



# ALUMNI

## CHRONICLES

ISSUE : 01

ALUMNI RESEARCH: DR. FERNANDO DE LA PEÑA LLACA

20  
22

# To the Moon and Beyond



The State of the American Career | 16

Ready for Takeoff | 21

Better Together | 29



# Be Informed Be Inspired



**Patrick Kendrick,**  
Graduate and Seattle  
Chapter President

**Chris Celauro,**  
Graduate and Director  
of Alumni Experience

Dear Phoenixes,

Welcome to the inaugural edition of Alumni Chronicles Magazine! We are so excited to showcase the triumphs of and opportunities for our alumni in these pages.

When we describe what makes a Phoenix different from graduates of other universities, one word always rises to the top: grit. And while grit is a short word, it embodies a long list of qualities: courage, resolve, strength, character, dependability and resilience.

With that in mind, we have created this magazine to celebrate the ways our alumni have put their grit to good use, as well as to identify the news and trends that can help them continue to grow.

Take, for example, our cover story, “To the Moon and Beyond,” which highlights the ways one University of Phoenix alumnus worked with NASA to bring holographic teleportation to astronauts. There’s also “Better Together,” which shares the story of three women who earned their doctorates the same way they did their bachelor’s and master’s degrees: with each other.

While this issue applauds the many notable successes of Phoenixes like you, it also takes time to dive into some serious career content.

“The State of the American Career” looks at how the pandemic and other events have impacted which jobs are growing the fastest – and what you need to know to compete for them.

Those articles are just the beginning. You’ll enjoy reading through the stories here that ultimately tell one greater, bigger narrative: how Phoenixes continue to rise.

Getting to where you are today wasn’t easy. We know it. But your courage, your resilience and, yes, your grit got you through your program and helped you achieve other accomplishments in life. Your endeavors and the challenges you overcame along the way, are celebrated here in *Alumni Chronicles Magazine*. You’ll find even more stories on our blog.

You are the reason every University employee comes to work, every day. You may not realize this, but you inspire thousands of us. Now, with the debut of *Alumni Chronicles Magazine*, your stories can inspire current and future Phoenixes as well.

**We rise!**

**You have friends in local places**

SEATTLE

LAS VEGAS

DALLAS

NYC / NYC

CHARLOTTE

Network with UOPX graduates, volunteer locally – and have some fun. **Join one of 50 chapters nationwide.**

[Learn more about our chapters](#) →



14

**Cherry on Top**

Cherry Roa knows how to make an alumni chapter a place for everyone.



21

**Ready for Takeoff**

Education gave one alumnus wings to soar.



16

**The State of the American Career**

The U.S. job market feels like a game of musical chairs. Make sure you're not the one left standing.

29

**Better Together**

Friends don't let friends give up on their dreams.



S  
T  
R  
E  
T  
N  
O  
C

06

**New at the U**

Explore the latest and greatest happenings at University of Phoenix.

10

**Research Rising: To the Moon and Beyond**

How one UOPX alumnus is helping bring holographic teleportation to space.

14

**Alumni Chapter Spotlight: Cherry on Top**

Cherry Roa, president of the Southern California Alumni Association, shares the magic behind her very active chapter.

16

**The State of the American Career**

Caution ahead! What's hot – and what's not – in the job market today.

21

**After UOPX: Ready for Takeoff**

How alumnus Dennis Trujillo took his aerospace career to new heights.

24

**Staff to Student**

Meet three UOPX staff who are also part of the student body.

26

**Help Wanted**

Career coach Ricklyn Woods shares what you should know about Career Services for Life®.

29

**Alumni Profile: Better Together**

How three friends made earning their doctorates a team sport.

31

**Alumni Why**

The motivation behind the degree for three UOPX alumni.





New at the U

U

By Michael Feder

I N N O V A T I O N A T T H E U N I V E R S I T Y

## University of Phoenix is constantly innovating. Check out some of the latest developments and achievements from 2022!

### UOPX Introduces Competency-Based Education

In February 2020, University of Phoenix launched its first competency-based education (CBE) program so that students can gain a degree with career-relevant skills faster and at a lower cost. In fact, CBE lets qualifying students earn their degree in less than a year and for under \$11,000.

How? The idea is simple: CBE programs leverage a student's preexisting knowledge and skills to create a more flexible learning plan with the support and guidance of faculty. In a CBE program, students can demonstrate their knowledge through the completion of competency assessments rather than through predefined activities with set due dates.

Students can also leverage their expertise in subject areas they already know as a way to modify their learning plan and focus more of their time in areas new to them.

UOPX currently offers four CBE credit-based programs — three of which are master's programs — with more than 3,000 enrolled students and 570 graduates.

[Learn more about competency-based-education.](#)

### Career Questions, Answered

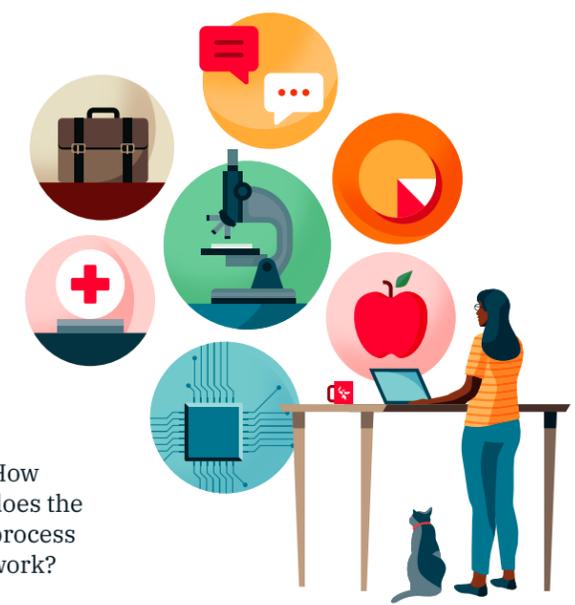
Much has been made of the job market over the past few years. While it's possible to comb through the avalanche of data and opinions, there is a better option: the University of Phoenix Career Institute®. Designed to identify and research the obstacles to career advancement, the Career Institute was launched in 2021 to provide data-driven thought leadership and expanded research on such topics as talent retention, career changes, return to in-person work and more. This year, the Career Institute released its second annual Career Optimism Index®, which offers a comprehensive look at how U.S. employers

and employees perceive their careers, their skills and what needs to change.

[Learn more about the University of Phoenix Career Institute.](#)

### Show Off Your Skills

As the job market continues to evolve, so does the University's commitment to providing an education students can leverage in the real world. Enter skills-tagged curriculum, an innovative new process for making visible to students and potential employers the skills students learn in their undergraduate and graduate programs across the University.



How does the process work?

At UOPX, skills are being aligned with program and course outcomes. Each skill is connected to a corresponding assignment — authentic, real-world assessments that the student completes as part of the course.

Across select programs and courses at the University, when students completes certain assignments, they are awarded a digital credential, a badge that indicates the specific skill they've attained and what they did to earn it. Students can share the badges on their resumés or with their employers, explicitly connecting their education to the skills they bring to the table. With the anticipated completion of all programs being skills-tagged by this fall, and about 13,000 badges granted, UOPX awards hardworking learners with the credentials to help them stand out from the crowd.

NEW AT THE U

## Phoenix Perks

The UOPX journey doesn't end at graduation. When students become alumni, they enjoy a range of benefits designed to improve their careers and lives.

What do these include? For starters, graduates have access to one-on-one career advisement — for life. So, whether they are looking to get a job after graduation or change jobs (or even careers) later on, UOPX is there to help with resumé advisement, job interview preparation and more career services.

Alumni also have access to each other. (There are more than a million Phoenixes out there!) In addition to the 800,000-strong network on LinkedIn®, alumni can connect via an alumni chapter or on PhoenixLink™ Network.

Other alumni benefits include:

- Access to career fairs and workshops
- Access to the self-service Career Resource Library
- A 50% discount on professional development courses at UOPX
- Yearly homecoming ceremonies
- Discounts on more than 900 brands

In short, UOPX is committed to the long-term success of alumni long after they receive their diploma.

## Spirit of Inclusion

The student body at UOPX comes from all walks of life. To reflect and respect that diversity, the University has developed several initiatives. These include the virtual Inclusive Café and an educational equity webinar series to



spur conversations about equity and inclusion in the classroom, workplace and community. The accessibility partner program, meanwhile, allows UOPX staff to learn accessibility principles and how to apply them in the creation of digital content and resources. In addition, the University is proud to have hosted its first Inclusive Leadership Summit in April 2022, which welcomed over 1,400 attendees!

UOPX fosters relationships within its diverse student body through Recognized Student Organizations, where students can connect with each other over shared backgrounds, experiences and interests, and build connections that last long after graduation.

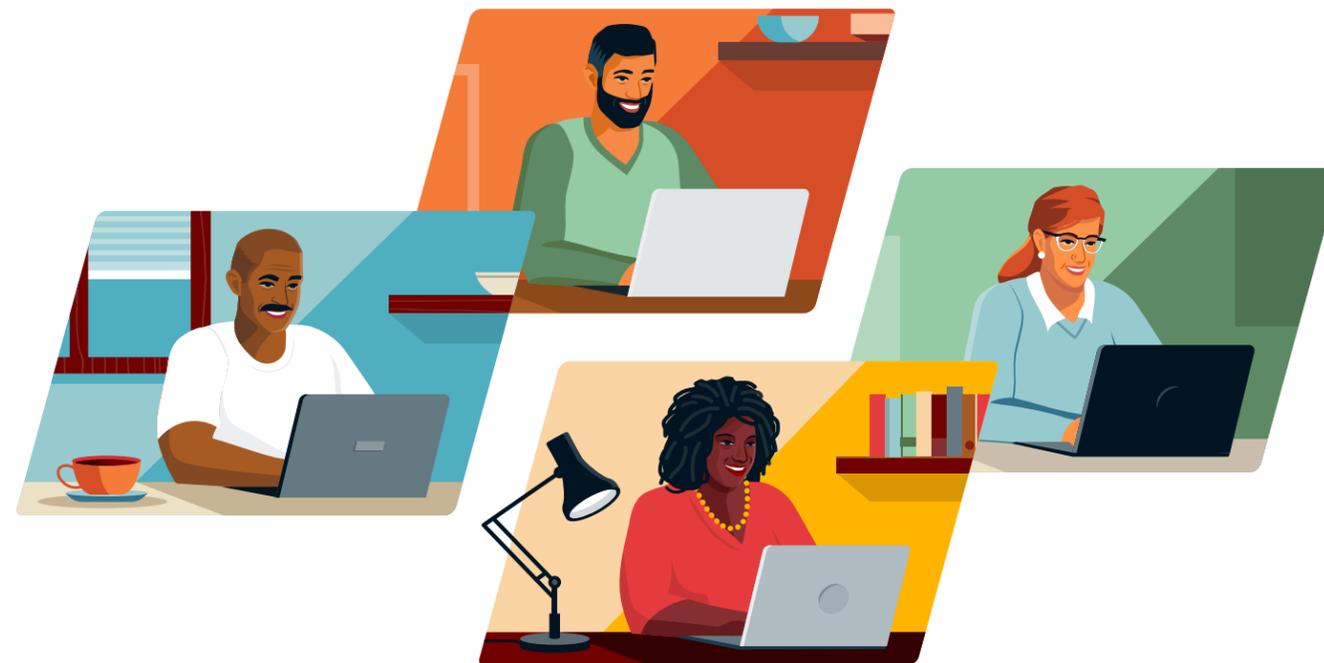
This approach to diversity not only positively impacts the lives of students, it's also what students want. According to a student survey, 86.4% believe it's important for faculty to be sensitive to the needs and perspectives of diverse groups.

## Upskilling for Today's Market

Skills matter in today's workforce. For those looking to take on new challenges, remain competitive in a changing job market or simply up their skills game, UOPX has launched a suite of online, noncredit professional development courses in a number of high-demand fields. (Think digital marketing, information technology, healthcare, human resources and education.)

These courses are built to be affordable, flexible and relevant to the modern job market. Self-led and self-paced, they also teach useful skills in less than 30 hours, all without the need for prior experience. They can even prepare learners to take industry certification exams from Google, Facebook, Scrum.org and Amazon.

For individuals looking to grow their career or small business, or find a new a career, professional development courses prove learning never goes out of style.



## And the Award Goes to...

Every graduating student is a testament to UOPX's leadership in online education. A number of accolades recently awarded to UOPX in various disciplines and subjects further underscore that positive impact.

In a testament to the University's commitment to inclusion, UOPX was recently designated Best Places to Work for LGBTQ+ Equality by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation. This achievement followed five years of earning a 100% score on the foundation's Corporate Equality Index.

In 2021, the University earned recognition in all seven Hallmarks of Excellence in Online Education Leadership as set by the University Professional and Continuing Education Association. The accolade followed an intensive and comprehensive six-month evaluation, which included an assessment of the University's online enterprise and interviews with its faculty, staff and administration by a team of experts in distance education.

For the third year in a row, the International Council of Electronic Commerce Consultants (or EC-Council) awarded UOPX its Academic Circle of Excellence Award in 2021, which highlights excellence in cybersecurity education and training in North America. More than 1,000 universities, commercial training centers and other educational institutions are considered for this award, and only four are recognized each year.

In recognition of UOPX's quality nursing education, the National Education Progression in Nursing Collaborative awarded its Quality Designation to the University in 2021.

This award emphasizes UOPX's commitment to exemplary nursing education and preparing students with the skills they need to further their nursing careers. Educational institutions are evaluated on their strategic plan, the quality of their programs and student outcomes.

These awards represent just a handful of those UOPX has received over the years, but they signal the unique benefits students gain from their education and the experiences they can take into their future careers! 🦋



# To the Moon and Beyond

By Sharla Hooper

R E S E A R C H R I S I N G

Photo: Camille Josephine

## Holographic teleportation — it's the stuff of sci-fi films, fantasy novels and, thanks to University of Phoenix alumnus Dr. Fernando De La Peña Llaca, real-life space travel.

For most people, holographic teleportation sounds like a pie-in-the-sky possibility. But the technology actually exists, and what's more, it's transforming industries outside IT.

Take space travel, for example. Dr. Fernando De La Peña Llaca's company, Aexa Aerospace, recently collaborated with NASA scientists to provide holographic teleportation as an innovative, 3D version of telemedicine for astronauts on the International Space Station (ISS).

His recent success with NASA is part of a journey he began many years ago. As an undergraduate engineering student, De La Peña Llaca completed and patented a spacecraft engine propelled by antimatter. He received additional patents as well, including for a space launcher that employs magnetic levitation.

"I have 28 years of experience leading technology companies," says De La Peña Llaca, who completed his Doctor of Management at University of Phoenix in early 2022. "However, space exploration has always motivated me."

He continued to refine and further his research on space exploration as a doctoral student at the University. His dissertation, "Holographic Teleportation in Space and Astronauts' Stress," focused on defining the best practices of the technology to alleviate social isolation and stress for astronauts.

De La Peña Llaca's dissertation research found two significant areas in which holographic teleportation could benefit astronauts: psychologically (via socialization) and physically (via medical care). "Astronauts spend months in social isolation," he explains.

"They live in a closed space station for up to a year. They don't socialize with their families or friends." He points out how millions right here on Earth experienced and closely modeled the phenomenon in the past few years.

"We lived during the COVID-19 pandemic and saw and experienced how isolation is linked to side effects, including a loss of performance. While holographic teleportation is new in space, it may relieve some of the side effects during long-term isolation, especially during missions to the moon or Mars."

De La Peña Llaca established Aexa Aerospace in 2012, at the same time he began his Master of Information Systems at University of Phoenix. Aexa Aerospace developed a training application for astronauts and payload specialists that uses holograms to overlay existing hardware and deploys avatars of other users working remotely. This is the technology that enabled the holographic teleportation experience with the ISS.

“ We lived during the COVID-19 pandemic and saw and experienced how isolation is linked to side effects.”

In 2016, Aexa successfully demonstrated a training application for NASA in its undersea habitat, Aquarius. De La Peña Llaca describes how the concept of holographic teleportation began then as both a collaboration and a dissertation project.

“ They live in a closed space station for up to a year. They don't socialize with their families or friends.”

“ I figured out that I could focus my dissertation on something new and relevant to serve future generations of scholars and researchers.”

“We started working on this remote training application for NASA using mixed reality and augmented reality. We successfully tested at the bottom of the sea in the Aquarius habitat in Florida, where the habitat is an analog environment for space.”

The technology used avatars while a NASA surgeon in Houston interacted with the astronauts at the bottom of the Florida sea. After they completed the activity, the NASA surgeon in charge of the project gave De La Peña Llaca some useful feedback: The application was perfect, but not everyone is happy dealing with avatars in this metaverse.

“He asked what else would be possible, and I came up with the idea of holographic teleportation,” De La Peña Llaca shares. “I told him, ‘We can holographically teleport you to the International Space Station; your essence will be there.’”

The NASA surgeon agreed, and they started working on the requirements to make it happen in space. “I tried to find scholarly papers about holographic teleportation, [but] there were only a few,” De La Peña Llaca says. “Then I figured out that I could focus my dissertation on something new and relevant to serve future generations of scholars and researchers.”

The holographic teleportation journey took a theory to implementation and reality, a process he describes as similar to writing a dissertation.

“In the dissertation, I already have a road map to introduce [a topic], review the literature on what has been done, create a methodology, perform my research, and present my results and conclusions,” he says. “A project like holographic teleportation uses the same logic.

“First, I write the technical requirements similar to the introduction. What is this about, and what do I want as the final product? Then we research what is available, what has been done, and how to improve it. Then we start the methodology to develop the product and perform research until we fulfill the requirements. Then we present our product and test it on-orbit.”

The result was the successful October 2021 testing of the holographic teleportation technology. Space isn’t the only industry leveraging this kind of technology, either. Medicine, engineering and business are just a few of the other industries exploring it.

De La Peña Llaca and Aexa Aerospace plan to make the application commercially available by the third quarter of 2022, with the goal that anyone on Earth (or in space) will be able to use it to communicate.

“This technology will be the new way to communicate and work in a three-dimensional environment,” De La Peña Llaca predicts. “I believe that my technology will be used for space exploration, so people will be able to interact and holoport themselves to the moon, Mars and beyond.”

“ This technology will be the new way to communicate and work in a three-dimensional environment.”



Photo: Camille Josephine

RESEARCH RISING

# Cherry on Top

By Laurie Davies

ALUMNI CHAPTER SPOTLIGHT

To talk with Cherry Roa is to brace for several things. Joy. Effervescence. And the probability you'll be called by your first name every 30 seconds or so.

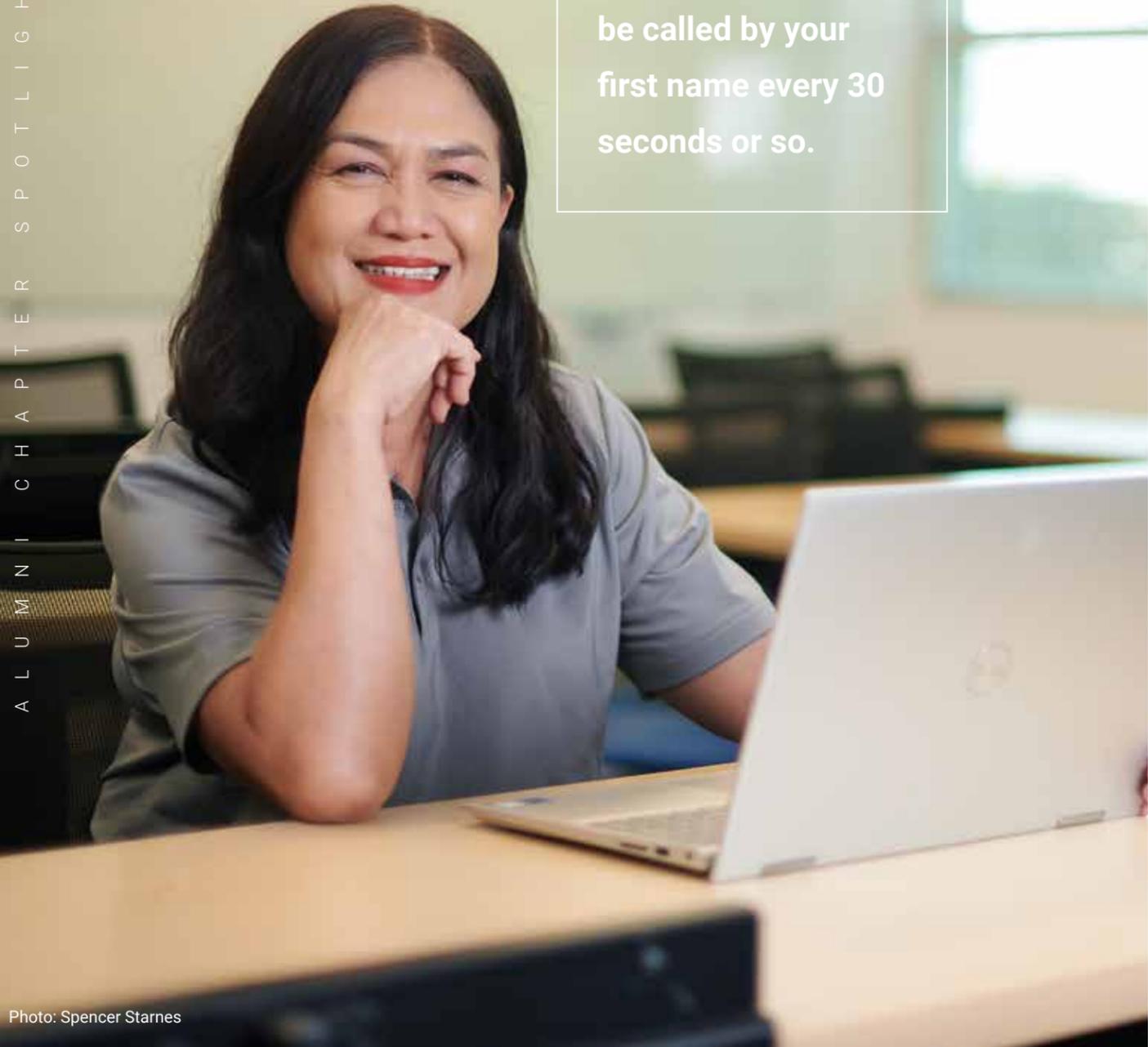


Photo: Spencer Starnes

President of University of Phoenix's Southern California Alumni Association, Roa is, at heart, a connector. She connects University graduates to each other, to a sense of belonging and to the numerous career, volunteer and social events her alumni chapter facilitates.

In fact, her alumni association's slate of activities and participation rates are so strong that the SoCal chapter has become the eighth largest in the University of Phoenix system. The chapter's 850 members are diverse in their personalities, professions and values. So, Roa figures, there had better be a little something for everyone.

The chapter presents Leadership Impact Awards, which, in 2022, recognized 18 recipients. The awards showcase leaders, innovators, people who serve their communities and individuals who have overcome adversity to improve their lives and the lives of those around them.

Roa's chapter also hosts network events, which include educational workshops and webinars to help SoCal alumni stay current on everything from career skills to personal financial strategies.

There are volunteer outreach events, which bring Phoenixes together around causes like serving the homeless and improving youth literacy. There are career fairs to connect alumni with potential jobs and job seekers. And there are golf tournaments, sports outings and community gatherings at local parks, all of which are planned simply to focus on what Roa loves best: connection.

"I have this — I don't know, this is what people say — skill and energy of drawing everyone together and pointing them toward one goal," Roa says with dancing eyes, a sparkling smile and a sense that she kind of knows this is what she was born for.

And it's not even her main gig.

Applying the Master of Health Administration she earned from the University in 2014, Roa has a full-time job overseeing the operations, marketing and accounting for the two home healthcare businesses she owns. (Prior to embarking on her MHA, she practiced law in the Philippines.) When she's not running her healthcare businesses, she plays golf and dabbles in amateur photography.

Still, she finds time to give back to the alumni chapter that welcomed her with open arms in 2014.

“People are attracted to her infectious, positive attitude. She is 100% focused on helping our alumni achieve their goals.”

“When I joined, I thought, ‘I might as well get to know fellow Phoenixes,’” she says. “There were fewer than 100 in the chapter at the time, but it was something new. I wanted to be involved and make it grow.”

Why? “I see the value of belonging,” Roa says.

Southern California Campus and Academic Director Mikal Powers says three ideas come to mind when he considers Roa's leadership: positivity, passion and servant leadership. “People are attracted to her infectious, positive attitude,” he says. “She is 100% focused on helping our alumni achieve their goals.”

Powers credits Roa for not only connecting alumni within her chapter but also connecting her chapter to broader University life. “She brings people together. You'll find current students, alumni and faculty at many of our events. This really serves to reinforce our broader identity as Phoenixes,” he says.

Respect, reputation and credibility are the trifecta that keeps Roa energized in her role. And, of course, joy. With a wide smile she says she plans to keep helping Phoenixes belong.

“Belonging is the foundation. Belonging helps us work for a purpose, for a goal. Belonging is everything.” 🍷

**Belong to something bigger.**

[Join an alumni chapter today! →](#)

# The State of the American Career

By Elizabeth Exline

Hiring shortages. Hybrid work situations. Boomerang employees. Just how extreme is the U.S. job market these days? It depends on who you ask. Here, we take a deep dive into the state of the American career.

## Different Name, Same Problem

Call it the Great Resignation or the slightly more optimistic Great Reshuffle, the result is the same. Employees are on the move, and the ball — for salaries, benefits and work-life balance — is in their court.

This, of course, is nothing new: Texas A&M Associate Professor Anthony Klotz coined the term “Great Resignation” in 2021, and there’s been no shortage of articles about it since then. What’s interesting is not that it exists as a phenomenon but how the phenomenon is being used to change workplace culture. Specifically, what do companies need to do to retain talent?

**University of Phoenix (UOPX) released its second Career Optimism Index® in 2022** to take a closer look at workplace trends. Conducted in conjunction with The Harris Poll, this survey has input from 5,000 U.S. adults who were working or wished to be working, as well as 500 employers.

The thinking was that, in understanding the wins and the pain points of employers and employees alike, the Great Resignation could be turned into the Great Retention.

Not surprisingly, the findings were full of surprises! For example, 85% of employers stated that employees loved their jobs, but only 66% of employees agreed. In fact, nearly 1 in 3 Americans were prepared to quit their jobs without having another lined up.

So, what would get them to stay? The list isn’t long. According to ADP Research Institute®, employees say salary is the top priority, followed by a desire for greater flexibility in where and how they work. In fact, 74% of parents want to arrange working hours to be more flexible — and 68% of childless employees agree.

Employees, in other words, would like a decent salary and flexible working conditions. And, until they get those things, they will continue to move around.

“Many employees expect to be able to work remotely, if not every day, most days of the week and are saying, ‘No, thank you,’ to companies that don’t offer that as an option,” explains Ricklyn Woods, a career coach at University of Phoenix.

“What one company won’t do, another will. And people are holding out until they find a company that can meet their needs, or they are opting to start their own business or a freelance gig. So, I’d say [the Great Resignation] is really just getting started.”

OTHER KEY TAKEAWAYS INCLUDE:

# 64%

of the workforce would consider looking for a new job if they were required to return to the office full time

# 52%

of employees would take a pay cut in return for more flexibility or a hybrid approach to where they worked

THE GREAT RESIGNATION

The data supports Woods' assessment. Turnover reached a historic high in March 2022 when 4.5 million Americans quit their jobs. Barring a change in economic conditions or a drastic development in automation, *Forbes* notes that the abundance of open positions will likely continue through 2030. Even Klotz has gone on record saying he doesn't see it slowing down for at least a few years.

## Not All Markets — or Employees — Are Created Equal

Where things get confusing is in the specifics of the market that appears to favor employees. According to a recent article by the BBC, "Although a war for talent is certainly raging, employers aren't fighting the same battles across the board. Only some candidates have power in the job market — typically experienced, mid-career employees. It means entry-level workers can still face difficulties finding employment — and this is especially the situation in certain sectors."

Job availability varies by industry and country, but one strike against entry-level employees is the training they require. With hybrid and work-from-home options increasingly available, new employees need to be able to ramp up without a lot of oversight or training, and that's a skill that often comes with experience.

“ Although a war for talent is certainly raging, employers aren't fighting the same battles across the board.”

## Industries on the Rise

No matter what stage your career is in, it helps to know which industries are projected to experience strong job growth in the coming years. Here's the short list.

### Healthcare and Social Assistance

Overall, the healthcare and social assistance sector is projected to add the most new jobs from 2020 to 2030. And, as outlined in the Employment Projections — 2020-2030 report from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS),

individual and family services roles, like home health aides and occupational therapy assistants, will experience the fastest job growth among healthcare professions.

### Leisure and Hospitality

The pandemic may have necessitated a breakup with the leisure and hospitality industry, but a rebound is taking place in a major way. So much so, in fact, that BLS projects employment in the leisure and hospitality industry to grow the fastest as people return to in-person activities. This means hiring at hotels, restaurants, recreational destinations and cultural icons could increase faster than you can say amusement park.

### Professional, Business and Scientific Services

Careers in business, IT and other professional fields remain attractive as ever. In fact, according to BLS, employment in professional, business and scientific services (including computer systems, design and related services) is projected to grow 2.1% each year between 2020 and 2030, while management, scientific and technical consulting services are projected to grow 2% annually.

LinkedIn® agrees. The professional networking site compiled its own report in 2022 called Jobs on the Rise, which examines job titles that had the highest growth rates between January 2017 and July 2021. Among these, technology roles were some of the most numerous, including such positions as machine learning engineer, user experience researcher, business system administrator, back-end developer, customer solutions engineer and site reliability engineer.

### Human Resources

With so much reshuffling happening in today's workforce, it should come as no surprise that human resources is a growing industry. Three of LinkedIn's 25 fastest-growing job titles were in human resources, with the position of diversity and inclusion manager taking the No. 2 spot.

### Marketing

Competition is not only fierce for our employment but for our attention as well. With a proliferation of options and platforms at our fingertips, marketing is on the rise. Roles in marketing, especially those associated with IT, continue to increase, according to LinkedIn. Some popular options include customer and search marketing manager roles and analyst relations specialists.

## The Fine Print

Woods has seen these trends firsthand but with some interesting twists. Healthcare, for example, may continue to attract students, but, in her experience, she sees many of those graduates seeking nonclinical roles.

“There are a lot of people who want to study healthcare, but they don't necessarily want to be patient-facing,” Woods explains.

She points to roles in insurance, billing, pharmaceutical research and health administration as increasingly attractive.

As for technology, Woods can't overstate its importance, even for those who don't pursue traditionally tech-centric professions. Technology, after all, is integrated into virtually every field, from human resources to healthcare.

“No matter what you're doing, you need to be able to know how to navigate technology and systems; otherwise, you'll be left behind,” Woods says.

By way of example, she points to a client who had 20 years of experience in healthcare administration. The employee was ready to move to a bigger practice but lacked the technological skills larger organizations required, making the transition difficult without upskilling.

In addition to industry nuances, there are big-picture trends to consider, specifically in regard to the aging workforce. Baby boomers left the workplace in droves during the early days of the pandemic, and as that generation ages, BLS predicts participation in the labor force will decline from 61.7% to 60.4% between 2020 and 2030.

“ No matter what you're doing, you need to be able to know how to navigate technology and systems; otherwise, you'll be left behind.”

According to the UOPX Career Optimism Index:

43%

of Americans don't see a clear path for advancing their careers

and

40%

worry that artificial intelligence will render their skills obsolete

T  
H  
E  
G  
R  
E  
A  
T  
R  
E  
S  
I  
G  
N  
A  
T  
I  
O  
N



## How to Navigate Toward the Great Retention

According to the UOPX Career Optimism Index, 43% of Americans don't see a clear path for advancing their careers, and 40% worry that artificial intelligence will render their skills obsolete.

For some, the answer to this quandary may be to upskill — invest in continuing education through either a degree program, industry certification or certificate course.

Because upskilling can directly benefit you and your career, Woods advocates for it, even if your employer doesn't pay for it. This is important because, according to the Career Optimism Index, 89% of employers think they offer frequent upskilling opportunities while only 61% of workers agree. That disconnect means there is a fair number of employees who believe they need to seek out and finance upskilling opportunities for themselves.

One emerging trend in this realm is skills-badging, which awards program participants a digital badge that they can upload to their LinkedIn profile or resumé to quickly show prospective employers what they bring to the proverbial table.

“Up until this point, job seekers have been sold on the importance of sprinkling keywords throughout their resúmes and LinkedIn profiles to stand out among the competition and be discovered by recruiters or hiring managers,” Woods explains. “Skills-badging will provide a new way for recruiters to find talent with a ‘verified’ set of skills and experience.”

For institutions that offer skills-badging, a third party, such as Credly, typically handles verification to ensure assessment objectivity.

““

## Reimagine the Job Search

For individuals who have the right experience and skill set, making the most of the current market still hinges on a fair amount of strategy. It's one thing to feel confident you are a valuable employee. It's another thing to find an employer

that will provide you both the opportunity and the benefits you're poised to attain. To that end, Woods offers the following advice:

- 1. Make sure your resumé stands out.**  
Ensure your most relevant and valuable skills and experience are easy to find so you can stand out from the competition. As Woods notes, “There will be competition. It is an employee's market after all.”
- 2. Get clear about what is important to you.**  
Are you all about the salary? The job title? Flexibility or workplace culture? How about opportunities for growth? Whether it's none, one, some or all of these, you need to know what is important to you so you can seek the right opportunities.
- 3. Be prepared to interview the company.**  
Interviews aren't a one-way street. Like a good date, interviewing for a job involves an exchange of information and questions. “Each interview is an opportunity to learn as much as you can about the company,” Woods points out. “Develop questions in advance of the interview that will yield information about what is most important to you.”

## Beware the Boomerang Experience

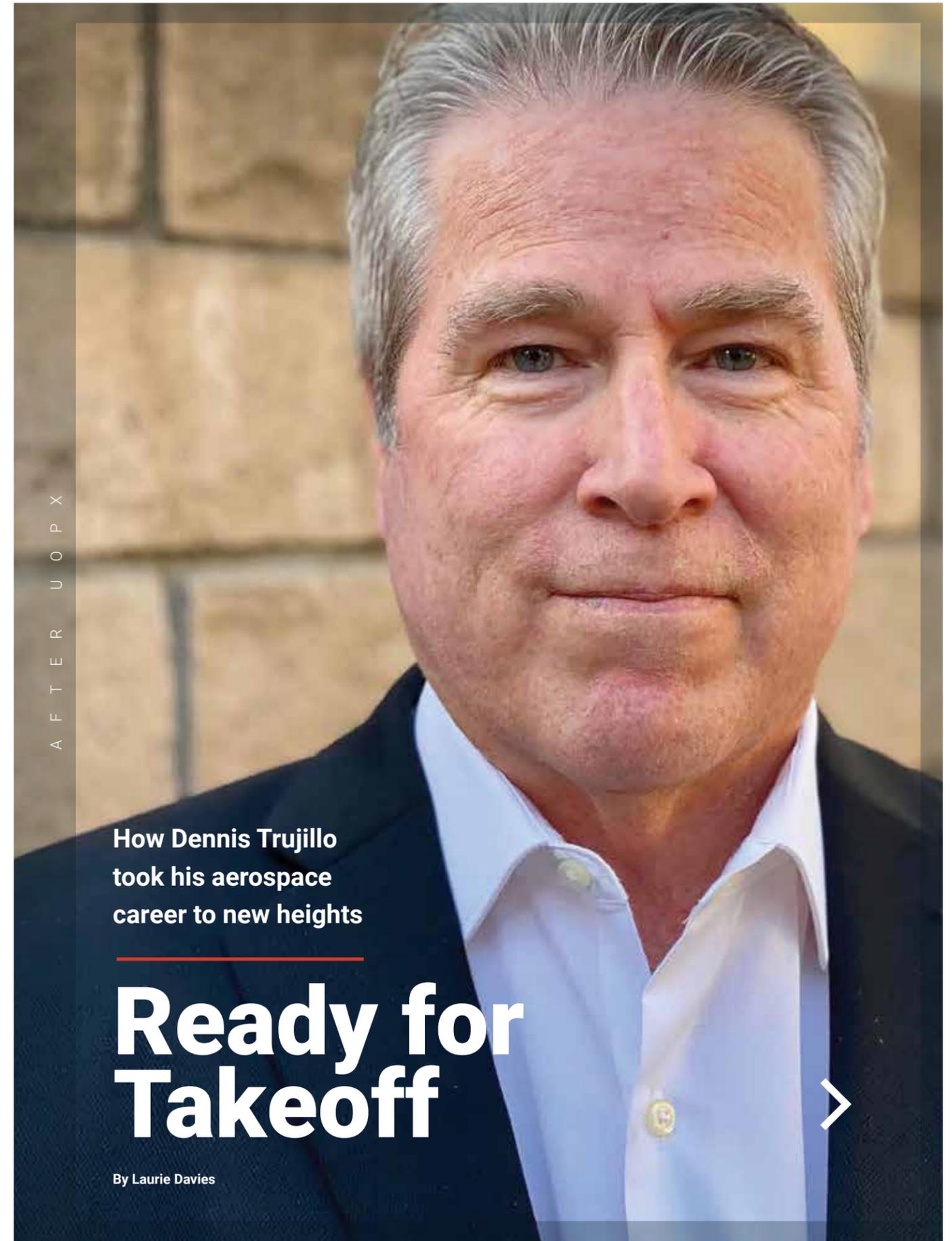
Another trend to emerge from the Great Resignation was that of the “boomerang” employee. These were people who quit their jobs only to return shortly thereafter. Being a boomerang employee is undesirable if you left your job only to be disappointed by the next one. That's an emerging reality for more than 50% of people who have been at their job for three months or less, according to LinkedIn News.

But, as Woods points out, there are positive outcomes to boomeranging — if you do it right.

“If someone left to pursue a growth opportunity that was not afforded to them at the time of their departure, gained experience elsewhere and returned in a higher-level position than when they left, there isn't anything wrong with that,” she says.

Opportunity, after all, is at the heart of the American dream. And today's job market can be a dream come true for prepared employees. 🌟

*The BLS Projected Growth for 2020-2030 is published by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. This data reflects BLS' projections of national (not local) conditions. These data points are not specific to University of Phoenix students or graduates.*



A F T E R U O P X

How Dennis Trujillo took his aerospace career to new heights

# Ready for Takeoff

By Laurie Davies



## It's funny the details you remember when you look back on your first love, that indelible moment when the skies parted, your heart pounded ... and the jackrabbits scattered?

That's how it went for Boeing Project Manager Dennis Trujillo (MS/Global Management, 2003) anyway.

He was 6 or 7 years old when he fell in love with airplanes. Trujillo romanticized them from the other side of the 4-foot chain-link fence where he spent his spare time "spotting" — the art of identifying aircraft from the ground.

"My father would take me to Long Beach Airport, and we'd park along the runway. When the airplanes would come in to land, I'd identify them. I knew them by the nose and engines," he says. "I could tell a Douglas from a Boeing from a Lockheed."

In fact, he could tell a plane was close just by looking at nearby bushes. "All the jackrabbits would scatter when the ground shook. I always got such a kick out of that," says Trujillo.

Now approaching his 40th anniversary working first for McDonnell Douglas (and now Boeing, which merged with McDonnell Douglas in 1997), Trujillo has been project manager for major endeavors such as passenger-to-freight plane conversions and the reconfiguration of parked planes for new owners during the pandemic. He also became the company's first-ever Boeing Designated Expert (BDE) in project management.

### Enough Credit to Go Around

Hardworking yet humble, Trujillo credits many others for his success. He nods to his dad, a U.S. Army veteran who served in the post-World War II effort to help Western Europe recover and then spent his career rebuilding jets as a mechanic. "He steered me toward a sure paycheck in aviation when law school called," says Trujillo.

He credits his mom, three aunts and uncle, whose combined 200 years of aerospace industry experience gave him confidence in his career choice.

And Trujillo credits University of Phoenix (UOPX), where he earned a master's in global management. (That degree certificate has since evolved into other offerings at the University, including the Master of Management degree.)

Trujillo remembers back to 2001, when McDonnell Douglas had a staffing shakeup. "It was a big PM [project management] overhaul. You had to rebid for your job. I was married and kids had come. I knew I needed to go back to school," he says.

Trujillo looked for a degree program he could afford and complete on his schedule but that would also help enhance his career possibilities. At UOPX, he found all three.

Trujillo took advantage of his company's tuition assistance program, Learning Together, which includes hundreds of quality colleges and universities worldwide to support the company's full- and part-time employees in advancing their educational goals.

That tuition assistance — combined with class times that fit his schedule and the Global Management curriculum offered in the early 2000s — made the decision to enroll at UOPX a no-brainer. "The master's in global management was well respected and fit my growing role conducting international business," Trujillo says.

Looking back, he knows he made the right choice.

"The degree helped me, and I was given bigger assignments. It prepared me for large-scale integration jobs," says Trujillo, who was already working as a program manager in the freighter conversion world. He gained the skills he needed to carry out his job responsibilities with confidence on the international stage.

"My University of Phoenix classes helped me understand currency fluctuation, contract law and culture, especially how to negotiate within Asian and European culture," he says. He later went on to get his Project Management Professional (PMP)<sup>®\*</sup> designation, offered through the Project Management Institute<sup>®</sup>.

“My father would take me to Long Beach Airport, and we'd park along the runway. When the airplanes would come in to land, I'd identify them.”

“The trick is to inspire, motivate and lead teams that don't report to you. You have to be able to work with people and lead by example with integrity, honesty and empathy. You have to have respect for the team.”

### Career Highlights

Trujillo continued to work in freighter conversion when he graduated from UOPX. He describes how it works: "We take a passenger plane and basically convert it into a flying truck," Trujillo says.

To get the process started, an airline will request conversion of a passenger plane to a freighter. Trujillo then runs point, coordinating the following groups:

- An engineering team, which converts the design configuration
- A procurement team, which buys parts to retrofit the planes for cargo transport, such as a large sliding door, cargo holds and cockpit upgrades
- A modification team, which physically changes the plane
- A converted freighter team, which makes sure the contract is met
- A regulatory team, which ensures government compliance

In addition to project managing for the freighter conversion program, Trujillo also works as a program portfolio manager. This means he manages a collection of programs. For example, within the 737 MAX aircraft line, there are six different models. "So, we have to certify six different models that are all collectively under one model with the Federal Aviation Administration, Civil Aviation Administration of China, Eurocontrol — each of which has different certification criteria."

It's a complicated journey with many moving parts, and Trujillo takes all the challenges in stride.

"I'm at the top of my game. They give me the tough stuff," he says, adding that being a successful project manager is about much more than keeping deliverables on schedule. "The trick is to inspire, motivate and lead teams that don't report to you. You have to be able to work with people and lead by example with integrity, honesty and empathy. You have to have respect for the team."

In fact, for Trujillo, great project management is every bit as much about soft skills as it is about efficient planning, cost reduction, purchasing and delivery. He emphasizes both skill sets in the classes he teaches to Boeing employees in the U.S., Tokyo, China, London and elsewhere around the world.

Ever the project manager, Trujillo is managing a little project of his own: training 50 Boeing PMPs. "Being a PMP, it's my passion to train the next generation," he says, noting that 44 of his students have passed the rigorous PMP training — 96% of them on the first try — in the last 12 years.

"That's what I'd like my legacy to be. I'd like to be the guy who trained an entire generation of Boeing project managers," he says. "I think I'll meet my goal."

As for that fence-clinging kid who romanticized the rumble of jets that sent jackrabbits running wild — what would Trujillo say to him? "Follow your inspiration and listen to your dad. He was right. Planes are cool.

"It's been a good career." 🍀

“That's what I'd like my legacy to be. I'd like to be the guy who trained an entire generation of Boeing project managers.”

<sup>\*</sup>PMP is a registered mark of Project Management Institute, Inc.

# Staff to Student

At University of Phoenix, education is for everyone. Transfer students, returning students ... even staff who decide to become students themselves.



## Ron Erlandson Re-Entry Representative

Should your UOPX path ever cross with that of Ron Erlandson, chances are good you'll have taken your first step toward restarting your education. As a re-entry representative, Erlandson is tasked with helping students who've taken a break from school find their way back. Often, this involves Erlandson imparting some of his hard-earned wisdom.

As an Air Force veteran, life coach and personal trainer, Erlandson knows what it means to have a goal and achieve it. He also thinks motivation is overrated. Success, he says, usually boils down to discipline.

With that in mind, Erlandson embarked on his third master's program at UOPX in 2021. (He actually started as a student before joining as staff in 2010.) He already has a Master of Business Administration and Master of Arts in Education/Adult Education and Training under his belt. As he looks toward the future, however, he'd like to be more effective in his current role and, after retiring, carry on a small counseling practice and maybe even run a nonprofit dedicated to helping military veterans.

### **Which degree are you pursuing?**

Master of Science in Counseling/Clinical Mental Health Counseling

### **What's one tip for juggling work and school?**

Using checklists and reasonable disciplined expectations.

Most people look at time or motivation as the key drivers, but I would suggest they hold a student back. Instead, I have students think about working on lists, because a list can help you stay focused and actually shorten the amount of time you work on something. But the list is never more than three items. So, every day you're doing just three items. For example, today is Tuesday, and I start a class. My three items are: I'm going to ask the instructor a question if I have one, I'm going to make the outline for my paper, and I'm going to read the chapter that involves this week's work. That's it. Then tomorrow, there's another list.

### **How will you celebrate the completion of your degree?**

My short-term goal is to be a better re-entry representative, and it has helped me a lot in understanding students. After I retire, I want to be a licensed counselor and continue to help people and do something I feel I can be mentally sharp for.



## Daniel Miekley Performance Coach

Daniel Miekley is used to looking on the bright side of things. As a performance coach, he works with enrollment representatives at UOPX to help them apply what they've learned in training and build on their existing skills. It's a role for which his high energy and extensive UOPX experience (13 years and counting) are well suited.

But his personal experience helps too. Miekley is a two-time Phoenix who earned his bachelor's degree in 2016. His wife then earned her degree, and now this father of two is back in school for his master's.

What keeps him going? For him, education is an investment in his future.

### **Which degree are you pursuing?**

Master of Management

### **Why go back to school?**

I knew I wanted to do more in leadership and management, and I knew that getting the education would definitely help me. I wanted to be qualified for some of the future jobs I would pursue.

### **What's one tip for juggling work and school?**

It really comes down to calendar planning and time management. I have set times I do my homework. I have set days I do my homework. My wife knows that [and] we coordinate schedules.

Every Tuesday and Wednesday, I know I'm spending two-hour blocks of time working on schoolwork and then again on Friday and then again on Saturday. My goal is to have it finished up to where Sunday, I can rest and have time with my family.

### **How will you celebrate the completion of your degree?**

Maybe I'll actually do a party or even a trip. I'm originally from L.A., and I miss the beach.



## Anissa Armenta Repayment Advisor

Anissa Armenta is one of those people who has it all — she's poised, friendly and good at what she does, which is help students figure out repayment plans for their student loans.

She also has it all in terms of obligations. This three-year veteran of UOPX started her bachelor's program shortly after joining the staff, following in the footsteps of her fiancé and various family members. As she eased into her professional role and her new degree program, she took on buying a house, remodeling, helping her fiancé launch a side business and, yes, planning a wedding.

Here's what keeps her going.

### **Which degree are you pursuing?**

Bachelor of Science in Management with a certificate in Human Resources

### **Why go back to school?**

I wanted to take advantage of the opportunity I had as an employee and use that to better myself and create more opportunities. I ultimately would like to go into human resources.

### **What's one tip for juggling work and school?**

Sometimes you just need a little reminder that you had an assignment due today or tomorrow, or that you have a group project you should be working on just for a little bit at some point today. Setting reminders doesn't seem so significant until you see how much of an impact they can make.

### **How will you celebrate the completion of your degree?**

I would like to take a long nap. And then I'll start my master's. [She's not kidding.] 🍷

# Help Wanted

By Elizabeth Exline

Photo: Lauren Elisabeth Photography

CAREER SERVICES

## Everybody's talking about the job market — but not everybody knows how to navigate it. At University of Phoenix, however, students and graduates have a secret weapon for weathering workplace trends: Career Services for Life®.

What's in a name? Quite a lot if it's "Career Services for Life." And while we live in a world where over-promising is as common as underdelivering, Career Services for Life does what the name says.

"It's a resource center with support for people who are in career transition. So, whether that means they're unemployed and looking for a job, or feeling underpaid or undervalued and would like to try something different, or not sure what they want to do, we can support them through that. It's a great place for career exploration," explains Ricklyn Woods.

Woods is a certified career coach and part of the University's team of career coaches who routinely work with students and graduates on achieving their career goals. Like her colleagues, she brings decades of experience to her role. Also like her colleagues, she has seen how skeptics quickly become believers.

"I tell people so often, 'You have more experience than you think you do,'" Woods says. She cites one recent client who wanted to get into human resources but whose experience was in office administration. Woods chatted with her about her current job duties, pointing out that certain responsibilities — sourcing talent and verifying their eligibility to work — fall under the HR umbrella even if she was performing them as an assistant office manager.

"What we often find is people do have experience; they just haven't connected the dots with how their experience transfers to certain fields or how there is a common thread throughout their whole career that can really be leveraged as experience," Woods explains. That "aha" moment is one of the biggest reasons Woods loves doing what she does.

Here, Woods shares other secret and not-so-secret facts about what Career Services for Life at University of Phoenix is all about.

### What Are People Usually Looking to Achieve With Career Services?

One of the most common questions I get is, "I got this degree five or 10 years ago, and I don't really feel like I'm using it. What could I be doing, or what career options are available?" We have the resources available to help map their degree, if you will, to certain jobs.

A lot of times, we'll get people who have a desire to work in cybersecurity, for example. If you don't have the right experience, you can't always go right into cybersecurity. But there is a pretty clear path that one could take to get there. So, we're able to provide them with the resources, guidance and ideas that they may not have known or thought of.

### And by "Resources," You Mean ...

Career coaches do a little bit of triage to understand what the concerns are. Then we'll prescribe next steps based on what a client is looking to accomplish. It could be an assessment. It could be career pathing.

It could be resumé services. It could be guides for anything ranging from how to write a cover letter to how to interview for a job. It's really a smorgasbord of tools and resources to help our clients and alumni get clarity and develop a plan of action toward reaching their career goals, whatever they may be.

### What's Not Included?

We don't write resumés or LinkedIn® profiles, and we don't do job or internship placement.

[Discover more about what's included with Career Services for Life!](#) →

### What Does the Process Look Like?

The first part might be career exploration, and that could take two sessions, depending on what we accomplish. Clients are given "homework" a lot of the time, so if we're researching career options or industries, career coaches can provide clients with places to go online and look up certain information.

“ I tell people so often, 'You have more experience than you think you do.' ”

Once they have some clarity about their desired industry and what they'd like to do within the industry, we'll talk about how we can capture their work experience and education into a compelling document: their resumé. We'll get into the networking and what their LinkedIn profile looks like. How are they using it?

As they start getting phone calls for interviews, we'll talk about interview prep. I've even had clients who have gotten the job offer and want help with negotiating the salary.

It can be a full cycle kind of career management experience if that's the support that the individual would like.

### How Long Does the Process Take?

Some clients are one and done. Others prefer more support, and we might meet regularly for an extended time.

### How Can Someone Access Career Services?

Log on to [my.phoenix.edu](http://my.phoenix.edu), click on "Career Services" and then on "Get Career Advice." There, you can see all the career coaches available, along with their bios and headshots. For me, I have a heavy background in human resources, so I tend to get a lot of people who are looking to get into HR. Some will reach out because they have the same degree I have. So, I think people can find a career coach based on whatever makes them feel comfortable or connected.

### How Might Someone Reconsider a Job Search In Light of These Services?

I think people believe that career is like a solo sport: You look and apply for jobs independently. No one thinks of talking to someone outside of their family about it. But people aren't staying at jobs for their entire career anymore, and that's what career services is for. The same way that we would go see a physical health practitioner for a checkup, we can come alongside students and alumni on their career journeys.

It's about changing the way we think about our careers in general and knowing there is a resource. Even more fantastic at University of Phoenix, that resource is available to students and graduates for life. All you have to do is make the appointment. 🌸

“ What we often find is people do have experience; they just haven't connected the dots with how their experience transfers to certain fields.”

# Better Together

By Elizabeth Exline

## How Three Friends Made Earning Their Doctorates a Team Sport

**Natasha Myla, La-Toya Facey-Walker and Jennel E. Mayers have a friendship that predates their Doctor of Education degrees and most of their other roles.**

It stretches back to before their respective marriages, their careers, their children and even the two other higher education degrees (bachelor's and master's) they earned together.

Ultimately, the question is not whether theirs is a lasting friendship but just how much their friendship has driven their successes.

“We have a lot of separate accomplishments, but I know that I would not have been able to achieve [earning a doctorate] without them,” Facey-Walker says.

That goes double (and triple) for Myla and Mayers. It turns out that, when it comes to setting and achieving lofty goals, there's strength in numbers.



### Birds of a Feather

Talk to these three women — and it's a given you'll speak with all three at once rather than individually — and it's like talking to three sisters who really like each other.

“Our families are close. Our kids are close,” Facey-Walker says simply.

“We're all godmothers to each other's children,” Myla adds.

They may be close, but they are not the same. In fact, their complementary personalities probably explain better than anything why they get along so well. Myla is the bubbly one, the woman who perpetually wears a smile.

Mayers is the quiet, calm one. She waits to speak until she's sure of what she has to say. She grounds the group in steady good sense.

# 3

And Facey-Walker is the glue that holds them all together as well as the driving force that keeps them in motion.

Facey-Walker and Mayers met in middle school and stayed friends over the course of high school and Sunday church services. In college, they encountered Myla and discovered the missing piece to their triumvirate.

The three women would go on to complete their bachelor's and master's degrees together and work as educators in the same Broward County school district in Florida.

They live within five or 10 minutes of each other. Their children, as Myla noted, play with each other.

But they weren't done.

No one can pinpoint whose idea it was to pursue their doctorates in education. It simply evolved, like their friendship, out of like minds and goals.

"We said, 'You know what? Let's get our doctorates!'" Myla recalls.

## Passion and Perseverance

True to form, the three friends began researching their options, eventually settling on University of Phoenix for its flexible online programs.

While the online format worked for them, the process was far from simple. In addition to the rigor of a doctorate program, life presented serious challenges outside of the classroom.

Myla, for example, suffered a miscarriage at the start of the program. Mayers required a hysterectomy after the discovery of precancerous cells. And Facey-Walker was diagnosed with cancer during her doctorate program. After surgery, she needed to step away from school to, as she puts it, reset, and her friends did the same in solidarity. "We did everything together," Facey-Walker says.

## Finding the Why

It's a story none of them can recount without crying. But it's perhaps a testament to their character, both shared and individual, that the tears are balanced with laughter and no small amount of motivation.

Each woman had her own reason for pursuing a doctorate. Mayers' motivation, for example, stemmed from childhood. "From a young age, I always said I was going to be a doctor, even when I didn't really understand what that was," she says, smiling.

Going through the program, Mayers says her mom was her number-one cheerleader. She was waiting for Mayers outside the door while Mayers defended her dissertation. Mayers opened the door, her doctorate newly conferred upon her, and her mom "was ready with her arms open like, 'Oh my God, you're a doctor!'" Mayers recalls.

When it came time to celebrate their accomplishment, the women pushed through scheduling challenges, balancing work and family and even a pandemic to ensure they all crossed that stage during the same ceremony in Atlanta.

"We started together," Myla says. "We were going to finish together."

## The Payoff

Today, the three women are looking firmly to the future. They continue to work in education, and they are passionate about affecting education from the top down.

That might mean a university-level teaching role at some point. Or a role in educational technology. Who knows? With their doctorates under their collective belt, Facey-Walker, Mayers and Myla know they're unstoppable.

Facey-Walker sums it up thus: "In a world where [there are] a lot of smoke screens, we can stand up and know that when the smoke dissipates, we're still standing with our degrees." 🌸

“ For us, it's really just lifting each other up and making sure that we accomplish the goals that we set.”

# Alumni Why

University of Phoenix is a great place to go to school. Why? Just ask our alumni.

By Elizabeth Exline



## Suzanne Nicole Dempsey

**Bachelor of Science in Health Administration (2022)**

### Best UOPX moment?

There were many moments throughout the program that pushed me to what I thought was my limit at the time, but it was in those moments that I could clearly envision the woman that I needed to become. I now have a synthesized approach to life and leadership.

### One unexpected way your degree has impacted your life?

I have come to understand the need to give back to our communities and to our families, to leave a legacy.



## Rose Lorenzo

**Bachelor of Science in Criminal Justice Administration with a concentration in Management (2014), Master of Business Administration (2016), Doctor of Management (2020)**

### Best UOPX moment?

Graduating with my bachelor's in criminal justice the same year that my daughter graduated with her bachelor's in nursing. We were able to walk at the same commencement in San Diego.

### One unexpected way your degrees have impacted your life?

Getting my degrees from UOPX gave me the confidence to grow my business, participate in podcasts, host webinars, become a thought leader, write a book on entrepreneurship and, most recently, establish the i2O Entrepreneur and S.T.E.A.M. Academy and Youth Leadership and Apprenticeship program. The impact has been immeasurable.



## Stephen Paskel

**Bachelor of Science in Management (2011), Master of Business Administration (2022)**

### Best UOPX moment?

When I graduated from my bachelor's degree program and got to put on a cap and gown for the first time. My father was still alive at the time, and he got to see his son accomplish something that he never had the chance to in his life. It was my best UOPX moment and one of the highlights of my life.

### One unexpected way your degrees have impacted your life?

I pursued my bachelor's degree while I had a really good job and didn't necessarily "need it." But I would not have even gotten an interview for my current role without the degree, because it is a requirement. So, having a degree opened up opportunities that I had not even imagined at the time.

Now, as a recent MBA graduate, I have had even more opportunities open up. My degrees have given me options — and who doesn't love having options! 🌸



**University of Phoenix®**  
**Alumni Association**

**ALUMNI CHRONICLES: ISSUE No.1**