the Rutgers Immigrant Community Assistance Project, a Rutgers Law School program to provide immigration legal services to Rutgers students. She said she developed her passion for working on immigration issues at Rutgers–Camden when she learned about the growing challenges facing undocumented immigrant students. “There is a lesson in recognizing privilege, and not just sitting on that privilege, but using your privilege to advance opportunities for others and advance equality for others. I always thought that being a double minority—being Black and Latina—and being a woman that I didn’t have privilege, but I now understand that I have privileges that other people don’t, such as U.S. citizenship. I want to be able to share the opportunity that I was born with.”



Melani Cruz Stokes, left, with fellow students at the Supreme Court during the 2019 DACA hearings.



A Historical Perspective

Kendra Boyd—an assistant professor of history and co-editor of *Scarlet and Black, Volume II: Constructing Race and Gender at Rutgers, 1865–1945*—said the global racial reckoning “is part of a very long fight for freedom and racial equality in the United States. The policing of Black bodies and state-sanctioned violence goes back to the days of slavery. It continued under the system of Jim Crow and now manifests in the mass incarceration of Black and brown people. The current fight against widespread police violence and the murder of African Americans is building on the legacies of the modern Civil Rights Movement, anti-lynching campaigns in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and earlier anti-slavery activism.”

“What has given me hope is seeing how many people are standing up and participating in protests and marches, not just in the U.S., but all over the world. It’s very, very inspiring to see how many people are uniting with the Black community and trying to finally bring an end to systemic racism.”

- Melani Cruz Stokes, a criminal justice major from Stratford, New Jersey, who was one of 135 scholars around the world awarded a Humanity in Action Fellowship.



“Although the future seems uncertain and the state of the country is frightening right now, we should be hopeful because this moment is ripe for social activism and change. Historically, college and university students have been crucial in fighting against social and economic injustices. All three Rutgers campuses witnessed ample student activism in the 1960s and 1970s. The current generation of students will be at the forefront of activism around racism in 21st-century America. They give me hope, and I am excited to educate this generation of student activists at Rutgers–Camden.”

- Kendra Boyd, assistant professor of history and a scholar of African American history.

“I would love to be optimistic and full of hope, but hope can sometimes lead to comfort and this is far from a time to get comfortable and slow down. The United States’ legal system is inaccessible to many despite its omnipresence in our lives. As a law student, I hope to use what I learn to help change that, even if it’s just in a small way. It is important to keep in mind the words of Toni Morrison: ‘If you are free, you need to free somebody else. If you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else.’ If we’re going to make it through 2020, and whatever is to come after, we will need to do so together.”

- Lisa Laffend, second-year law student from Media, Pennsylvania, who, among numerous activities, is president of Rutgers Law School in Camden’s Association for Public Interest Law and is a student leader for two law school programs offering free legal services.



“I think we should be hopeful for a few reasons: More organizations are making public commitments to and investments in diversity, equity, and inclusion. Moreover, some organizations are specifically naming anti-Black racism as a systemic problem within this country and their organizations that need to be addressed, an unlikely widespread admission just a decade ago. Powerful people and institutions are being more responsive to grassroots activists and movements, and broader coalitions are forming to eliminate systemic oppression. As a nation, to the degree that this year’s past difficulties have made us aware of our critical weaknesses, then that has made us stronger.”

- Oscar Holmes IV, associate professor of management and associate dean of undergraduate programs for the Rutgers School of Business–Camden, is the author of a recent article, “Police Brutality and Four Other Ways Racism Kills Black People,” that appeared in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal.



“On the social justice front, I am encouraged. It is the first time in my adult life that I have seen so many different racial groups come together and realize there is a problem. We can be happy if there is progress, even if there isn’t complete change. I am optimistic both on the health front as well as the racial justice front that we are going to have some changes come out of 2020.”

- Sharon King RLAW’93

“Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said there is either ‘chaos or community.’ What are our options if we are not hopeful? Having hope is better than having despair. Given the options we have and reflecting on COVID-19 and the racial reckoning, I am hopeful that we can choose community and build upon it.”

- Stanley King RLAW’94

Sharon and Stanley King, founders of the King and King LLC law firm based in Woodbury, New Jersey, met as Rutgers Law students and have practiced civil rights law for more than 20 years. They were honored with the Rutgers Law Mary Philbrook Public Interest Award in October.

STUDENT PHOTOS BY JONATHAN KOLBE (EXCEPT FOR PRIYAL SHAH). RUTGERS MASKS COURTESY OF FOCO.COM.

BIAS IN THE MACHINES



IMAGE COURTESY OF BRUD

Students researched Lil Miquela who, despite being virtual, is harassed online.

By Sam Starnes

Miquela Sousa, more commonly known as Lil Miquela, is a social media icon. A 19-year-old model, musician, and an influencer who promotes a variety of products, she has more than 2.8 million followers on Instagram where her audience comments at length on her posts, often in harassing language.

Rutgers University–Camden undergraduates majoring in digital studies have been studying the trend of various forms of harassment online for several years, and a recent project included studying Lil Miquela’s followers’ comments. Miquela, who is part Brazilian and part Spanish, is often subject to racial harassment, said Sora

Harnessing ‘Hateware’

Faculty and student researchers focus on harassment and abuse online

Kiwior, a senior from Freehold, New Jersey, majoring in animation and digital studies, who is working on the Rutgers–Camden study.

Other comments are sexist—sometimes insulting, and other times consisting of “inappropriate flirting or sexual harassment,” Kiwior said.

The catch, Kiwior pointed out, is that Lil Miquela is not human. She’s virtual, a 3D image, an on-screen robot created by a company to promote products. Even though she’s not real—although it is not clear if all of her followers realize she is a robot—Lil Miquela is subjected to types of harassment that are prevalent on social media platforms. “I was not surprised that people would harass a self-proclaimed Instagram influencer,” Kiwior said. “Just being active on social media, you come across harassment all the time.”

The type of harassment Lil Miquela experiences is rampant on the internet, said Jim Brown, an associate professor of English and digital studies who is the director of Rutgers–Camden’s Digital Studies Center. “We know that women, people of color, and anyone who sits at the intersections of identities experience harassment in more intense ways,” said Brown, who has studied and written about the issue extensively and directed the research on Lil Miquela. “If you are a Black woman, you are particularly vulnerable to abuse and harassment.”

Brown argues many online platforms, such as Facebook, which have tacitly permitted hate speech, fall under the category of “hateware.” He coined the term, which is defined as “software that employs policies, algorithms, and designs

that enable, encourage, and/or directly participate in abuse or harassment.” He said these platforms can help stop race- and gender-based harassment by taking responsibility for what happens on their platforms, rather than outsourcing the responsibility to users.

In “Hateware and the Outsourcing of Responsibility,” a chapter published in the 2019 book *Digital Ethics: Rhetorics and Responsibility in Online Aggression*, Brown and Rutgers–Camden alumnus Gregory Hennis CCAS’18, a former student of Brown’s, write of the existence of “a regulatory and cultural environment that insists on protecting the free speech rights of users at the expense of the safety of marginalized populations.”

Hennis, who earned degrees in computer science and digital studies and now works as a technical specialist for the Federal Aviation Administration, said he learned through his research with Brown that the existence of hate speech online is not a new problem. “Companies have known that this problem existed and they completely ignored it,” he said. “That was something that stuck with me. People knew that terrible things were happening on their platforms and they didn’t care at all.”



Gregory Hennis CCAS’18 coauthored a book chapter on “hateware” as an undergraduate.



James Brown, director of the Rutgers-Camden Digital Studies Center, teaching his course Truth and Lies in the Digital World. It analyzes the history of propaganda and misinformation online.

Brown said this practice of “outsourcing” the responsibility of reporting of harassment to users is becoming a less tenable decision for online platforms. In July, more than 1,000 advertisers joined in a boycott of Facebook that was led by a civil rights group urging the company to strengthen its policies on hate speech and misinformation. “People are starting to recognize that a hands-off approach is a position,” Brown says. “It’s not the lack of a position. If a company decides it is not going to filter content or ban someone for racial epithets, that is taking a position.”

Through the creation of a “hateware spectrum,” which would rate software, Brown and Hennis write that “we can begin to track the key features of software

that props up and supports abuse and harassment, intentionally or not.”

Their chapter analyzes Discord, an online platform initially set up to provide video gamers the ability to chat while playing, which was used by the alt-right Unite the Right group to organize protests that turned violent and deadly in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017. The group “merely took advantage of Discord’s hands-off approach to community management in order to hide in plain sight,” Brown and Hennis write.

Brown and Hennis argue that methods to prevent such behavior needs to be built into programs. “What if software designers began to think more deeply about how their platforms might be enabling bad behavior and designed these platforms with such potentialities in mind?”

Brown and Hennis argue for a sense of “design justice,” a framework proposed by Sasha Costanza-Chock, which sees design as directly tied to questions of racism and sexism. “To prevent the problems of hateware,” Brown and Hennis write, “we will need to identify and diagnose the portions of software that are easily gamed toward nefarious ends and then learn from those lessons as we attempt to build software that avoids landing on the hateware spectrum.”

Hennis said he is encouraged by the shift in attitudes that is forcing companies such as Facebook to more actively address hate speech on their platforms. “Collectively, very slowly, people are starting to realize we need more than anarchy online,” he said.

Striving for Algorithmic Justice

Law professors and students look behind the curtain of computer programs



Ellen Goodman is director of the Rutgers Institute for Information Policy & Law.

By Sam Starnes

Algorithms are everywhere. These digital codes that define how computers complete tasks can determine what ads you see on a website, who is eligible for a loan, and who employers hire. Algorithms also inform many decisions made in the criminal justice system, and governments use all manner of algorithms to decide on distributions of benefits, resources, and sanctions. “People don’t realize how much influence algorithms have on our lives,” said Ellen Goodman, a professor at Rutgers Law School in Camden who is director of the Rutgers Institute for Information Policy & Law. “Many of the decisions that

people have made in the past are being made by algorithms.”

And like decisions made by people, algorithms are often tainted with bias. Computers do what they are told, or what the data they are fed tell them to do. “Concerns about fairness and equity arise when the algorithms have been trained on biased data,” Goodman said. “These algorithms may make recommendations to police departments or housing departments or social services that are themselves biased and disadvantage certain populations.”

As an example, Goodman cites how police departments often use data to create maps that assign officers to patrol

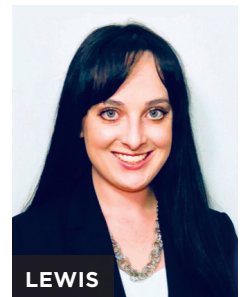
“WE MUST FIGHT FOR ALGORITHMIC JUSTICE AND END THE UNFAIRNESS, OPACITY, AND LACK OF DUE PROCESS INHERENT IN MANY ALGORITHMS.”

- Ellen Goodman

particular areas. “You would want to send police to where there is a lot of criminal activity,” she said. “What’s a proxy for criminal activity that algorithms use? Arrests. But those records reflect histories of over-policing and over-arresting, so you end up perpetuating that.”

She said arrests for marijuana possession are an example. African American youth are arrested for marijuana possession much more often than white youth, so they are targeted more by police. “You send the police to neighborhoods with more historic arrest data and then there are more arrests,” Goodman said. “It’s a reinforcement of historic data.”

Brooke Lewis CCAS’15, RLaw’17, associate counsel for criminal justice reform at the New Jersey Institute for Social Justice (NJISJ) in Newark, said algorithms are used to inform many



other governmental decision-making processes, such as determining pretrial release, sentencing, and screening allegations of child abuse. “These are very serious governmental actions that have serious consequences for people’s liberty and autonomy,” said Lewis, a native of Gibbsboro, New Jersey, who earned her undergraduate degree in political science and her law degree from Rutgers–Camden’s B.A./J.D. program.

As a student, Lewis worked as a research assistant for Goodman, helping with research for Goodman’s article “Algorithmic Transparency for the Smart City” that was published in 2018 in the *Yale Journal of Law & Technology*. Goodman is a noted speaker and researcher on the trend of “smart cities,” which involves pervasive data gathering and integration, big data analytics, and artificial intelligence to manage many city functions. Lewis said her background in learning about algorithms from Goodman has been very useful in her current work in criminal justice reform. “One of the most dangerous things about using these types of algorithms is the level of deference people inherently give them,” Lewis said, noting that she was speaking on her own behalf and not that of NJISJ. “People look at it and say, ‘These are numbers. It’s an algorithm. It’s a computer. We are not having any human judgment.’ But that’s not true. There is human judgment because there is still a human who sits down and decides what factors matter and how much each factor matters.”

Kayvon Paul, a second-year Rutgers Law student in Camden, is working as a research assistant with Goodman this semester and helping her to track down policies on the use of algorithms

in cities such as Dallas, Texas, and Detroit, Michigan. “It’s eye-opening to see that when you remove humans from the decision-making process, it has the potential to do more harm than good,” Paul said.

Paul, a part-time law student from Asbury Park, New Jersey, has worked as a government lobbyist in Trenton. He said Goodman’s efforts to advocate for transparency in how algorithms function is critical going forward. “All governments are going to transition to the use of algorithms and smart technology,” he said. “The only question is when?”

“IT’S EYE-OPENING TO SEE THAT WHEN YOU REMOVE HUMANS FROM THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS, IT HAS THE POTENTIAL TO DO MORE HARM THAN GOOD.”

- Kayvon Paul RLAW’22

An expert in freedom of information law, Goodman said that looking behind the curtain of how algorithms are created is crucial to ensuring they are effective and just. She said freedom of information laws must be rigorous in ensuring transparency of the data inputs and computational programs that lead to decisions that affect the lives of many. “It’s very important that decision makers understand the meaning of algorithms,” Goodman said. “We must through freedom of information laws fight for algorithmic justice and end the unfairness, opacity, and lack of due progress inherent in many algorithms.”



PHOTO COURTESY OF MONMOUTH UNIVERSITY

Information and Digital Research On Campus

Rutgers Institute for Information Policy & Law is an interdisciplinary institute at Rutgers Law School that focuses on issues of artificial intelligence, internet protocol, algorithmic systems, media, platforms, data, privacy, and information justice. Faculty, fellows, visiting scholars, and students do engaged research, learning, and teaching on the legal governance structures around information. Website: riipl.rutgers.edu.

Rutgers University–Camden Digital Studies Center is an interdisciplinary and collaborative research, development, and education center. It is based in the Digital Commons, a site for digital studies, writing, and design based in the Johnson Park Library Building. Website: digitalstudies.camden.rutgers.edu.



A Supreme Presence

After a historic appointment to the New Jersey Supreme Court, alumni from the Rutgers Law School in Camden now hold two seats on the state's highest court: Justice Fabiana Pierre-Louis RLAW'06, above, who joined the court this summer, is the first Black woman to serve on the New Jersey Supreme Court and its third Black jurist in history. Justice Faustino J. Fernandez-Vina RLAW'81, who was sworn in to the state's high court in 2013, is the sole Hispanic justice serving on the court and the second in the court's history.

A Groundbreaking Appointment

By Sam Starnes and James Foley

A pivotal step in the career of newly appointed New Jersey Supreme Court Associate Justice Fabiana Pierre-Louis occurred in the summer before her second year at Rutgers Law School in Camden when she attended a campus seminar for students interested in judicial clerk positions. "Having the opportunity to be exposed to

judicial clerkships and learning about the benefits of working for a judge right after law school was instrumental in the path that I have taken," Pierre-Louis said.

After earning her juris doctorate with honors in 2006, Pierre-Louis launched her legal career as a clerk for state Supreme Court Associate Justice John E. Wallace Jr. She would go on to work as a federal prosecutor and

a defense lawyer with a private law firm. During her nine years at the U.S. Attorney's Office in New Jersey, she rose to the position of attorney-in-charge at the Trenton branch office and, later, attorney-in-charge at the Camden branch office. In both cases, she was the first Black woman to fill that role. When she returned to private practice, she did so as a partner at the firm of Montgomery



McCracken in Cherry Hill. In June, Governor Phil Murphy appointed Pierre-Louis to the state Supreme Court and the state senate unanimously confirmed her in August.

Pierre-Louis said that the summer session on clerkships was just one of numerous ways that Rutgers Law in Camden helped her to achieve her groundbreaking accomplishment. “Having the opportunity to obtain a phenomenal education coupled with the fact that the people were wonderful, I’m really grateful and lucky I had the opportunity to go to Rutgers Law School in Camden,” she said.

The daughter of Haitian immigrants—her father was a New York City cab driver—she grew up in Brooklyn and Irvington, New Jersey. She earned a degree in political science from Rutgers–New Brunswick, where her older sister attended. Pierre-Louis, who served as vice president of the Black Law Students Association in her final year of law school, said she benefitted from many mentors in Camden. “I was the second person in my family to go to college, but

I was the first person in my family to go to law school,” she said. “I didn’t really know many lawyers prior to starting law school.”

It was at the summer session on clerkships where Pierre-Louis met Rhasheda Douglas, an alumnus of Rutgers Law who organized the panel, who would become a mentor for her. Douglas, an assistant dean at Rutgers Law in Camden who oversees the school’s Minority Student Program, was thrilled at Pierre-Louis’ confirmation to the state’s high court. “She was born and raised in predominantly Black inner-city neighborhoods,” Douglas said. “To see her able to navigate and to ascend to the positions she has secured in her



career, it’s a dream come true for her parents, I’m sure, and for her community members, as well as other Black boys and Black girls to look to her and see that it is possible to achieve their dreams.”

Kimberly Mutcherson, co-dean of Rutgers Law School in Camden—who also broke ground when she became the first woman, first Black person, and first LGBT law dean at Rutgers—praised Pierre-Louis. “It’s always wonderful when great things happen to good people, and Fabiana Pierre-Louis is a good person,” Mutcherson said. “Justice Pierre-Louis is not the first Rutgers Law graduate to sit on the New Jersey Supreme Court, but she is the first to make history in this way. She is obviously bright and accomplished, and I have no doubt that she will be a conscientious and empathetic justice during her years on the court. She will serve New Jersey and its people well.”



Associate Justice Fabiana Pierre-Louis, shown above in her official Supreme Court portrait and at Rutgers Law in Camden commencement in 2006, was appointed by Governor Phil Murphy. She is pictured in June with Murphy and Lieutenant Governor Sheila Oliver.

Cuban-Born Justice Inspired by Parents

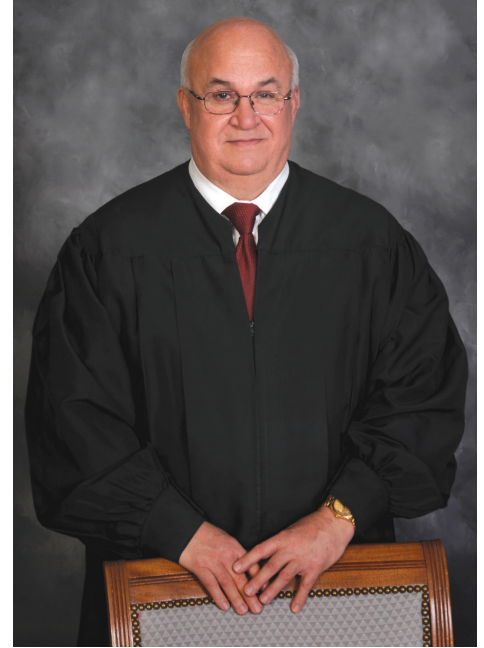
New Jersey Supreme Court Justice Faustino J. Fernandez-Vina immigrated to the United States from Cuba in the early 1960s. “At 10 years old, I arrived in this country with my parents, not speaking a word of English,” Fernandez-Vina said during his confirmation hearing before the New Jersey State Senate in 2013.

More than 50 years after coming to America, when he was sworn in to the New Jersey Supreme Court on the stage of the Walter K. Gordon Theater at Rutgers University–Camden, Fernandez-Vina’s father, Faustino, was by his side holding the Bible on which he took the oath. “My parents, through courage and example, taught me the value of hard work, honesty, integrity, and giving

one’s best every day without complaint,” Fernandez-Vina said during the 2013 hearing. His mother, Hortensia, had passed away a year before he joined the Supreme Court, and his father passed in 2015.

Fernandez-Vina, a 1981 graduate of Rutgers Law School in Camden, served as a superior court judge for nine years in the Camden Vicinage. In 2012, New Jersey Chief Justice Stuart Rabner named him assignment judge of the Camden Vicinage. Earlier in his career, he was a partner at Kelley, Wardell and Craig in Haddonfield from 1998 to 2004, and Capehart & Scatchard in New York from 1993 to 1998.

Known by his nickname “Fuzzy,” he was a standout football player for Haddon Heights High School and later



at Widener University, where he earned his undergraduate degree. His longtime nickname was inspired during youth football when he was compared to Fuzzy Thurston, a star for the Green Bay Packers.



Justice Faustino J. Fernandez-Vina RLAW'81 was sworn in on the Rutgers-Camden campus in 2013.

Law Professor Instrumental in Landmark LGBT Decision



Rutgers Law Professor Katie Eyer helped to influence the U.S. Supreme Court.

By Jeanne Leong

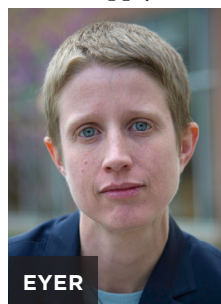
When the U.S. Supreme Court handed down a landmark ruling that banned discrimination based on an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity, law professors and advocates saw the influence of Rutgers Law Professor Katie Eyer's work in the opinion.

Eyer authored an article, and later an amicus "friend of the court" brief, arguing that textualism—a theory that the interpretation of the law should center on the legal text—required the court to conclude that gay and transgender employees are protected by Title VII. The Supreme Court adopted this argument, ruling by a 6-3 margin in the case of *Bostock v. Clayton County* that workplace discrimination based on an individual's sexual orientation or gender identity is prohibited by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Eyer's brief, which was based on her article, "Statutory Originalism and LGBT Rights," published in the *Wake Forest Law Review* in 2019, was cited as helping to inform legal strategy in the case

and influencing Justice Neil Gorsuch's majority opinion. "Almost every analytical step in Gorsuch's opinion can be traced back to @katie_eyer's visionary article," ACLU attorney Josh Block wrote on Twitter.

An anti-discrimination law scholar and litigator, Eyer applauded the Supreme Court's decision. "LGBTQ workers have long experienced discrimination and harassment in the workplace," Eyer said. "Many states still lack explicit protections for LGBTQ workers and some lower courts had held that Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which protects employees against discrimination based on race, color, national origin, sex, and religion, did not apply to such workers. For many



workers, this meant that they could face egregious forms of discrimination and harassment at work—being physically assaulted, fired, refused employment—

without any recourse. The Supreme Court's decision in *Bostock* makes clear that all LGBTQ workers are indeed protected by federal employment discrimination law."

Eyer, a resident of Philadelphia, earned her law degree in 2004 from Yale University and her undergraduate degree from Columbia University in 1999. She joined Rutgers Law in 2012 and in 2017 was honored with the Society of American Law Teachers' Junior Faculty Teaching Award. Prior to joining academia, Eyer litigated and won precedent-setting court cases protecting the legal rights of LGBT and disabled employees.

She is optimistic that the Supreme Court ruling will have lasting impact. "I hope that after *Bostock*, all employers will now take seriously their obligations to make their workplaces welcoming and nondiscriminatory environments for LGBTQ employees," she said. "Although the experiences of other protected groups make clear that formal protections will not eradicate discrimination in the workplace, this is an important step forward."

She said her work was only part of a major effort fighting for equality. "I am immensely humbled and gratified to have some of the Supreme Court advocates and others pointing to my work as influential in the opinion," Eyer said. "However, the reality is that an enormous number of people, over a span of many years, played critical roles in getting us to the decision in *Bostock*. While I hope that my own work played some role in helping to achieve the outcome, I am acutely aware that this was the result of innumerable advocates—both in and outside of the courts—helping to develop the legal reasoning, laying the groundwork for the decision, and then making the arguments persuasively to the court."

SCARLET PROFILES



First-Generation Alumnus Supports Students

John Cooper CCAS'65 on a trip to Portugal (above) and in Eldorado Canyon State Park (below), where he volunteers for Colorado Parks and Wildlife.

By Sam Starnes

When John Cooper was growing up in a farmhouse in Delaware Township, New Jersey—what would later be renamed Cherry Hill—college was not part of his family's plan. "My parents did not encourage me to go to college," he said. "They wanted me to go to work and bring money home."

But Cooper, who graduated high school in 1961, had plans of his own. He asked his father, who worked blue-collar jobs for the railroad and bagging groceries, to write a \$10 check for him for the application fee to Rutgers College of South Jersey, as Rutgers University–Camden was known. "How are you going to pay for that?" my mother asked me. I said, "I'll figure it out."

He enrolled at Rutgers–Camden—making him the first in his family to attend college—and he thrived on campus. "We had such great interaction with the faculty," he said.

Cooper, who earned a social sciences degree in 1965 and now lives in Arvada, Colorado, near Denver, is retired after a successful career in higher education. His first job in education, in fact, was as a student when he worked for \$1.10 an hour in the Rutgers–Camden library. Initially, he had studied with the goal of becoming a high school economics teacher, but changed his plans his senior year. Unsure of his plans, he met with Rutgers–Camden Dean of Students Ralph Taylor who guided him toward the M.B.A. program at the University of Indiana, a move that opened many doors for Cooper. He earned his M.B.A. in 1967 and went on to work at a small Indiana college, served in the Peace Corps in West Africa, and ultimately landed a job at the University of Vermont where he became an assistant to the dean of students in the 1970s. After earning a Ph.D. in higher education from Michigan State University in 1981, he

built a successful career as an education and management consultant for numerous organizations, which included administrative positions in the Michigan Community College system and a five-year stint in human resources for General Motors.

Cooper still has great fondness for the college that gave him his start. "What is significant about Rutgers–Camden, and what has held my heart for all these years, is the fact that faculty members and administrators knew us and helped us," Cooper said. "That ambience and the connections that we had were really wonderful."

Through annual gifts and setting aside a portion of his retirement portfolio each year for Rutgers–Camden, Cooper hopes to open up opportunities for students today. His gifts help support the Rutgers–Camden Chancellor's Emergency Fund, the Rutgers–Camden Student Academic Success Fund, and the Saul J. and Consuelo Diaz Scholarship, which provides financial assistance to students based on academic merit with preference given to underrepresented student minority groups. "I want other folks to have the experience and the support that I had in those days," Cooper said. "My commitment to learning comes from Rutgers–Camden."



A Nursing Dream Fulfilled

By Jeanne Leong

Hecmarie Berrios started dreaming of becoming a nurse when she was in preschool. “I love caring for and helping others,” Berrios said. That childhood dream became reality this fall when Berrios, who graduated from the Rutgers School of Nursing–Camden in May, started a full-time registered nurse position working in a cardiac unit at Cooper University Hospital. Being a nurse presents opportunities that Berrios relishes. “I get a chance to save lives,” she said. “We’re there for the patients every step of the way.”

The path to a nursing degree wasn’t easy for the native of Camden. A 2014 graduate of the Camden Academy Charter High School, the college prep school set her on the track to pursue her dream of becoming a nurse. After earning an associate’s degree at Camden County College, she continued her education at Rutgers–Camden.

Berrios, who received support from Rutgers–Camden’s Educational Opportunity Fund, which is dedicated to supporting low-income and first-generation students, worked two jobs while in school. In spite of the demands work put on her time, she excelled in her courses and participated



in numerous campus activities and performed community service work. As the president of the Rutgers School of Nursing–Camden chapter of the Student Nurses’ Association, Berrios led community service projects such as providing blood pressure screenings, assisting with games and other activities for patients at Children’s Hospital of Philadelphia, and serving meals, seating guests, and cleaning up after meals at Cathedral Kitchen.

Although she gave generously to the campus and surrounding communities, there was a time when she needed help herself. In her junior year, she required assistance when she was struggling in almost every aspect of her life. She was taking very challenging nursing courses—medical-surgical nursing, pediatrics, and pharmacology. The courses required her to spend many hours each day on the classwork, leaving her little time to hold a job to earn money for expenses. “This took a toll on me mentally,” Berrios said.

Berrios was treated for depression at the Student Wellness Center and became healthy again. “I went through challenges, but I wouldn’t really call them obstacles because I had a lot of support and I was able to resolve those challenges,” Berrios said. She said overcoming adversity has made her stronger and prepared her to handle any future personal or professional challenges.

Berrios graduated with numerous honors. She was recognized with a Rutgers–Camden Lasting Legacy Award,



Berrios, former president of the Rutgers School of Nursing–Camden chapter of the Student Nurses’ Association, is now a registered nurse at Cooper University Hospital.

given to graduating seniors for their service to the campus and surrounding community, and membership in three honor societies: The Eta Mu chapter of the Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing, the Zeta Pi chapter of the Chi Alpha Epsilon National Honor Society, and Delta Omega chapter of the women’s studies honor society Iota Iota Iota.

Her long-term goal is to work in health policy advocacy. “Not only do we have to fight for our patients in the hospital, we have to fight for them outside of the hospital,” Berrios said. “We have to advocate for better health care policies. Health care shouldn’t be treated as a privilege like it currently is today, but as a right.”

From Night School to Rutgers–Camden’s Finest



Meral K. Smith SBC’82, center, received the Rutgers Service Award in 2013 from the Rutgers School of Business–Camden.

By Sam Starnes

When Meral K. Smith graduated high school, she picked up a newspaper and searched in the want ads for a job. She found one as a bookkeeper in Camden only two blocks from Rutgers–Camden.

Despite the proximity to campus, she had no plans to take college classes until her future husband, Al Smith, then a student at Rutgers–Camden, suggested it to her. “He said, ‘Why don’t you take some classes?’ I said, no, I’ll never get in.”

She also worried about how to pay for it—she was making \$85 a week and had her own apartment—but eventually he persuaded her to try. She was accepted and found support from her boss who agreed to pay her tuition. “I started taking one class at night for the first year just to prove to myself I was college material,” Smith said. “I got the bug and started taking two classes at night, and then I added a third class on Saturday. It took me ten years to get my degree.”

Smith, a native of Barrington, New Jersey, who now lives in nearby

Haddonfield, graduated in 1982 with a degree in accounting. She said her education at Rutgers–Camden played a big role in helping her build a successful career as a treasurer and part-owner of two title companies. “The

professors were really focused on how to help us have practical experience and move forward,” said Smith, who earned CPA certification a year after earning her degree. “It was a really great experience.”

When Smith began taking business courses at Rutgers–Camden, she often was the only woman in the classroom. “It never bothered me and I was always comfortable with it,” she said. “I knew I was working in a field that was male-dominated and I could hold my own.” Smith, who has served as treasurer of the South Jersey Society of CPAs, noted that more women eventually joined her in classes and that the field has changed significantly since then.

Smith’s career took off when she became a co-owner of Surety Title Corporation, which she helped to launch in 1992. The business grew from five employees to more than 150. When she sold her interest in 2009, she thought she would enjoy early retirement but soon found she was “bored to death.” She

joined with a former business associate in the creation of Brennan Title Abstract, and continues to work as a co-owner.

She and her husband, Al, a 1972 business graduate whom she married in 1978, have long been supportive of the university and the Rutgers School of Business–Camden. Both were named to the first class of the Rutgers–Camden Finest, a recognition of exceptional alumni. “Al and I are grateful for the education we received at Rutgers–Camden and are proud that our daughter, Allison, followed in our footsteps,” she said. “The presence of Rutgers in Camden has allowed many more students a chance to attend a premier university.”



Meral K. Smith with Al Smith SBC’72, and daughter Allison CCAS’16, who earned a degree in psychology with minors in human resources and marketing.

From Juvenile Court to Award-Winning Attorney

By Jeanne Leong

Carmen Day was 17 years old when she found herself in juvenile court facing a possible year-and-a-half probation sentence on a criminal charge. She pleaded with Superior Court Judge Charles Dortch to reduce her sentence, vowing that she would make a better life for herself and that he might one day see her as a lawyer in his courtroom. He gave her a break, sentencing her to six months of probation. Day made good on that promise from 2006 when she graduated with honors from Rutgers Law School in Camden in January 2020. She is now an associate attorney at the Brown & Connery law firm in Westmont, New Jersey. “I believe I was destined to be a lawyer,” said Day, who lives in Erial, New Jersey.

After finishing high school, Day attended Camden County College, but dropped out twice before returning to school. While earning her associate’s degree and working full-time at a



Carmen Day CCAS’16, RLaw’20

mortgage company, Day started her own business, SheSoWavy Hair. She went on to complete a double major at Rutgers–Camden in 2016, graduating with honors and earning degrees in criminal justice and political science.

While attending law school, she juggled work, her courses, and responsibilities at home with her husband and two young daughters. “When I felt overwhelmed and discouraged, I kept reminding myself that my current struggles were only temporary and that I was going to be a lawyer, no matter what it took,” Day said.

As a participant in the Rutgers Law School’s Children’s Justice Clinic, Day was certified as a legal intern and had the opportunity to work as a juvenile defense attorney to represent children in criminal cases. “Having gone through the juvenile system myself, I was and continue to be extremely passionate about helping young people turn their lives around, just as I have,” Day said.

Day’s honors include the Rutgers Law School Richard L. Barbour Jr. Memorial Award, the Camden County Woman of Honor Award, a New Jersey Legislature citation, and a U.S. House of Representatives proclamation.

Day, who does motivational speaking at area schools, is a member of the Rutgers Alumni for Diversity, Inclusion, Community-Building, and Access in Law and Brown & Connery’s



Diversity and Inclusion committees. She also is on the board of the I Dare 2 Care Association and founder of the Take a Chance on Law, a mentoring program for prospective and current law students that partners with the Rutgers Law Minority Student Program.

In Day’s second year of law school, she had an opportunity to reconnect with Judge Dortch, who showed her mercy a dozen years before, when she was among a group of students observing proceedings in his courtroom. After the class spoke with Dortch, a 1984 graduate of Rutgers Law School in Camden, she met with him privately to tell him her story. “It was so important for me to show him that his compassion in the courtroom played such a huge role in restoring my own faith in the law, and helped inspire me to continue to fight for my dreams of becoming a lawyer,” she said.

ALUMNI NEWS

HEARTFELT GIFTS

Love for Rutgers–Camden motivates alumni association support

The executive board of the Rutgers University–Camden Alumni Association (RUCAA) voted to give \$5,000 to the Rutgers–Camden Chancellor’s Emergency Fund and committed to give \$5,000 a year over the next five years to endow a scholarship fund of \$25,000. This scholarship annually will benefit a Rutgers–Camden senior who earns goods grades and is involved as a campus leader. The gifts were approved in June and announced on Rutgers Giving Day. “It’s all because we love

Rutgers–Camden and we love our students,” said RUCAA President John Kendall CCAS’80. “We are passionate about giving back to Rutgers, and giving to the students to help them along.”

Kendall welcomes other alumni to donate to the RUCAA endowment by visiting give.rutgers.edu/rucaafund. “We hope to grow the fund and make it bigger and better so it will become a channel for future donations,” he said. “It’s win-win-win—a win for the alumni, the students,

and the university.”

Scott Owens CCAS’04, GSC’10, Rutgers–Camden’s acting vice chancellor for advancement, said the association’s gifts come at a critically important time. “These generous gifts announced during the pandemic send a clear message that our alumni care deeply for our students and are committed to supporting them,” he said. “We hope that these gifts from RUCAA will energize other alumni to give to areas of their choice at Rutgers–Camden.”



ABOUT THE ALUMNI ASSOCIATIONS

If you graduated from Rutgers University–Camden, you are automatically a member of both the universitywide Rutgers University Alumni Association (RUAA) and the Rutgers University–Camden Alumni Association (RUCAA).

Prior to the pandemic, RUCAA hosted numerous events such as Night at the Theater featuring the Rutgers–Camden spring production; a Shark Tank program, inspired by the television show; an annual lifetime achievement award dinner; and other special events. “We are a very active group,” President John Kendall said, adding that RUCAA plans to resume in-person events when it is safe.

You can find RUCAA on Facebook at facebook.com/CamdenAlumniAssociation.

For more information, email rutgerscamdenalumni@gmail.com or call 856-225-6028.

Under the umbrella of the RUAA, which consists of more than half a million alumni, there are numerous chartered groups that are organized and run by dedicated alumni volunteers. For a listing and information on all Rutgers–Camden chartered clubs, visit alumni.rutgers.edu/get-involved/clubs-and-groups.

.....
For more information, email alumni@camden.rutgers.edu or call 856-225-6028.



RUCAA officers with student Ka’Daysa Roberts CCAS’20, winner of the Shark Tank competition held in November 2019. From left, Ydian Velez CCAS’16, second vice president; Kenneth Fowlkes CCAS’79, treasurer; Roberts; and John Kendall CCAS’80, president.

NEW NURSING ALUMNI ASSOCIATION FOUNDED

A newly chartered alumni association aims to support nursing alumni and the School of Nursing at Rutgers–Camden. “We have a lot of pride in the school,” said Jean Grazel SNC’81, who is copresident of Rutgers School of Nursing–Camden Alumni Association with Linda Wray CCAS’74, SNC’76. “We are energized about giving back, supporting the school and other nurses, and connecting with the Rutgers–Camden community.”

All graduates of Rutgers–Camden who are registered nurses belong to the new group. Organizers for the new association

met twice before the pandemic began, and continued to get together monthly for virtual meetings to work on projects. One initiative included the creation of Rutgers-branded scrub caps and masks that were distributed to alumni working on the frontlines of treating COVID-19.

Wray and Grazel said the association’s goals are to help with fundraising for the School of Nursing, develop networking for nursing alumni, and also offer mentoring for recent graduates joining the nursing workforce. “Our alumni have talents and significant experience that they can share and

benefit our younger alumni,” Wray said.

School of Nursing Dean Donna Nickitas agreed. “Building a connection between our graduates and the new association means the formation of meaningful opportunities to learn from, network with, and have support that will last a lifetime,” she said.

.....
The association can be found online at nursing.camden.rutgers.edu/alumni.
For more information, email mike.morgan@rutgers.edu or call 856-225-6606.



HEALTH CARE



THE ARTS



BUSINESS



PUBLIC SERVICE



YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD

Today, Help Rutgers– Camden Make the World Better

Through research, nursing outreach, small business consulting, and civic engagement, Rutgers–Camden is supporting our communities during the pandemic. This isn't the first time the university has risen to the challenge and it won't be the last.

The time to make a difference is now.

Rutgers–Camden is a trailblazer in nursing, social equity advocacy, civic engagement, the sciences, and countless other areas that improve the human condition.

Today, you can help Rutgers–Camden continue to make discoveries, strengthen communities, and shape our society over the coming decades. You also can support students in need through the Rutgers–Camden Chancellor's Emergency Fund.

Together, let's better the world.
Today.

Visit support.rutgers.edu/covid19support

RUTGERS
UNIVERSITY FOUNDATION

Rutgers University Foundation raises funds to support Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey.

Rutgers University–Camden
303 Cooper Street
Camden, NJ 08102-1519

SCARLET PROMISE GRANTS



SOMETIMES A LITTLE HELP GOES A LONG WAY

For generations, Rutgers–Camden alumni have turned their dreams into achievements that make the world a better place. At a time when affordable access to higher education is more essential than ever, Scarlet Promise Grants give many students the leg up they need to distinguish themselves—a financial bridge to success. Scarlet Promise Grants help tomorrow’s leaders fulfill their potential.

**Make a gift in support of
Scarlet Promise Grants today.**

[SUPPORT.RUTGERS.EDU](https://support.rutgers.edu)