

Notes from Dean Jenny Schuessler

Happy Holidays from the School of Nursing! In spite of the current challenges in health care, faculty, staff, and students are determined to continue the academic excellence in a caring environment that earned the school the 2019-2023 Center of Excellence designation by the National League for Nursing. Students at all levels- BSN, RN to BSN, MSN, and EdD- are fully engaged in the frontlines during this pandemic, even as they continue to pursue their nursing degrees. Faculty, too, have made significant contributions to address the challenges of the pandemic through their practice in various clinical settings as well as in their teaching, service, and research.

We admitted the largest cohort ever in summer 2020 to the pre-licensure BSN program. Fall enrollment in the school is at a record high of 566. The record enrollment is due to an intentional, steady increase of admissions to the pre-licensure BSN program, which has seen a 37% increase in enrollment since 2014.

Our RN to BSN program is going strong and for the



7th consecutive year our MSN and EdD programs have been ranked nationally as outstanding online programs.

We welcome your feedback on our programs. [Click here to complete our Community of Advisors' Survey.](#)

2020 was designated the International Year of the Nurse by the World Health Organization, though it is likely no one was expecting 2020 to be the Year of the Nurse in the way it has turned out to be!! More than ever, it is clear why nursing is the most trusted health care profession! As we settle into the "new normal" of nursing education during COVID-19, we invite all of you- students, alumni, clinical partners, parents, donors, faculty, staff, and colleagues- to join us in our initiatives. Please consider a gift before the end of the year.

Contact Melissa Cox, Development Officer, for more information about giving to nursing (mcox@westga.edu; 678-839-6136). [Give by clicking here.](#)

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Enjoy this "Thank You" video, featuring our nursing students thanking nurses for their service during the pandemic.

BSN Fall 2019



BSN Class of Fall 2019

BSN Spring 2020



Nurse Alumna Travels to the COVID-19 Frontlines in New York City

by Sheryl Marlar

Emilee Barron enjoys jumping into new situations to challenge herself – a trait she said is necessary for healthcare as interventions of care evolve almost daily.

Barron, who completed her [RN to BSN degree](#) at the University of West Georgia's [Tanner Health System School of Nursing](#) in 2017, returned home to Woodland, Alabama, after working for more than three weeks in a New York City hospital.

"The news and social media were blasting the need for nurses in hotspots," Barron began. "I casually talked to my husband about it, but I don't think he thought I was serious at that point."

After speaking with a recruiter, Barron and two of her nursing friends were able to get the information that allowed them to travel to New York.



"I told myself, I cannot sit down when I have the knowledge and skills to go help those in need," Barron continued. "After receiving confirmation from the recruiter, I had 48 hours to arrive in NYC and begin working the next day."

Barron said that nursing school definitely prepared her to be a nurse, but nothing could have prepared her for working in the city during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, relying on past experiences helped her remain calm during the storm and rely on the skills and knowledge she earned at UWG.

"I can remember instructors constantly reminding me to think critically in all situations but especially during emergency situations," she said. "Working in NYC, I had to constantly keep a check on myself to stay in a critical thinking mindset. I wanted my emotions to enter, but I had to remain strong for the patients and for my team."

Bringing home memories that will stay with her for a lifetime, Barron also made friends she'll never forget.

"We were more than friends for those 24 days," Barron said. "We were family – 'battle buddies' for life. I couldn't have made it without them, and we picked each other up along the way."

Barron said the days were tough – mentally, physically and emotionally. There are many things she'll never be able to forget, but one thing she'll remember is certain.

"I went there to help, and I am proud of myself for stepping out of my comfort zone," she recalled. "I served my country and my community during this time in history."

Barron recalled that even on the dark days, a light would shine in the hallways as the hospital speakers would announce that another patient had come off a ventilator.

"Talk about chills," she concluded. "Those moments each day made everything we did feel so worth it. Nursing is such a rewarding career."



Andrew Peoples on COVID-19 Frontlines

Andrew Peoples, RN, BSN, CEN, works at both Piedmont Fayette Emergency Department and Atlanta Medical Center, PRN, Level 1 Trauma ED.

As a nurse in the emergency department, Andrew Peoples has been on the frontlines of the COVID-19 pandemic. When Andrew started his college career, he didn't know what he wanted to do after graduation. He knew he enjoyed caring for people, so he transferred to UWG to start the nursing program. A 2009 graduate of the Tanner Health System School of Nursing, Andrew has been working as a nurse for more than 10 years.

He describes being a nurse during this time as "overwhelming." He said, "The demand for scheduling is higher than it's ever been as the need for nurses has increased. Even more, it's mentally and physically hard to have to wear that much PPE every single day and ultimately not know if you'll still bring home this virus to your family."



What keeps him going is the support of other healthcare professionals, kind words, prayers, and donated meals from the community, and support from friends and family.

Andrew is appreciative of the training he received at UWG which he says has prepared him for this pandemic. "Holistic nursing care has been a major part in helping people heal and recover from this illness."

"Nursing at UWG gives students the tools and experience to do this," he said.

His advice to current nursing students is "Practice, practice, practice. Take some time after graduation and clear your brain and then practice taking NCLEX questions. You have had the best nursing experience through UWG - trust your education and be teachable!"



Angela Egwu at Epicenter of Pandemic

"It's not every day that your child tells you they're going to the epicenter of a pandemic to offer their help."

From Atlanta to New York in a matter of days, Angela Egwu ('16), found herself as a Crisis Response Nurse at New York-Presbyterian Hospital.

When Angela Egwu's job in Atlanta slowed down due to the COVID-19 pandemic, she decided to go where her skills as a nurse were most needed – to New York City. "Coming to New York made sense. There was a need and I was available so I took the job."



Angela's assignment was in the ICU at New York-Presbyterian Hospital where the patient to nurse ratio is three to six times larger than normal circumstances.

When she arrived in New York, Angela said she felt extremely welcome. The full-time nurses graciously welcomed the travel nurses into the hospitals and the community was such a "blessing. Not a day went by that I wasn't offered a hot meal, a place to do my laundry, or a much needed prayer."

She described the work during this pandemic as horrible and sad.

She said. "It's just hard but it doesn't matter because time doesn't stop, and these healthcare workers realize that there is a job to be done, so we wipe our tears, we debrief and we move on to the next case."

As difficult as the work was, Angela said ultimately she is grateful for the opportunity to serve a community that has suffered so much during this time.

"It's easy to watch the news and lose faith in humanity, but coming to New York, one of the hardest hit areas in the world, has done the exact opposite for me," Angela reflects.



Lisa Robinson Teaches COVID-19 Preparation



Lisa Bridwell Robinson, DNP, CNE, CNL, NP-C ('00), Associate Professor, UWG THS School of Nursing, knows firsthand how important preparation and education are in the healthcare industry.

Lisa teaches pathophysiology to graduate students who are registered nurses and many of whom work in acute care settings with COVID-19 patients. When the effects of the pandemic were starting to hit close to home, Lisa recognized the added stress her students were facing at work and at home. To alleviate some of the stress, she decided to modify an assignment and give her students the option to reflect on their experience with the pandemic.

"The results were extraordinary," she said. "Many of the students reached out to me after completing the

assignment to say thank you for allowing them a safe place to discuss the things they are experiencing.

One student shared with me that she had no idea how much this was affecting her emotionally until she began the assignment. That assignment brought to light many of the things our healthcare professionals are facing - fears of bringing the virus home to their family and sadness as people avoid them in public if they are dressed in scrubs.

Lisa and her colleagues in the School of Nursing are committed to supporting their students and helping them succeed during these trying times. "I believe our students need now more than ever before to complete their degrees and utilize their education to support the healthcare system," Lisa reflected.

Lisa Robinson has strong ties to Carrollton and UWG, and she is thrilled to now be on the faculty in the Tanner Health System School of Nursing. Lisa grew up in Carroll County and

went to nursing school at West Georgia. After graduating in 2000, she worked locally as an ICU nurse before deciding to go back to school to become a nurse practitioner.

In 2012, she graduated from the Georgia Baptist College of Nursing at Mercer University with her doctoral degree in nursing which gave her the opportunity to teach at UWG.

As a nurse practitioner, she continues to practice medicine for six hours each week. Her favorite thing about UWG is the people.

She said, "[The] faculty, staff, and students are all here to grow and learn and support each other. The atmosphere of learning is evident across the campus."



susie Jonassen Promotes Caring During COVID-19



Susie Jonassen, MSN, RN, CPN, is a Clinical Assistant Professor at UWG and BSN Pre-Licensure Program Director in the Tanner Health System School of Nursing.

When asked why she became a nurse she responded, "Most people do not know this, but I was a miracle baby. I was not expected to live past birth after a very traumatic birthing experience but did. I was born paralyzed completely on my right side."

Her parents refused to give up hope and through modern medicine, physical therapy, and divine intervention, she regained almost full sensation and mobility through the years. This story inspired her through her adolescent years to serve others and volunteer with healthcare organizations. In college, Susie found herself torn between

becoming a secondary educator and a nurse. As she was completing her core classes, her younger brother collapsed and experienced a medical emergency. He was taken to Scottish Rite, and Susie remembers how caring the nursing staff was, how gentle the physicians were, and how everyone worked together for her brother and her family. "I knew at that moment I could be both: an educator and a nurse. My passion for pediatric nursing and trauma care began there, and as I progressed through my clinical career, I took hold of opportunities to teach and educate others which ultimately led me where I am today."

As for many others, this pandemic has been a learning process for Susie. "I have learned how important it is to still have a face with your students and to show them how much we care about them and their success. The UWG THSSON is centered around a caring philosophy, and during these unprecedented times, it is even more important to promote that caring philosophy."

Susie recorded daily videos and uploaded them in her courses each day with

messages of hope, encouragement, and fun games. She also created a discussion board just for her students to share pictures and messages of encouragement to one another. "There have been times where we can feel overwhelmed, overworked, or overstretched, but we have to practice self-care in order to care for our students and each other. We cannot care for others if we do not care for ourselves."



Kelly Dyar: Teaching Students Responding to COVID-19

Kelly Dyer is an Assistant Professor in the Tanner Health System School of Nursing at UWG. She has worked at the university for five years and has been a practicing nurse for almost 30 years. "I don't feel that I chose nursing as much as I feel that nursing chose me," she said, adding that she was always fascinated by medical stories and so nursing felt like a natural fit - a calling.

She said her favorite part of her job as a nurse is being invited into the lives of people when they are at their most vulnerable and seeing the anxiety and fear resolve when they begin to feel better.

Kelly said she has been so impressed with her former students during this time.

"I've connected with many of them through social media, and I am so proud and encouraged by how I am watching them step up and be leaders during this time."

In addition to being encouraged by the alumni of the SON, she has also been very proud of how her students have responded in this healthcare crisis. Many of her graduate students who were completing their practicum

project had to suddenly shift focus within their practicum setting.

"All of them demonstrated flexibility and initiative to become leaders to help meet the needs of their practicum site."

Another group of current students decided to join together and create masks for nurses and workers at a hospice agency. "Seeing my current and former students flourish, grow, and thrive during this pandemic has put many smiles on my face."

She is convinced now, more than ever, that nurses are leaders in many ways and is so grateful to work in the School



of Nursing among such wonderful colleagues who care so much about their students and are embracing change to continue to be excellent leaders in educating nurses.

Using QSEN and NLN Advancing Care Excellence Unfolding Cases to Teach Evidence-based Practice

Holly Dever, MSN, RN & Kelly Dyar, Ed.D, RN, CNN, CNE

University of West Georgia

Introduction

Teaching nursing research and evidence-based practice (EBP) to novice nursing students is challenging. Within a pre-licensure BSN program, previous iterations of the course focused mostly on research techniques rather than EBP. Student and faculty feedback revealed students were not fully prepared to engage in EBP. Further, in a content-laden curriculum, students lacked exposure to vulnerable populations such as the elderly, those with disabilities, caregivers, veterans, victims of trafficking, and LGBTQ+ patients.

Redesign of the course aimed to improve engagement, learning, and application of EBP through incorporation of QSEN competencies and NLN Advancing Care Excellence (ACE) unfolding case studies. Incorporation of QSEN competencies can improve the quality and safety of healthcare (QSEN, 2020). The NLN-ACE series offers resources including unfolding case studies, to improve the quality of vulnerable populations (NLN, 2020). The NLN-ACE series did not clearly include content for LGBTQ+ populations, victims of trafficking, or nursing practice problems. To incorporate these, course faculty wrote case studies to include a victim of trafficking, a pediatric transgender individual, nursing burnout and attrition, and lateral violence.

The course structure offered individual and group learning activities to prepare for an evidence-based project proposal and future nursing practice.

Objectives

- Describe the need for an innovative teaching approach for learning evidence-based practice in an undergraduate research course.
- Explore the application of QSEN evidence-based practice competencies and NLN Advancing Care Excellence unfolding case studies as a systematic approach to teaching evidence-based practice.
- Discuss how NLN Advancing Care Excellence unfolding cases can be incorporated to increase exposure of students to vulnerable populations.

Teaching Methods

- Incorporating QSEN Competency for Evidence-Based Practice
 - In-class review and discussions.
 - Reflections focused on practice related to the QSEN EBP Competency to identify areas of strength and weakness.
- Incorporating NLN Advancing Care Excellence (ACE) scenarios and case studies
 - Individual and Group Approach
 - Explore practice issues or vulnerable populations by selecting an NLN-ACE scenario or faculty-written case study.
- Scaffolding Assignments- Focused on the selected scenario
 - Individual and Group PICO question
 - Literature search and completion of two Matrix assignments
 - Critical analysis of one research article
 - Individual scholarly EBP paper
 - Group EBP Presentation

Lessons Learned

- We designed and developed the entire course before the semester began, which was providential as all activities and assignments were available to learners when the course opened.
- Making all course activities and resources available and 501(c) accessible when the course opened added in transparency of expectations and was helpful during the pandemic.
- The initial QSEN reflection assignment felt too early in the course and students felt they did not understand the QSEN EBP Competency well enough to adequately engage in reflection.
- Students need enough time to engage with the content and the competency before engaging in reflection.
- Learners struggled with searching for and finding appropriate research articles. Providing guidance and resources was time intensive given the number of students (n=35). Nursing research articles were difficult to find.
- Working with the university's research librarian to provide guidance and support would be helpful.
- Students completed two different literature matrix assignments which resulted in six different research articles. This was time intensive for the faculty.
- Condensing to a single matrix would allow students more time to find sources and be helpful to faculty.
- Students engaged with the NLN-ACE unfolding case and enjoyed selecting a topic and area of interest to guide their EBP project.
- Students connected with the central person within the case study and shared they felt as if they were making a meaningful difference in nursing practice.
- Students engaged with the content and learning in a meaningful manner and produced high-quality, cohesive EBP presentations.
- Some peer groups experienced challenges with group processes but demonstrated an ability to function well with guidance.
- Included in the course schedule was an EBP panel of experts. The students were highly prepared for this and engaged well with the experts.

Conclusions

Students explored nursing research and EBP through case studies that personalized individuals and scenarios revolving around vulnerable populations and nursing practice issues. This approach led to marked increases in engagement and improved learning. Through this approach, students explored QSEN Competencies and increased their knowledge, skills, and attitudes related to EBP. Additionally, their knowledge of vulnerable populations increased. Interacting with vulnerable populations through realistic case studies opened up the student's world view. Building the course and frontloading learning allowed for a seamless transition to online learning during the pandemic. These creative and innovative strategies for teaching research and EBP resulted in a course that was enjoyable for both students and faculty.

References

National League for Nursing. (2020). Advancing care excellence series. Retrieved from <http://www.nln.org/professional-development-programs/advancing-care-excellence-series>

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- Many of our ideas for guiding students to explore and engage with research articles were prompted by Elizabeth Van Non and Yolanda M. VanHoff and their 2018 NLN Summit Presentation on scaffolding and leveling assignments to promote higher-level student learning. We are grateful for their wisdom and knowledge.

The NLN Education Summit presentation by Kelly Dyar and Holly Dever

Caring in the Face of a Pandemic: Nursing Faculty Recognized by DAISY Foundation

by Sheryl Marlar

For years, nurses have been the unsung heroes in hospitals. But COVID-19 has opened the eyes of the public to see what nursing truly is.

These are the words of Lourdes Cody, MSN, RN, CNE, assistant professor, **UWG THIS School of Nursing**, and one of this year's recipients of the DAISY Award.



Lourdes Cody

The award is presented by the **DAISY Foundation** to recognize nurses who are not only dedicated to their students but who also exemplify compassionate care .

With the pandemic, hospitals cannot allow visitors for their patients, creating an additional bedside role that nurses must step into many times.

"Hospitalized patients are often frightened and unsure," Volkert said. "This fear and uncertainty has increased exponentially during the pandemic."

Typically, a patient's family will fill the role of comfort-giver and advocate for their family member. But since hospitals can't allow visitors, these additional roles fall on the nurses.

"This is yet another reason why showing true humanity and caring for our patients is crucial," Volkert added. "As the DAISY Award is an explicit recognition of showing

caring," Volkert added. "As the DAISY Award is an explicit recognition of showing caring, I am deeply touched I was selected."

Cody once reached out to a student who was having a hard time controlling emotions during their clinical time together. She assisted the student in gaining composure and confidence, therefore allowing the student to complete the assignment and provide compassionate care to the patient.

"Sooner or later, all nurses will deal with death and dying," Cody explained. "We all push through our personal feelings to get the job done – and none of us receive an award for this part of our job."

When reading her nomination, Cody was moved by seeing what she did from the student's perspective.

"What I saw as part of my job, she saw as a gift. Nurses provide comfort, love and medical care regardless of how they are feeling."



Delene Volkert

Delene Volkert, PhD, RN, CNE, assistant professor in THSSON, and Lourdes Cody were awarded the prestigious DAISY Award recently. Each was nominated by students who wanted to recognize the exemplary caring and compassion Cody and Volkert have shown.

Patient Nominates Kirby Perkins for Daisy Award

Kirby Perkins' destiny to become a nurse was set in stone when her father became very ill her junior year of high school. He had a great team of nurses who cared for him, and Kirby was inspired by them and the compassion they showed her father and their family. "I knew I needed to be *that* nurse for families and patients through their lowest of lows and highest of highs," Kirby said.

After graduating from UWG, Kirby landed her dream job at Parkridge East Hospital in Chattanooga as a Registered Nurse in the Mother-Baby Unit.

It turns out in the three years she has been in the healthcare field she has in fact become *that* nurse for her patients.

In February 2020, Kirby was announced as the winner of Parkridge East Hospital's DAISY Foundation Award based on a nomination submitted by one of her patients.

The patient who nominated her for the award said this about Kirby: "Kirby had been my nurse when the doctor informed me that



my baby needed phototherapy due to slight jaundice."

"I really needed someone to talk to because I felt so overwhelmed by everything that had happened just in the first two days of my child's life.

"[Kirby] was very caring and compassionate. She felt more like a friend than my

nurse and that was really what I needed at the time."

"It means so much to me that she took the time and showed the compassion that I needed in this situation.

"I know that nurses get very busy and have many tasks to perform in their daily routines, but she never made me feel like I was being a burden or disrupting anything else she needed to do.

"Just from the time she took to help me with my issue, I could tell that she was just naturally a caring person.

"I can only hope that in future visits I am lucky enough to have other professionals involved in my care plan who exhibit the same character and dedication as [Kirby] did for me."

Leading by Example: UWG Nursing Alumnus Receives 2021 Young Professional Voices Award

by Amadeu Guimaraes

University of West Georgia nursing alumnus Will Carson '20 recently gained national recognition when he received the 2021 Young Professional Voices award from the American Organization for Nursing Leadership (AONL).

This program recognizes nurse leaders who exhibit significant potential as healthcare professionals; demonstrate exemplary leadership; and embody innovation, influence and inclusion.

Carson, who received his master's degree in nursing leadership earlier this year, said he felt incredibly surprised and honored by the achievement.

"It was a complete shock," he shared. "I am 29 years old and have only been a nurse for seven years and in leadership for three years. To be recognized on a national scale was huge to me."

Carson believes that attending UWG changed his life for the better as it presented a unique networking experience with professionals from various different areas of healthcare as well as a great academic curriculum given by extremely



qualified professors. He said that the small class size was an important factor for the development of these relationships and understanding of the material broadening his perspective on the profession.

Besides the honor to receive the award and be recognized on a national level, selected award winners receive one year of AONL membership and get the opportunity to provide feedback on how the organization can continue to engage future young professionals.

Carson was nominated for the award by UWG Tanner Health System School of Nursing Professor Dr. Laura Caramanica, who was his instructor for many of his classes during the pursuit of his degree.

Carson described Caramanica as a "rockstar." "She was always available, answering my questions at any

time of day," he recalled. "She was an excellent resource through the program because she took the time to make sure I understood the concepts and knew how to apply them to the work I was doing. She was my biggest cheerleader, and I credit a lot of my success in the program from her teaching and her mentorship."

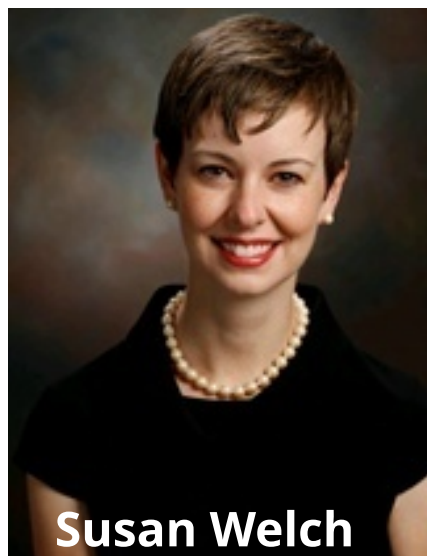
Currently, Carson works in his hometown of LaGrange at Wellstar West Georgia Medical Center, where he's worked for the past seven years. In 2017, he started as an emergency room staff nurse; in 2017 he earned a promotion to assistant nurse manager. Through the combination of hands-on experience, leadership training at the hospital, and excellent academic preparation at UWG, he honed his leadership skills.

The unpredictable nature of the job keeps him engaged and captivated by the profession.

"It changes day to day and hour to hour," he said. "There is no telling what is going to come through the doors at any given minute. I think that is why I love it so much. It keeps me thinking on my toes and it keeps me interested."

Faculty Selected for Special Professional Development Opportunities

Four School of Nursing faculty were selected for prestigious professional development and service activities this year.



Susan Welch, EdD, RN, Alum CCRN, CEN, Associate Professor and Associate Dean of Graduate Programs, is currently serving a three-year term as a member of the National League for Nursing's Commission for Nursing Education Accreditation (CNEA) Board of Commissioners.

Within this role, Dr. Welch provides leadership regarding accreditation of Nursing Programs nationally.

Further, Dr. Welch was recently elected to Vice Chair of the Board

of Commissioners responsible for supporting the Chair and representing the organization on national committees.

Lisa Robinson, DNP, RN, NP-C, CNE, CNL, Associate Professor and MSN Program Director, was selected as a National League for Nursing LEAD Fellow. This program is designed for nurses in education and practice who have recently been challenged with rapid transition into leadership positions, those in leadership positions who desire a formal leadership program and those emerging and aspiring to lead.

During this year-long program a cohort of peers examines organizational systems and leadership processes, strategic planning, building high performing teams, budgeting and developing personal career plans to advance organizational leadership.



Denise Morris, MSNEd, PhDc, RN, Clinical Assistant Professor and Clinical Practice 3 Coordinator, was named a USG Chancellor Learning Scholar. The Chancellor's Learning Scholars, appointed for a period of

two academic years, facilitate faculty learning communities on their campuses. Professor Morris leads in a high impact practice with an inclusive pedagogy learning community, charged with exploring ways to contribute to an inclusive learning environment and strategies to enhance teaching and learning.

Connie Barbour, EdD, RN, CNE, Associate Dean of Undergraduate Programs and Assistant Professor, was selected for the pilot cohort of the Experienced Academic Leadership Academy of Sigma, the International Nursing Honor Society. This academy is focused on enhancing the leadership skills and career trajectory of those with six or more years of academic appointment. Through the Academy, participants develop new leadership skills that facilitate the achievement of strategic institutional goals.



New Faces at SON

The School of Nursing added two new faculty this year. Katie Morales, PhD, RN, CNE, and Kim Massey, PhD, APRN, FNP. Both have significant experience as nurse educators. Dr. Morales has a strong background in adult-health nursing and evidence-based practice. Dr. Massey's teaching focus includes pathopharmacology and leadership. The scholarly interests of Drs. Massey and Morales are complimentary to the research priorities of the school. Dr. Morales has publications on various topics such as evidence-based practice and active learning strategies. Dr. Massey's scholarship interests include undergraduate students and peer mentorship and combat veterans' relationships with their children.

Likewise, we are pleased to welcome two new administrative support employees, Shannon Gordy and Heather Poole. Shannon Gordy, BSN, RN, is our clinical placement specialist, responsible for leading in the placement of all of our BSN students.

Heather Poole, BS, is our first floor front office departmental assistant. Shannon and Heather both started at the beginning of the required sheltering in place during the pandemic, so their introduction to the SON has been different, to say the least. None-the-less, they have proven to be an essential part of our team!



**Shannon
Gordy**



Katie Morales



**Heather
Poole**



Kim Massey

Pandemic 2020 Means Virtual Classes and Meetings

