

Villanova University

President's Report
2020-2021

**The
Change-
Makers**



Dear Friends,

Villanova attracts and forges world changers.

No matter the year. No matter the circumstances. Villanovans ignite change. Even when things are tough—especially when things are tough.

In my President's Report for 2020–2021, I have chosen to celebrate Villanova students who have taken action during this year when we were told to stay put. These students are creators, connectors and innovators. They have delivered what our community and our world needs—visionary ideas, unwavering commitment, points of connection, moments of levity and joy.

In a year like no other, these students made their mark, leading with vision and purpose.

Ultimately, these stories represent the stories of so many Villanovans who, during this uncertain year, have taken action and have gotten involved.

Again and again, Villanovans adapt, create and innovate. Villanovans ignite change.

Here's to the change-makers.

Sincerely,

The Rev. Peter M. Donohue, OSA, PhD, '75
President



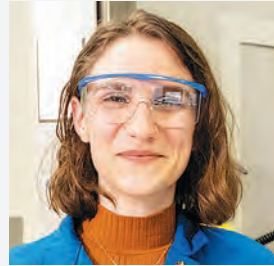
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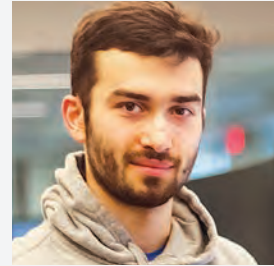
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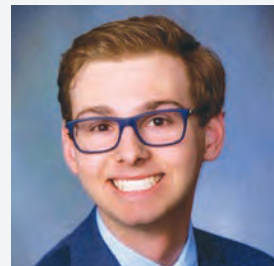
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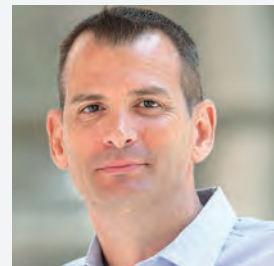
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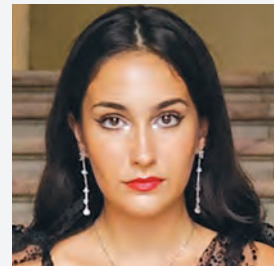
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“I always thought coming up with that million-dollar idea was the hard part, but it was easy compared to the execution.”

— Phong Nguyen Dang '21

THE AVIATION ENTREPRENEUR



While balancing a full course load, this Business student co-founded a blockchain tech startup that could revolutionize the aviation industry

A recent Villanova School of Business graduate recounts letting his entrepreneurial spirit soar as the co-founder and chief product officer of Aerotrax, a company he helped launch while earning his degree as a full-time student and that was just named by *Analytics Insight* magazine as one of its “Top 10 Most Revolutionary Blockchain Cloud Storage Companies in 2021.”

THE LAUNCHPAD

Collaborating with David Bettenhausen '20 on a winning idea for a global university pitch competition sponsored by the blockchain giant R3, **PHONG NGUYEN DANG '21** found inspiration in his high school job working for a Florida aircraft maintenance, repair and overhaul company. It was there he observed that the industry was reliant on outdated, manual operations, and he now saw an opportunity to improve efficiency using blockchain technology.

WINNING ISN'T EVERYTHING

The two undergrads devised a platform to digitally track every part and component throughout the life cycle of an aircraft (think Carfax but for airplanes). Chosen from more than 90 global submissions, their team—Aerotrax—finished in the top four of R3's 2019 pitch competition, but walked away with something much more important than first place: a viable idea. The overwhelmingly positive reaction from professors and connections within the industry fueled their drive to get their startup idea off the ground.

DOING THE HOMEWORK

After participating in an entrepreneur-in-residence program at R3, Phong returned to Villanova with a full course load and a new business to develop. “I always thought coming up with that million-dollar idea was the hard part, but it was easy compared to the execution,” says Phong.

FAST FORWARD

Since graduating in spring 2021, Phong has devoted himself full time as chief product officer for Aerotrax, which has grown to include a head of product design and 10 software engineers. They're now working toward their fundraising goals while simultaneously preparing to pilot test their product in both North America and the Asia Pacific region. The pressure is on, but Phong remains confident. “The classes I've taken and the conversations with advisers and experiences I've had while at Villanova helped me to understand that the most important thing is market fit,” he says. “Knowing I helped build something that provides a real solution for a real problem that delivers real value to customers keeps me going.”

Photo: peterschreiber.media - stock.adobe.com

THE COLLABORATOR

A Nursing student collaborates with an interdisciplinary team of engineers to design a home treatment for infant health

“Our students showed tremendous persistence and ingenuity in continuing to advance their research projects during a global pandemic—it is a remarkable accomplishment.”

— Sunny Hallowell, PhD, PPCNP-BC, IBCLC, assistant professor, M. Louise Fitzpatrick College of Nursing

As a student in Villanova’s M. Louise Fitzpatrick College of Nursing, **ANNA STAIGER '23** was interested not only in researching health issues, but also having a hands-on role in developing a solution. She found the perfect fit in the College of Engineering’s INNOVATE: L3Harris Summer Program, which supports undergraduate teams in developing innovative solutions to unmet societal or technical challenges. And soon the perfect project emerged.

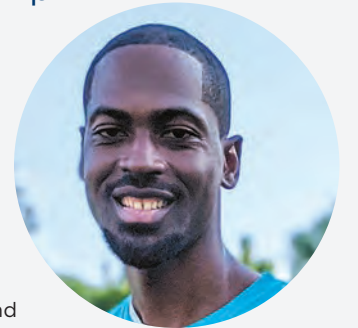
Dr. Hallowell and Pritpal Singh, PhD, professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering, guided Anna and Engineering students Cesar Nunez Rodriguez '22 (pictured with Anna at right), Colin Dougherty '22 and Kathryn Stringer '22 as they teamed up to develop technology to treat and monitor infant health.

Photo: Kathryn Stringer



THE AWARD-WINNING EDUCATOR

This high school educator wins a selective national scholarship for his passion, academic excellence and leadership in applied statistics



Arguably one of the most challenging years that educators have ever faced, 2020 did not stop **MERVIN WOODLIN JR. '18 MA, '22 MS.**

In addition to teaching a full roster of math and statistics classes at Philadelphia’s Abraham Lincoln High School and working with his wife to homeschool their own three children, Mervin worked toward his second master’s degree from Villanova’s College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. He also conducted two statistical projects at Abraham Lincoln, aimed at better understanding the effects of uniformed police officers in schools and the relationship between sleep quality and high school student performance.

Recognizing his passion, academic excellence and leadership, the American Society for Quality awarded Mervin the 2020 Ellis R. Ott Scholarship, which is given to only one master’s and one PhD student in the country each year to support their academic journey in applied statistics.

“Each year, as my students begin to investigate more topics that are related to their everyday lives and the world, I know that I must continue to evolve,” says Mervin, who will be adding an MS in Applied Statistics to his MA in Mathematics in May 2022.

In the midst of his 12th year of teaching, Mervin has had no shortage of real-world examples to analyze with students in his statistics class this past year. They used data to look at everything from sports predictions and top songs on the Billboard charts to police bias, education gaps, health disparities due to COVID-19, and vaccination trial results.

“I try to expose them to all different avenues where statistics can apply and have them look at the data for themselves,” Mervin says.



Photo: Villanova University/Paul Crane

THE SUSTAINABLE ENGINEER

An engineer at Boeing is applying her research to accelerate a shift toward a more sustainable commercial aerospace industry

It's the opportunity of a lifetime: After devoting years of research at Villanova's College of Engineering to investigating sustainable alternatives for aerospace materials, **ALICIA PISCITELLI '18 MS, '21 PHD** is now on the composites team at Boeing's state-of-the-art Seattle laboratory. Her work is already shaking up the conventional wisdom in her field.

"Naysayers think it's impossible to recycle composites, but I think there's something they're missing," says Alicia, who completed her doctoral degree in Sustainable Engineering in May 2021 and is continuing this work at the aerospace giant, where her research has the potential to become a reality that could transform the industry. "The life of an airplane is about 30 years and the progression of using composites in them is relatively recent."

Composed of a polymer matrix and reinforcing fibers, composite materials (fiberglass is one example) are used to build the main components of just about every commercial airliner. The problem: While composites are lighter and stronger than metal by design, many of them are not sustainable or recyclable.

Alicia is working to change that. "We're trying to create a sustainable supply chain for aerospace-grade polymers," she explains. "We're trying to source them from renewable materials so we don't deplete natural resources that are limited on our Earth, like fossil fuels. There is still an opportunity to find a sustainable solution."

THE WELLNESS CEO



This Leadership major decides there's no more putting off her dream to start a wellness and self-care business

RONELL SMITH '21 knew starting and operating a small business would be a challenge at any time, let alone during a pandemic. But she also had an idea that seemed suited to this very moment. "One of the main objectives of my passion project is to be able to help people handle themselves when things get tough," says Ronell. "My company is all about providing comfort for your soul."

With a focus on encouraging customers to engage in self-care, R&R Leisure and Wellness (the R&R refers to "rest" and "refine") offers those who shop on the store's website and at monthly pop-ups in Ronell's hometown of Lansdowne, Pa., comfy leisurewear, candles, pillows with inspirational sayings, and wellness services like life coaching and marriage therapy.

Since launching R&R in December 2020, Ronell has taken the leadership skills she's learned while pursuing her bachelor's degree in Leadership at Villanova's College of Professional Studies and applied them to her small business dream. She emphasizes three important lessons from her entrepreneurial journey:

TAKE IT SLOW

Ronell speaks of starting her business with a "spirit of excellence." For her, that means: a) taking the time to ask other entrepreneurs lots of questions; b) setting the right pace for R&R Leisure and Wellness to gain a loyal following; and c) providing products thoughtfully curated to create an ambiance of calm, peace and rest.

PROVIDE VALUE IN PEOPLE'S LIVES

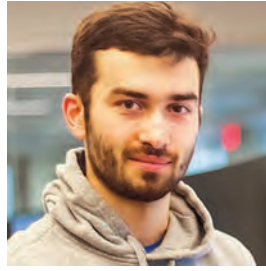
When working to build connections with people who visit her business, Ronell says she has utilized lessons from a Leadership Communication course she took at Villanova. "I'm focusing on serving my community," she says. "When people aren't sure how to manage the rough waters of life, I want to provide them with something that speaks to their emotional and mental wellness, whether that's an inspirational coffee cup or access to a counselor."

PRACTICE WHAT YOU PREACH

"R&R is a space where people are allowed to exhale," says Ronell, who makes sure to carve out time for herself between managing full-time work, classes at Villanova (she graduates in December 2021), church, family and now a startup business. "The pandemic has taught me how to prioritize my life and really place my energies into making sure that regardless of what happens, I remain well."



THE SPORTS ANALYST



A Business student scores attention for his innovative approach to sports analytics

ETHAN CARPENTER '22 has had a lifelong passion for sports analytics that, until recently, was a career dream and a hobby, albeit a time-consuming one. Then, earlier this year, his innovative approach caught the attention of sports media and industry players—and countless hours of writing computer code and running data sets began to pay off.

Ethan's novel and impressive approach to data analysis has become sought-after. Sports writer Seth Partnow referenced Ethan's analysis of how NBA lineups have changed in a March 2021 story for *The Athletic*, and soon after, a basketball consulting company hired the Villanova School of Business student part time.

Ethan's approach involves looking at a player's average points, assists and possessions, then using statistical modeling to predict how playing with different lineups would impact their performance on the court. "All of my analysis is based on lineups, which is a way to analyze individual players in terms of who their teammates are," he says. "I like breaking down lineups to see the diversity of roles that a player can take on."



THE INFLUENCER

Major League Baseball players have their eye on this undergrad's efforts to highlight America's favorite pastime on Instagram

A lifelong baseball fan, **ALEX TANTUM '22** wanted to find a way to increase the sport's appeal for a younger and more diverse fanbase. Launching the Instagram account @mlb.fits in fall 2019, he set out to make America's favorite pastime cool again by highlighting the culture, fashion and personality of Major League Baseball players on and off the field. In just two years, he has amassed more than 30,000 followers, including Major League legends CC Sabathia and Adam Jones.

The success of his account demonstrates his talent for marketing and willingness to constantly learn and put in the time. Alex highlights the three tenets that have attracted new baseball fans and pro players alike:



ENGAGE YOUR FOLLOWING

Alex's strategy for success started simply enough: "I would direct-message MLB players trying to persuade them to follow my account," he says. Growing by word of mouth, players eventually started telling other players and posting Alex's content to their own Instagram feeds. Now, he regularly collaborates with players on giveaways like customized cleats and signed baseballs.

CREATE QUALITY CONTENT

In addition to carrying a full course load in Villanova's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, Alex spends about two hours working on the account each day. Part of that time involves creating the right content to maximize user engagement: daily polls; photos of celebrities throwing out ceremonial first pitches; and posts featuring the game's most fashionable players, like Bryce Harper, Marcus Stroman and Fernando Tatis Jr. "Those drive the most likes, comments, shares," says Alex.

BE AUTHENTIC

Alex contends that baseball players showing emotion is good for the sport. "Those who play with their hearts on their sleeves attract more attention to the game," he says. "Players being their authentic selves resonates with people more."

THE HISTORY KEEPER

"This was an opportunity to give voice to people who have no voice in society."

— **Micaela Miralles Bianconi '21 MA**



A Graduate History student contributes to a more complete picture of essential workers' pandemic experiences for future researchers

Native Argentinian **MICAELA MIRALLES BIANCONI '21 MA** put her bilingual skills to exceptional use as a project assistant for an oral history project called "Rural Voices/Voces del Campo." Students at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire gathered the oral histories of Spanish-speaking migrant workers in an effort to understand what life is like for these rural essential workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. The project was launched with a COVID-19 grant from Villanova's Albert Lepage Center for History in the Public Interest, and later brought Micaela on through the center's Summer Internship program.

In the process of remotely transcribing, translating and organizing their words starting in June 2021, Micaela discovered that fear is a dominant thread in the tapestry of many immigrant experiences. "For many migrant workers, fear is everywhere. They are extremely aware of the dangers of this pandemic and the risks it holds. Because some are undocumented, they are afraid to ask for help," she says. "As an immigrant myself, I have a great deal of privilege that I have taken for granted. These immigrants showed me another side of the immigrant experience."

“When things shut down,
we had to rethink our next move.”

-Arun

“So I just put it out there:
What if we launched
our own podcast?”

-Joe

THE PODCAST CREATORS

Two Villanova Law students took charge of their own professional prospects, launching a podcast to discuss the intersection of sports, business and the law

Flying high from a near victory at the third annual Tulane Professional Basketball Negotiation Competition in February 2020, **ARUN THOTTAKARA '21 JD** and **JOE MANGANIELLO '21 JD** returned to the Charles Widger School of Law with plans for the summer of their lives. While in New Orleans, they secured internships, networked with judges and executives in the NBA, and forged promising professional connections. A month later, the NBA—and the country—shut down.

In an industry as competitive as sports law, their professors at Villanova Law had repeatedly emphasized the importance of setting yourself apart. Joe recalls a conversation with Arun at the time: “We’re asking each other as friends and colleagues, ‘How can we really put ourselves out there if we literally can’t leave our rooms?’”

And thus, *Suits and Sidelines* was born—a podcast they created to discuss the intersection of sports, business, policy

and the law. By August, they had launched their first episode on the Apple Store. Over the course of seven months and 27 episodes, they honed their skills as negotiators, lawyers and commentators, as well as their rapport as a dynamic duo.

In 2021, they took home first place in the Tulane competition and secured positions in the industry shortly after graduation: Joe as an account executive with the New York Liberty of the WNBA, and Arun as a name, image and likeness legal coordinator with Excel Sports Management. They both credit the podcast as a stepping stone that helped to get them there. “In the sports industry, you’re often told, ‘Find a way to separate yourself,’” Arun says. “And for us, this podcast was a separating point.”

While Joe and Arun have moved on from the podcast to working in sports, their episodes still remain relevant, covering some of the most pressing topics in sports and society today, with commentary from leading law experts and some former professional athletes.

Art: Veronica Cordi

THE HEALTH ADVOCATE

This clinical nurse educator immersed herself in research that could aid countless African American women suffering with high blood pressure

As a clinical nurse educator on the cardiac surgical unit at Abington Jefferson Health, **TIERRA SMITH '21 MSN, CCRN-CSC**, spent three years teaching nurses how to care for patients with cardiac disease and an array of other cardiac issues. “However, I’m learning that to *really* effect change, we must start with prevention,” says Tierra, who is now a nurse professional development specialist at the hospital.

And so she spent the final year of her master’s program in Nursing Education at Villanova’s M. Louise Fitzpatrick College of Nursing immersed in preventive research with the potential to make a major impact. Specifically, what are the barriers that contribute to non-adherence to medication for African American women with high blood pressure?

With guidance from Villanova Nursing Professor Mary Ann Cantrell, PhD, RN, CNE, FAAN, Tierra embarked on a literature review to uncover some answers in the research—and seek to bring about a change in practice.

THE SIGNIFICANCE

According to the American Heart Association, African American women in the US have the highest prevalence of high blood pressure, clinically known as hypertension, both nationwide and worldwide—and those rates continue to increase. “As an African American woman, I have always been interested in health disparities that disproportionately affect minorities,” says Tierra, noting that this population is vastly underrepresented in the literature.

THE FINDINGS

“Affecting medication adherence in this population requires a multi-factorial approach that should consider social and discriminatory factors,” Tierra explains. In addition to key factors that include age, income, knowledge about medication, medication side effects, and the asymptomatic nature of the disease, the cost of medications as well as unsatisfactory patient/provider interactions lead to non-adherence. Racism and discrimination are also factors: “Some patients felt they just weren’t being heard when they voiced concerns,” Tierra says. “They thought physicians possibly didn’t listen just because of who they were.”

THE TAKEAWAY

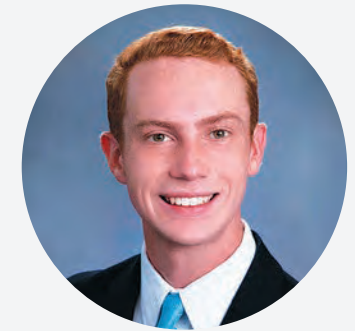
“Sometimes patients who don’t comply with their treatment regimen are looked at negatively,” Tierra says. “We in the medical community need to look at patients holistically, as whole people, find out what’s holding them back, and see how we can help them to adhere to their treatment regimen and gain better outcomes.”



“... I’m learning that to *really* effect change, we must start with prevention.”

— Tierra Smith '21 MSN, CCRN-CSC

THE STUDENT LEADER



This student keeps an award-winning program for young adults with intellectual disabilities going strong during the pandemic

TED BOLTE '21 was attracted to VUnited from the moment he heard its mission: enhancing the lives of individuals with intellectual disabilities and introducing them to a college experience with social and academic components.

Under Ted’s leadership as student director, a team of more than 40 Villanova students forged ahead over the past year when COVID-19 threatened to put their efforts on pause. In fact, the student-run organization—along with mentor Steve McWilliams, PhD, MFA, '92 MA, director of Disability Services—was recognized in the midst of it, receiving the One Body in Christ award in April 2021 from the Archdiocese of Philadelphia for its “innovative, inclusive programing.”

“Anything can be accomplished when you are working with a great group of people,” says Ted. “VUnited being able to not only survive, but thrive, during the pandemic is a testament to that.”

In fall 2020, Ted recruited VUnited’s first virtual cohort—15 students from the local community, all high school graduates over the age of 18. “VUnited wants to provide opportunities for these students to engage in the community, and we know the opportunities available decrease tremendously following the completion of high school,” Ted explains.

Refusing to let the pandemic take this opportunity away, VUnited took its seven-week life skills program online each Saturday morning. They delivered the same academic modules aimed at enhancing the students’ independence and job skill preparation while also maintaining the mentorship component and relationship building that is such a crucial part of the program. “For those two hours, everything felt almost normal again,” Ted says. “It was a feeling of togetherness, which everyone needed more than ever during the pandemic.”

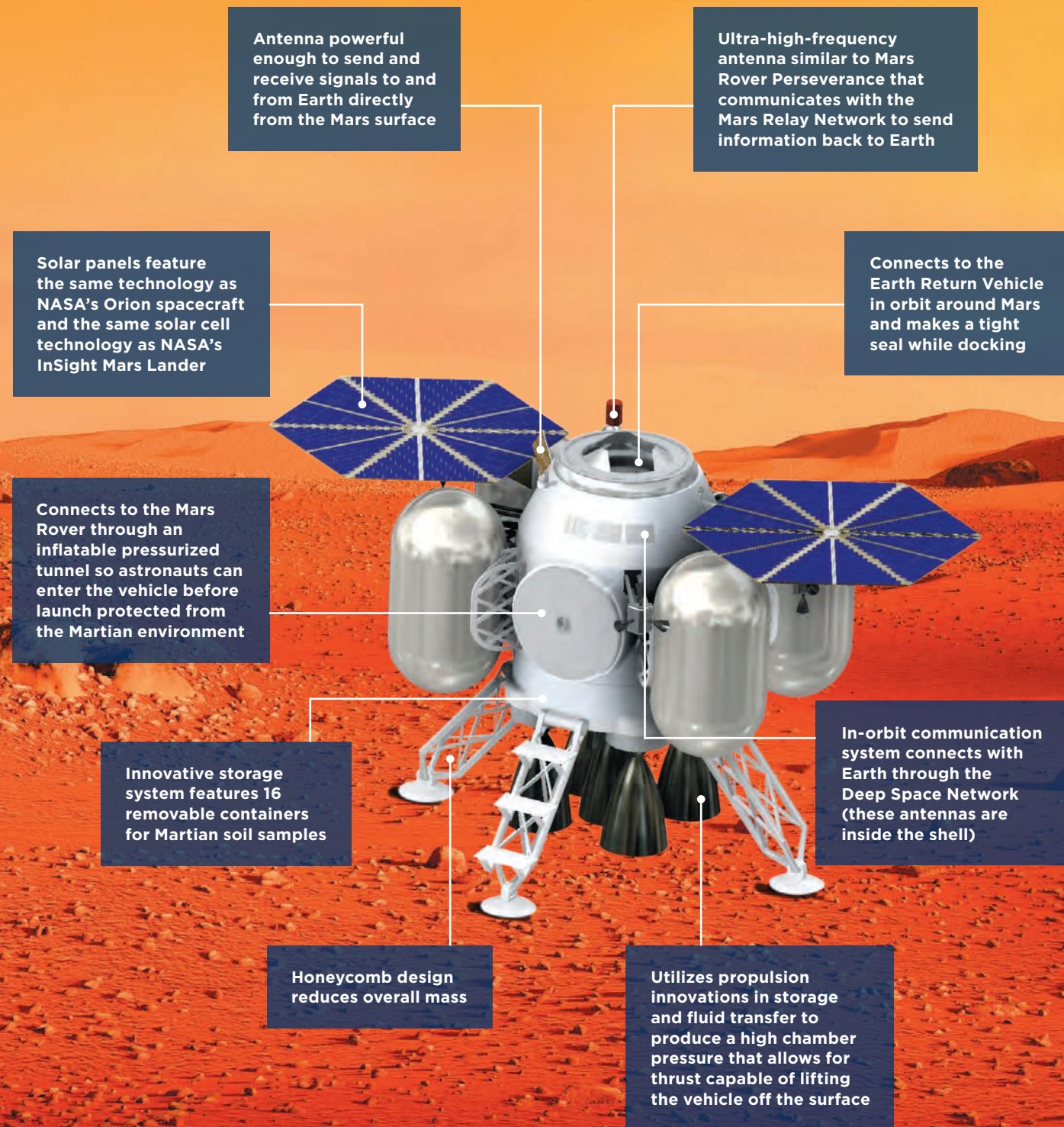


This master's student led a team of 21 undergraduates in developing a deep space mission concept for a nationwide NASA competition

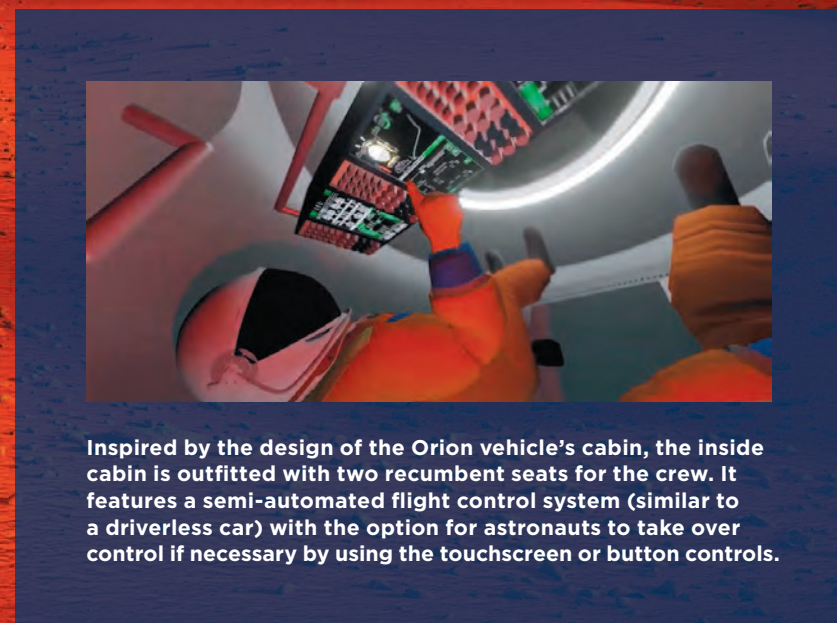
The mission: to design a vehicle that could safely transport two astronauts from the surface of Mars into orbit, where it would dock with an Earth Return Vehicle. A master's student in the College of Engineering, **NICHOLAS FLORIO '20, '21 MS** was up for the challenge; more specifically, NASA's RASC-AL (Revolutionary Aerospace Systems Concepts - Academic Linkage) competition.

"The whole idea was to design a minimal Mars ascent vehicle—minimizing mass and price while maximizing safety and functionality," says Nicholas, who is now a systems engineer for Lockheed Martin Space. Advised by Villanova Associate Professor of Mechanical Engineering Sergey Nersesov, PhD, Nicholas recruited and led a team of 21 undergraduate students from Villanova, Drexel and Rutgers to do just that.

The team made it all the way to RASC-AL's final round, presenting their deep space concepts directly to NASA and aerospace industry leaders in June 2021. Their design featured many innovative elements—some utilizing existing technology already in use by NASA and others newly designed by the students themselves. Learn more about these features and how they would enable Mars exploration in the diagram on the left.



Vehicle Rendering: Joseph Fasso, Nicholas Florio and Joseph Krueger



Inspired by the design of the Orion vehicle's cabin, the inside cabin is outfitted with two recumbent seats for the crew. It features a semi-automated flight control system (similar to a driverless car) with the option for astronauts to take over control if necessary by using the touchscreen or button controls.

Background image: iStock.com/dottedhippo

“Once you figure out what your ‘why’ is, you can only grow from there.”

— Michael DiMaio '23

An Air Force veteran lifts up those struggling with addiction and homelessness through the nonprofit he founded

MICHAEL DIMAIO '23 overcame many personal challenges before he found his “why.” A veteran of the US Air Force, Michael spent 23 years battling opioid use disorder before getting sober in 2013 and transferring to Villanova’s College of Professional Studies with his associate’s degree in 2020 at the age of 50. His goal: to use his experiences to benefit others.

In October 2020, Michael launched The Infinite Mission, an organization dedicated to empowering individuals, including veterans, who struggle with homelessness and substance abuse. “Gratitude is an action word,” Michael says. “Giving back to the community is part of making my amends.”

A Public Service and Administration major, Michael credits a Nonprofit Management class he took with Wesley Proctor, EdD, assistant teaching professor, as the catalyst that ultimately inspired him to establish his own nonprofit.

The Infinite Mission has partnered with Mother of Mercy House in Philadelphia’s Kensington neighborhood to host more than a dozen outreach events and, even amid COVID restrictions, has found ways to provide thousands of people in need with free water, fruit, healthy foods, clothing, wound care, hygiene items and emergency overdose prevention medication.

Photo: Peter Olson for Independence Blue Cross Foundation | Someone You Know™



Photos: Ed Cunicelli

Starting a new chapter of a national organization on campus, this student group co-founder encourages other young women to find their voice

LAURENLEE DOMINGUEZ '21 knew she found something special when she encountered IGNITE, a national organization that helps young women find their voice and encourages them to be civically and politically engaged. The organization has more than 200 chapters on high school and college campuses across America—including one at Villanova, thanks to Laurenlee’s initiative.

“IGNITE fosters a safe space for everyone, no matter their political differences,” says Laurenlee, who graduated from Villanova’s School of Business in May 2021 with a triple major in Finance, Accounting and International Business.

Drawing on her experience as a first-year student helping to re-establish the Latin American Student Organization on campus, Laurenlee worked with three other students to found IGNITE at Villanova in August 2020. Despite the pandemic, they organized activities like voter registration drives, panel discussions with elected women and candidates, policy workshops, and, most importantly, difficult conversations about important topics.

“How do we reconcile differences? IGNITE works so well, because people feel open to speak within the bounds of being respectful, making everyone feel valued and heard,” Laurenlee explains. “There’s power in just listening, even if no one agrees.”

“IGNITE fosters a safe space for everyone, no matter their political differences.”

— Laurenlee Dominguez '21

Wanting to make a difference in her former school district, this recent graduate became the youngest elected member of the Park Ridge Board of Education

With her roommate serving as her campaign manager, write-in candidate **LAUREN SUM '21** ran for the Board of Education in her hometown of Park Ridge, N.J., from her dorm room—and won.

After being sworn in as the youngest member of the board in January 2021, she set out to make good on her election promises. Lauren, who graduated from Villanova's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences in May 2021, offers these thoughts on jumping into politics.

Q. What inspired you to run for public office?

A. I wanted to show students that you're never too young to get involved, especially when the decisions affect you. The big idea was that I knew what it meant to be a student at Park Ridge because I experienced firsthand the school district from K through 12.

Q. What are some of your job responsibilities as a school board member?

A. I was involved in generating the communication plan for reopening the school district during the pandemic. As a part of the Community Relations Committee, I focused on rewriting the mission and vision statement this summer, which was an important opportunity to make sure it really was representative and reflected the students and staff.

Q. How are you focusing your efforts in your new role?

A. I want to advocate for inclusion and mental health and creative spaces. I want students to feel supported and that they're in an environment where they can speak up and feel safe. Making sure all students are seeing themselves in the teachers, the staff members, the curriculum—that's the biggest way of creating a safe environment where students from marginalized groups feel comfortable expressing themselves and sharing their experiences.

Q. What's one of the biggest lessons you've learned?

A. Do small things, and then build off of that. Knowing that my work is impacting students on a daily basis helps me stay positive because change can take so long. It's a matter of being persistent and pushing through with your ideas.

Photo: *The Philadelphia Inquirer*



THE CAMPUS CONNECTOR

Committed to putting community first, a Psychology major stepped up to help organize the distribution of PPE and other supplies on campus

Never one to stand on the sidelines, **JASMINE MAYS '21** wanted to contribute to a safe return to campus for fall 2020. Her idea flourished into the COVID-19 Prevention Pantry, a resource that was available to students the entire academic year. Jasmine, who graduated with a Psychology degree in May 2021, successfully raised funds and oversaw the donation of items students could really use, including masks, hand sanitizer, disinfectant wipes and cold remedies.

With support from the Office of the President, the Office of Student Involvement and members of the Villanova community, Jasmine played an integral role in keeping students equipped with the supplies they needed to keep themselves and others healthy.

Through this project, she brought some much-needed comfort and support in uncertain times. “My mother taught me giving is more important than receiving,” Jasmine says. “Service is a core value to me. A lot of people have helped me so that’s why I wanted to give back.”



Photo: Sharif Fennell Jr.

“Think big.
If you’ve got a good idea,
you should let it go and fly.”

— Jasmine Mays '21

THE SHARER OF THE FAITH

Tapped to lead a new effort in archdiocesan outreach to Catholic young adults, this church administrator connects with a new generation of faith seekers



Selected as the new head of archdiocesan outreach to Catholic young adults in November 2020, **MATT DAVIS '21 MS** is excited for the opportunity to play a vital role in the future of the 1.2 million Catholics in the Archdiocese of Philadelphia. In less than a year, he’s already connected with the leaders of more than 50 young adult ministries in the archdiocese, exploring ways to establish dialogue and connection between the groups and the archdiocese and to understand their needs.

Having graduated from the Villanova School of Business with an MS in Church Management in May 2021, Matt shares some insight into the why, the how and the possibilities of this new position.

Q: Why is it important to engage young people in the Catholic Church?

A: Without young people more engaged and involved, our Church will find itself in a very difficult situation in the near future. A young Church that is engaged, that is listened to, and that is invited to share their gifts and talents can bring a tremendous depth and variety of gifts, enthusiasm and joy to our faith.

Q: How will your past experience as director of Pastoral Care of Refugees and Migrants for the Archdiocese help you minister to a different population needing support in the Church?

A: Many of the principles I found most helpful in working with immigrants

also work well with young adults: planning *with* instead of planning *for*, including others by making sure they have a seat at the table, listening, and asking for and valuing input.

Q: What do you love most about working with young people in the Church?

A: I love all of the possibilities for doing good for God and the Church that come with this role. For me, young adults are the most exciting group to work with in the Church. They are old enough to ask all the big questions of God, our faith and themselves, and young enough to be open to where the Spirit leads in exploring these questions and to make major life and vocational decisions based on that prompting.

THE BUDDING RESEARCHER



This Biochemistry major is contributing to research that could revolutionize the way clinicians treat chronic disease

As a student researcher in the lab of Aimee Egger, PhD, **JOEY LaMORTE '23** devoted the last 18 months to studying the potential of novel molecule combinations that could be game changers in combating the epidemic of chronic disease in the US.

SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS

About 50 percent of Americans suffer from a chronic disease, and 86 percent of US health care costs are spent treating chronic diseases. Research suggests activating Nrf2 protein could help in the prevention of numerous diseases—from cancer and neurodegenerative conditions to arthritis and asthma.

“Essentially, Nrf2 is the major regulator of a cell’s response to stressors,” Joey explains. “It binds to DNA to produce RNA that gets translated into proteins that can eliminate the stressors that contribute to chronic disease progression.” Joey is working with Dr. Egger, associate professor of Biochemistry, and the team of undergraduate and graduate students in her research group to better understand this relationship and investigate which molecules work best to boost Nrf2 levels.

HITTING THE BOOKS

Joey planned to spend the spring 2020 semester shadowing Dr. Egger and her students and being trained in the intricacies of lab work. He adjusted his plan due to COVID-19 restrictions, and instead combed through online scientific journal databases, immersing himself in the most current research on Nrf2. “Reading and analyzing scientific papers, evaluating the research methods, and determining how and if it’s applicable to your own research are skills that take a lot of time to develop,” Joey says. “The time I spent working remotely turned out to be a huge help in designing my own experiments once I got back in the lab in August 2020.”

FINDINGS WORTH SHARING

Diving right into hands-on lab work in fall 2020, Joey spent the year on experiments that involved studying molecules that work synergistically to activate Nrf2. He was scheduled to virtually present the results of this research at an international conference of scientists and clinicians in November 2021. In the meantime, he is also helping to prepare article manuscripts for submission to two peer-reviewed scientific journals, *Free Radical Biology & Medicine* and *Redox Biology*.

THE COMMUNITY CHAMPION

A Villanova Law student focuses his scholarly pursuits on making an impact in public service and equal justice

MICHAEL HARDING '23 JD had expected to spend 2020 in Santiago, Chile, as a Fulbright Scholar, but just a month after his arrival there, the US State Department recalled international scholars in response to COVID’s spread. Michael had taken a year of leave from the Charles Widger School of Law to pursue this prestigious educational opportunity, and suddenly he found himself back home in Philadelphia a month into the academic year.

Undeterred, this Public Interest Scholar changed course and took on high-impact roles at three regional and national organizations, ending up with one transformative year:

EQUAL JUSTICE WORKS

In spring 2020, Michael was selected to serve on the National Advisory Committee of Equal Justice Works, a national nonprofit that creates opportunities for law students to engage in public service in support of underserved communities. Not only was he asked to co-chair the committee, but within months he was also invited to serve on the organization’s board of directors. “Serving on the board of Equal Justice Works has been both eye-opening and humbling,” Michael says. “I’ve been able to see the inner workings of a national nonprofit organization and interact with some of the nation’s most impressive lawyers and judges in public interest law.”

JUSTICE AT WORK

At Justice at Work, a nonprofit organization that provides free legal assistance for low-wage and immigrant workers in Pennsylvania, Michael helped draft pleadings and other legal materials, interviewed clients in Spanish, and helped clients apply for emergency housing assistance during the pandemic. He says, “It was my first exposure to legal practice, and I was deeply impressed by the personal commitment and investment of the lawyers I worked with.”

PUBLIC INTEREST LAW CENTER

Michael got to work directly with clients in the Public Interest Law Center’s Renter Rights Clinic, helping them to secure appropriate housing resources. He also completed legal research assignments to aid the center’s high-stakes lawsuits. This position exposed him to impact litigation—the practice of selectively choosing cases that will have a high impact for large groups of people or particular causes. Michael reflects, “It confirmed for me that I want to use litigation to effect systemic change in that same way.”



Image: iStock.com/Sinhyu



Ioana is pictured wearing the "Cassiopeia" top in gold from her fall 2020 collection, Yoyo's Closet.
Photo: Thea Puscaru

THE FASHION DESIGNER

A Communication major takes her passion for fashion to the next level in her native Romania as a designer and entrepreneur

After five canceled flights and a 4,700-mile journey, **IOANA-TAISIA TURCESCU '23** finally made it home to her native Romania in July 2020, having completed her first year at Villanova's College of Liberal Arts and Sciences—only to begin the two-week quarantine that is standard with international travel during a pandemic.

Ever industrious, Ioana (better known as "Yoyo" by friends and family) didn't let any of these obstacles hamper her drive. While she was quarantining with her father and his wife, Oana Nutu, an established fashion designer in Bucharest, inspiration struck. "I have always been passionate about fashion," Ioana says. "I just wasn't quite sure what form it would take."

She admired the intricate corset tops of her stepmother's luxury dresses and wondered whether they could stand alone as their own pieces. She put pencil to paper and sketched out five potential corset designs that she pitched to her stepmother the next day, and so their collaboration began. On Aug. 27, 2020, the "Yoyo by Oana Nutu" collection launched with those five pieces.

"When the samples arrived and I tried them on, it was such an emotional moment because my vision came to life, quite literally," Ioana says. The successful line went on to sell internationally and inspired her to launch her own collection, Yoyo's Closet, in October 2020, with the help of her friend Ramona Bizbac, a fashion student in Bucharest. Ramona did the sewing, and Ioana handled the rest—everything from fabric selection and budgeting to marketing and packaging.

"You never know where an idea might take you," Ioana says. "Even if it's not a brand-new product, you may have a new perspective, a new way of thinking about it, a new purpose for it—just put it out there."

Financial Summary 2020–2021

This past year presented Villanova with the most significant financial and operational uncertainty of its modern history, as the pandemic threatened our ability to provide the campus-based experience that is the foundation of our undergraduate program. While the campus experience of the year ending May 31, 2021, was very different because of the need to protect the community from the virus, I am proud of the fact that Villanova was able to maintain a campus-based experience at a time when many other institutions were unable to do so.

Our success was the direct result of the extraordinary efforts and sacrifice of the entire University community—faculty, staff and students—during a period of time when flexibility, perseverance and acting in the interest of the greater good were demanded more than ever before.

The pandemic significantly affected Villanova’s operations in many ways in the past year—events on campus were canceled, students were unable to study abroad and significant unbudgeted costs were incurred in order to safeguard the health of our community, to name just a few. As a result of cost-containment measures, implemented in June 2020, as well as ongoing efforts throughout the year by the campus community and sustained philanthropy from our loyal benefactors, Villanova was able to maintain its operating margin.

Despite the significant disruption to the global economy that resulted from the pandemic, financial markets performed extraordinarily well. This was evident in the growth of the endowment in the past year, from just under \$800 million on May 31, 2020, to more than \$1.1 billion as of May 31, 2021, reflecting a rate of return of 38 percent.

Other highlights from Fiscal Year 2021 include the following:

- Endowment support for operations reached an all-time high of more than \$35 million, which represented just under 7 percent of total operating revenue.
- Primarily as a result of the growth in the endowment, net assets grew from \$1.4 billion as of May 31, 2020, to \$1.8 billion as of May 31, 2021.

While the pandemic is certainly not behind us, our experience of the past year provides us with the ability to resume investment in the strategic plan, *Rooted. Restless.*, including planning for the renovation and expansion of the Center for Engineering Education and Research, which will be the first major facilities project associated with the plan.

In resuming our investment in the strategic plan during Fiscal Year 2022, we will do so with ongoing prudence. As we monitor the pandemic, we will continue to incorporate the University’s long-standing fiscal discipline and commitment to financial sustainability into all of our planning.

Sincerely,



Neil J. Horgan
Vice President for Finance and Chief Financial Officer

BALANCE SHEETS

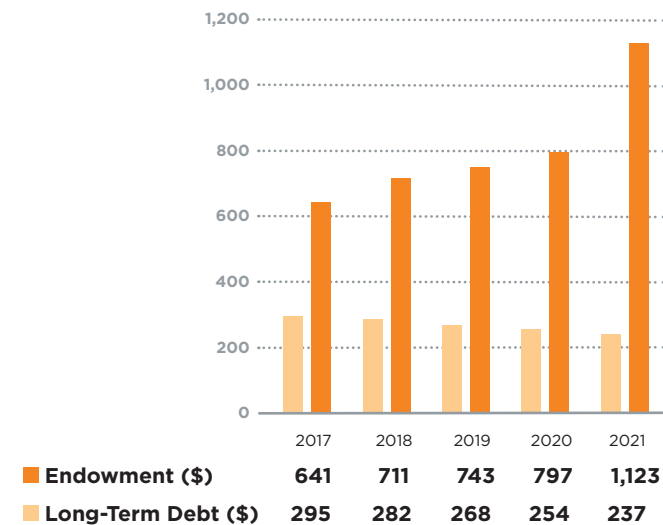
(\$ in thousands)

as of May 31

	2021	2020	2019
ASSETS			
Cash and Short-Term Investments	\$ 126,321	\$ 175,244	\$ 121,275
Long-Term Investments at Market	1,234,909	867,732	821,226
Accounts Receivable, net	67,661	80,317	103,796
Other Assets	6,396	6,210	6,736
Assets Whose Use Is Limited	2,067	2,111	2,085
Prepaid Pension Asset	1,189	—	—
Student Loans Receivable, net	6,154	7,262	9,101
Right-of-Use Assets, Operating Leases, net	15,973	—	—
Land, Buildings and Equipment, net	717,114	741,930	711,241
Total Assets	\$2,177,784	\$1,880,806	\$1,775,460
LIABILITIES			
Accounts Payable and Accrued Expenses	\$ 69,654	\$ 53,531	\$ 81,664
Deposits and Deferred Revenue	34,706	40,695	31,116
Short-Term Lines of Credit	—	60,000	—
Long-Term Obligations	236,822	254,044	268,124
Operating Leases	16,076	—	—
Other Liabilities	16,635	23,834	24,794
Total Liabilities	373,893	432,104	405,698
Net Assets	1,803,891	1,448,702	1,369,762
Total Liabilities and Net Assets	\$2,177,784	\$1,880,806	\$1,775,460

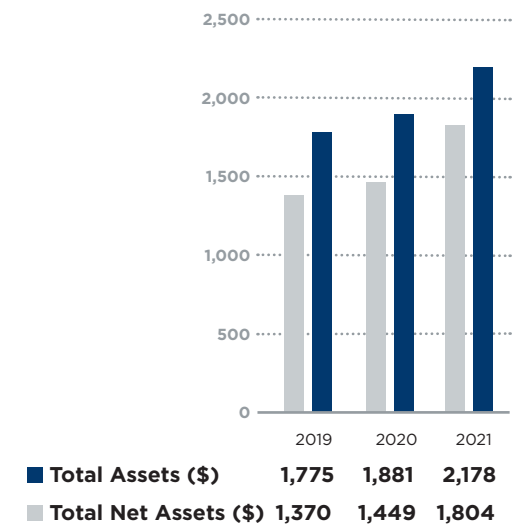
Endowment vs. Long-Term Debt

(\$ in millions)



Net Assets

(\$ in millions)



UNRESTRICTED REVENUES AND EXPENSES

(\$ in thousands)

as of May 31

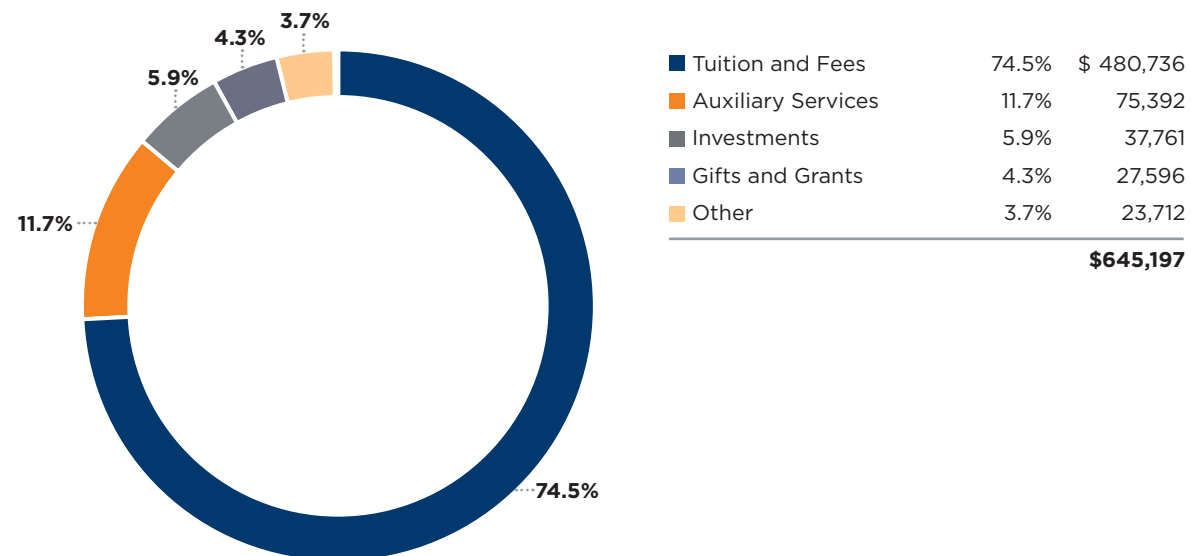
as of May 31

	2021	2020	2019
OPERATING REVENUES			
Student-Related Revenue:			
Student Tuition and Fees	\$ 480,736	\$ 461,867	\$ 452,154
Sales and Services of Auxiliary Enterprises	75,392	71,079	77,551
	\$556,128	\$532,946	\$529,705
Gifts	15,694	14,371	14,641
Private Grants	2,076	2,032	1,961
Government Grants	9,826	8,827	7,303
Endowment Resources	17,011	14,733	12,829
Investment Income	2,234	4,004	5,026
Other Sources	19,455	28,727	31,113
Net Assets Released from Restrictions	22,773	24,023	21,765
Total Operating Revenues	\$645,197	\$629,663	\$624,3436

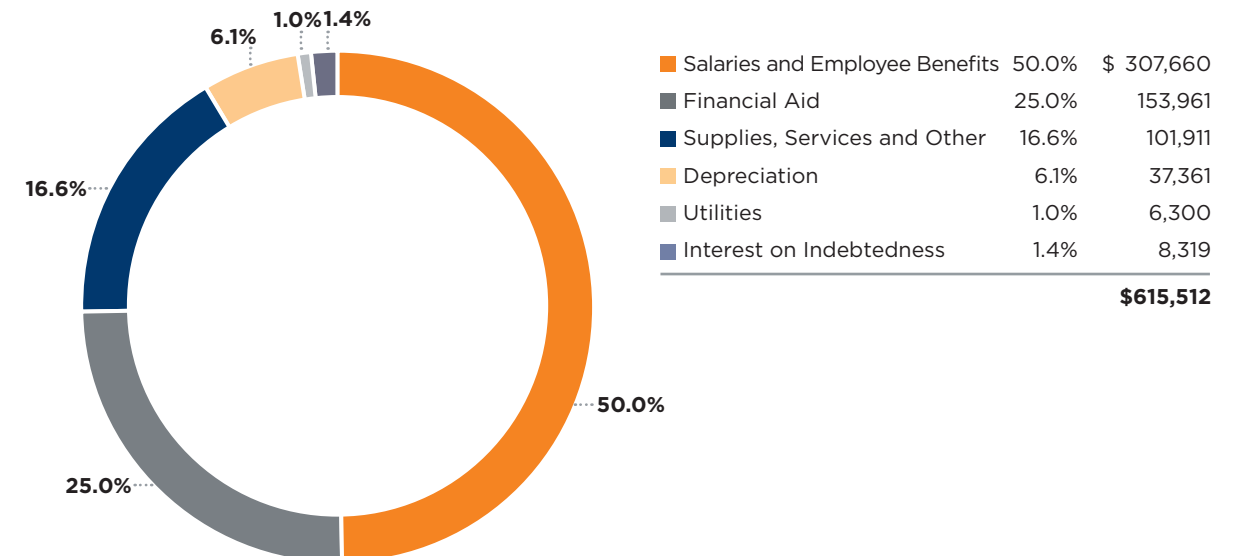
OPERATING EXPENSES

Salaries and Employee Benefits	\$ 307,660	\$ 297,543	\$285,608
Financial Aid	153,961	142,523	139,708
Supplies, Services and Other	101,911	112,058	117,525
Depreciation	37,631	33,070	26,847
Interest on Indebtedness	8,319	8,849	4,221
Utilities	6,300	6,659	8,265
Total Operating Expenses	\$615,512	\$600,702	\$ 582,174
Amounts Reserved for Capital Expenditures, Debt Principal Payments and Strategic Initiatives	\$29,685	\$28,961	\$42,169

Sources of Operating Revenue 2021



Distribution of Expenses 2021



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“We are an Augustinian community that moves forward, that is not complacent, that believes the best way to improve your own life is by improving the lives of others.”

— The Rev. Peter M. Donohue, OSA, PhD, '75
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