The Vanguard Society, begun in 2012, recognizes and celebrates the powerful impact that Alverno women are making locally, nationally and globally. The Vanguard Society brings together alumnae whose records of distinguished service, leadership and achievement have brought pride and distinction to the College.

These distinguished alumnae have achieved the highest levels in their professions and communities and create a powerful network of resources for Alverno students, faculty and staff.

Through its Career & Leadership Initiative, Vanguard Society women engage with and provide mentorship to Alverno students in a variety of ways, including one-on-one opportunities and in group settings.
Tonya Adair
2003, MA, Director of Instruction and Administrative Leadership

As chief innovation and information officer for Milwaukee Public Schools, Tonya Adair leads four major district departments, including Innovation, School Transformation, Organizational Development and Technology. She is particularly passionate about improving student outcomes for traditionally underserved populations and focuses on assuring equitable opportunities for all.

Successful initiatives under her leadership include establishment of Turnaround Arts Milwaukee in partnership with The Kennedy Center and Turnaround Arts National; implementation and expansion of Telepresence to increase advanced placement course options for all students; expansion of Community Schools in partnership with United Way of Greater Milwaukee and Waukesha; One-to-One Chromebook Devices for all high schools; implementation of the district’s Equity agenda; development of The Principal’s Playbook; and Milwaukee Public School University.

Known to others as a servant leader, Adair has dedicated her life to helping others grow professionally and spiritually. She serves on numerous committees and boards, including City on a Hill, GPS Education Partners, and United Way of Greater Milwaukee and Waukesha Campaign Board.

As a lifelong learner, Adair is currently pursuing a PhD in language and literacy education at Cardinal Stritch University.

“If there is one thing that I have learned, it’s that my leadership is not about me, but all who dare to dream and pursue destiny. By cultivating my passion for serving and helping others discover their own destiny, Alverno prepared me to lead with courage, confidence and always by example.”
Debra H. Amesqua
2004, Business and Management

“Alverno College helped me to change my perspective and mindset about my life and how I fit into this world. I now strive to take it all in with great intensity and focus, until I am overflowing, and then with grace, give it all back without any expectation for reward. I know when I can do this, wonderful things can happen.”

Debra Amesqua was the first female fire chief for the City of Madison, serving from 1996 to 2012. Under her stewardship, the department expanded to meet the needs of the growing state capital. In addition, the department implemented a citywide smoke-alarm ordinance that dramatically reduced fire fatalities in a three-and-a-half-year span.

Amesqua has been nationally recognized for her work on senior-level management training for fire service women and breaking down barriers for people of color.

As the first president of the Women Chief Fire Officers Association, she completed the National Fire Academy Executive Fire Officer Training Program as well as the Senior Executives in State and Local Government Program at Harvard University’s John F. Kennedy School of Government.

Martin Luther King Jr. Heritage Award, Madison, Wis., 2012
Career Fire Chief of the Year, Fire Chief Magazine, 2011
Fire Chief of the Year, Wisconsin Fire Inspector’s Association, 2011
Andrea-Teresa (Tess) Arenas
1982, Professional Communication

Woman of Color of the Year, UW System
Woman of Distinction, YWCA of Dane County
Craven Award for outstanding service and leadership system-wide, UW System Administration

Tess Arenas was the highest-ranking Latina in state government from 1990 to 2005, when she served as the assistant vice president for academic affairs and senior adviser to the president for academic diversity for the University of Wisconsin System. From 2005 to 2015, she served UW–Madison as the founding director of the college of letters and science’s office of service learning and community-based research and as a faculty affiliate in the Chicana and Latina studies and Nelson Institute Fellow. In her teaching, she models and applies the spirit of ability-based learning to support her students’ growth.

A published poet, whose work is studied in colleges and universities in Europe, Arenas is also passionate about telling the stories of Latin women through an oral history project. Somos Latinas serves as a site for community-based research for her students, while documenting the history of Latinas in Wisconsin.

Arenas has extensive experience in creating and amending local, state and federal statutes and policy related to diversity. She developed recruitment, retention and admission policies with legal staff, regents, chancellors, admissions officers and staff from the U.S. Office of Civil Rights. Her work has supported students from varied under-represented groups in the UW System, including African-American, Hmong, Asian, Latino and Native American students. Arenas was founding president of the Wisconsin Hispanic/Latina Council on Higher Education.
Stephanie A. Arend
1985, Business and Management, Professional Communication

Stephanie Arend is a superior court judge in Pierce County. She is the former chair of the Presiding Judge Education Committee for the Board for Court Education and a former member of the Best Practices Committee for the Board for Judicial Administration.

Upon her appointment in 1999, she was a partner with Gordon, Thomas, Honeywell, Malanca, Peterson & Daheim PLLC, in Tacoma, Wash., where her practice focused on land use, real estate and environmental law. Over the course of her legal career she has been a frequent speaker on topics ranging from storm water management to Washington State criminal sentencing laws.

She organizes the superior court judges and commissioners to participate in Habitat for Humanity and formerly was the district convener for the yearly YMCA Youth and Government Mock Trial Competition.

Arend received her J.D., cum laude, from the University of Puget Sound School of Law in Tacoma, Wash.

“During my time at Alverno, I developed self-confidence and a clear direction for my life, both personally and professionally. I was surrounded by people who believed in me, from President Joel Read and my teachers to my fellow students. I truly owe my life to the amazing people I met at Alverno College.”

Karla Ashenhurst
2014, MBA

As the vice president of mission integration at Ascension Wisconsin Karla Ashenhurst is a top executive at one of Wisconsin’s largest health care systems. She has been an influential industry leader, crafting and implementing legislation and policy, and designing and heading large, integrated strategic analysis and planning efforts.

Ashenhurst held numerous positions with Ministry Health Care, with a focus on government affairs, advocacy, health care reform and public policy. Her most recent role was as vice president of mission integration. Before that she was the director of government and community relations for the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. She was also a legislative secretary for the state of Wisconsin, working for two elected officials in the executive and legislative branches of Wisconsin. Duties included speech writing, media relations, legislative research and analysis, constituent case management, and strategic planning.

She is actively engaged in the Alverno School of Business Advisory Council. She is currently in the master’s degree program in health care mission administration at Loyola University in Chicago.

Professional Achievement Award, Alverno College, 2018
Member, Alverno School of Business Advisory Council
Tiffany Barta
2003, BSN

Tiffany Barta has served the City of Milwaukee Health Department since 2005 and was appointed the director of nursing in 2014. As the highest nursing authority at the MHD, she provides leadership and oversight for MHD nursing practice while assuring compliance with Wisconsin state statutes and other laws governing public health nursing. She helped launch the Healthy Kids Collaborative, which involves the City of Milwaukee, Milwaukee Public Schools, MHD and post-secondary schools of nursing to enhance nursing services in the district's schools and community.

She represents the MHD in many local, state and federal partnerships, boards, coalitions, committee and networks. She was the 2015 nursing mentor for “Project Beyond” at Marquette University, serves on the advisory committees for Alverno College and Bryant and Stratton, and has assisted in BSN curriculum development and revision with area nursing schools. In 2016 Governor Walker’s office approved Barta to participate in an advisory committee to review the Wisconsin state statutes for public health nurses qualifications.

Barta is a member of Sigma Theta Tau International Nursing Honors Society Delta Gamma-at-Large Chapter.

“Alverno has helped me accept any challenges and obstacles, whether personal or professional, as learning opportunities for growth, and the hindrance of progress is caused by my own fears. This philosophy of empowerment and control continues to help me stay positive and on track.”

Professional Achievement Award, Alverno College, 2017
Nurse Administrator of the Year Award, Sigma Theta Tau Delta Gamma-at-Large Chapter, 2016
Two-time nominee for Wisconsin Nurse of the Year Award
Director-at-Large for Wisconsin Nurse Association
Jean E. Bartels
1981, BSN

Jean Bartels is the provost and vice president for academic affairs at Georgia Southern University. She formerly held the positions of interim president, dean of the College of Health and Human Sciences and chair of the School of Nursing. Bartels also served as the chair of nursing at Alverno College. Before coming to Alverno, she worked as a staff nurse in the intensive care unit at Columbia Hospital.

Bartels has served on educational policies committees, discipline deans committees, curriculum committees, strategic planning councils, and research and assessment councils at Alverno College and Georgia Southern University. She has taught theory and clinical practice in all areas of the nursing curriculum.

Bartels has also conducted research in higher education areas, and has written extensively on topics such as outcome measurement in nursing education, critical thinking in nursing, nursing education for the 21st century, service learning and community-based nursing education.

“I frequently relay that my Alverno education was far and beyond the very best educational experience of the many I have ever had. Without doubt, my development in the areas of speaking, writing, group process, analytic thinking and problem solving have contributed to my success in the many leadership opportunities that define my career. I am confident and competent, and I owe much of that to the outstanding learning experiences and challenges Alverno’s outstanding faculty provided me. I will be forever thankful that I found Alverno College!”

Founding member, Global Alliance for Nursing Education
Testified before U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Education and the Workforce on projected shortages of nurses and nurse educators
Outstanding Alumna Award, Alverno College, 2005

“I frequently relay that my Alverno education was far and beyond the very best educational experience of the many I have ever had. Without doubt, my development in the areas of speaking, writing, group process, analytic thinking and problem solving have contributed to my success in the many leadership opportunities that define my career. I am confident and competent, and I owe much of that to the outstanding learning experiences and challenges Alverno’s outstanding faculty provided me. I will be forever thankful that I found Alverno College!”

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Tammy Belton-Davis
1993, Professional Communication

With a background spanning two decades in government, education and public relations, Tammy Belton-Davis merged her love of politics and community with communications by launching Athena Communications 10 years ago. In 2016 Belton-Davis founded the Athena Speakers Bureau, a bureau of thought leaders and experts dedicated to connecting transforming messages for building communities and people.

Belton-Davis is an award-winning public relations professional. She was honored in 2017 as Center of Change for her work and commitment to work as a change agent in Milwaukee. In 2018 her firm was recognized with a Diversity in Business Award by the Milwaukee Business Journal.

Prior to launching Athena, Belton-Davis held senior level positions with community-based organizations and city government, and served as staff assistant with the Milwaukee County Board and Milwaukee Common Council. Belton-Davis’ charismatic style in facilitating branding sessions or delivering a customized communications session make her a sought after presenter and leader. She specializes in brand management, strategic communications and government affairs.

Belton-Davis serves as vice president, programming, for the National Black Public Relations Society – Milwaukee Chapter. She serves on a number of community boards and is the program coordinator of Cardinal Stritch University’s African American Leadership Program, the premier leadership experience for African American professionals.

“The impact of an Alverno education is truly not felt until you are perhaps miles away, or years from your last assessment. The Alverno brand is strong and as a brand manager, I value and appreciate the investment in and the impact of being an Alverno woman. It is a brand I wear with great pride.”
Mary Beth Berkes is a principal for the Shorewood Group LLC. She co-founded and is retired managing director of Linden Capital Partners LLC, a health care and life science private-equity firm headquartered in Chicago. She has been involved in health care for more than 30 years.

Berkes has significant governance experience on boards of directors of health care companies and organizations, and chairs audit, compensation and organizational development committees. Berkes spent 18 years as a senior executive at Bristol-Myers Squibb in the ConvaTec division. She also worked in cancer and antibiotic research at the Medical College of Wisconsin.

Berkes actively promotes women in business and community with her involvement at Alverno College, Communities in School, The Chicago Network, Women Employed, Chicago Foundation for Women, and Schools That Can-Milwaukee. She is an Alverno trustee and on the board of directors for Froedtert Health and the United Community Center.

Berkes earned her MBA from Kellogg Graduate School of Business at Northwestern University.

“Alverno instilled in me, and all women who attend the school, a sense of confidence. The faculty and staff did an eye-to-eye with me, as they do with every student, and said ‘don’t let anyone tell you that you can’t do it. If you’re willing to work for it, you can do it.’ Just showing up doesn’t get you a trophy, and it was up to me — up to each of us — to prove our merit, take risks and deliver results. That was the start of a path that defined my professional career and life.”
Anne Boykin
1966, BSN

Anne Boykin is the founding dean and a professor emerita of the Christine E. Lynn College of Nursing at Florida Atlantic University, and the director of the Christine E. Lynn Center for Caring. For more than 30 years in these roles, she dedicated her efforts to humanizing care through the integration of teaching, research and service.

Her impact was recognized upon her retirement with the establishment of the Anne Boykin Institute for the Advancement of Caring in Nursing in 2011, for which she serves as director. This institute provides global leadership to nursing education, practice and research grounded in caring; promotes the valuing of caring across disciplines; and supports the caring mission of the college.

During her career, Boykin served the profession of nursing in various roles at the international, national, regional, state and local levels. Besides being an outstanding administrator at the university level, Boykin maintained an active role in teaching, research and service. She co-authored and edited several books, and has authored book chapters and articles focused on caring, spirituality, nursing as a discipline and story as a method for study in nursing.

“I have been so grateful for the person-focused approach to education I received at Alverno. It helped me to develop an understanding of myself, cherish this and live in accordance with the values I hold dear. This learning is the core of my personal and professional life. It has grounded my philosophy of caring and the meaning of community.”
Mary Braband
1986, Business and Management

For more than 40 years, Mary Braband has worked with clients in numerous industries to determine how they can use technology to achieve business goals. She has been recognized for building committed, motivated teams and for her understanding of technical infrastructure, personnel, software and hardware required in today’s fast-paced information technology environment.

Braband serves as enterprise cloud architect director for Oracle Corporation. She has served as CIO and VP of IT for Maysteel LLC and Leeson Electric Corporation, operations director for GE Consulting Services, and held IT positions with American Appraisal Associates, MGIC and Oster Corporation. In 1996 she was named one of the Top 100 Women in Computing and she received the CIO 100 Award in 2003.

A lifelong believer in community service, Braband is board secretary for Golden House, a domestic abuse program and shelter in Green Bay, Wis. She previously served as chair of the National Kidney Foundation of Wisconsin, board president of the Alverno Alumnae Association, volunteer assessor for Alverno College, board member of Advocates of Ozaukee, St. Aemilian’s volunteer Lakeside, Special Olympics coach and Big Sister.

Braband holds an executive MBA from the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee.

“One of the lessons from my days at Alverno that has stayed with me in every part of my life is to never settle. I’m always looking to improve both professionally and personally, positively impact the people I work and socialize with, and enhance the community in which I live.”
Margaret Bull was a professor and director of the PhD program in the College of Nursing at Marquette University until she retired in 2016. She has done extensive research and writing on issues affecting older adults.

Bull was awarded a PhD in urban social institutions-health policy at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee and a Robert Wood Johnson postdoctoral fellowship in the clinical nurse scholars program at the University of Rochester. Her research at both institutions focused on health care prospective reimbursement policy and the specific impact on older adults and their families. The National Institutes of Health, the Retirement Research Foundation and the University of Minnesota provided substantial funding for her research.

Through her postgraduate publications and teaching and professional activities, Bull has greatly advanced the understanding of selected health care issues and policy implications that have had a major impact on the delivery of health care.

“As an RN student returning for a baccalaureate degree I developed a keen appreciation for Alverno’s nursing faculty and their willingness to recognize and grant credit for one’s prior educational experiences. I also found that persistence in pursuing goals was fostered at Alverno.”
Jovita Carranza
2011, Honorary Alumna

U.S. Treasurer
Albert Schweitzer Leadership Award, HOBY, 2015
Woman of Distinction, American Association of University Women, 2008
Woman of the Year for Outstanding Accomplishments, Hispanic Business Magazine, 2004

Jovita Carranza is the treasurer of the United States. The more you learn about Carranza, the more you’ll see how she breathes life into every aspect of the Alverno mission, every part of the American dream. She worked her way up from the mailroom of UPS to become the company’s highest-ranking Latino (vice president). President George W. Bush appointed, and the Senate unanimously confirmed her, as the deputy administrator of the U.S. Small Business Administration. Her list of distinctions, her work with trade ministers from around the globe and her distinguished contributions to communities would fill this page and more.

Carranza is valued for who she is because she uses synergistically, every part of Alverno’s core curriculum every day. Just like Alverno College, she helps people and organizations achieve results even they didn’t think possible.

She is the founder and CEO of The JCR Group and was named by the governor to the Illinois Enterprise Zone Board in 2015. A committed and active community leader, Carranza has served on the boards of United Way, National Center for Family Literacy, National Council of La Raza, SCORE and the American Cancer Society Corporate Advisory Council among other civic committees. She is the former chair of Alverno’s School of Business Advisory Council.

“The unique backgrounds of Alverno students and the exceptional teaching staff is what tightly and neatly seams together the educational experience for women in search of professional solutions. The Alverno promise of discovery and commitment to excellence are the signature characteristics that I systematically developed in all life endeavors.”
Mary Cieslak-Duchek
1979, Chemistry

Mary Cieslak-Duchek began her nursing career at Aurora St Luke’s Medical Center and practiced in the cardiovascular intensive care unit where she developed many graduate nurses. As an educator she trained nurses to not only manage patients on complex cardiac assistive devices but she introduced the first bedside computer system designed in the country to the nurses and physicians at ASLMC. She then facilitated the integration of newly acquired nursing divisions/hospitals as the Aurora Health Care System expanded across 20 years.

She has served as the chief nurse executive at several sites, implemented many workforce initiatives and greatly expanded the clinical informatics division of Aurora Health Care. Her most rewarding role has always been to support nursing practice at the bedside to continuously improve care. She has also participated in various community partnerships and currently serves on various nursing boards.

Cieslak-Duchek earned a diploma in nursing from Deaconess Hospital School of Nursing and an MSN from the Medical College of Wisconsin. She is a postgraduate fellow of the Johnson and Johnson Nurse Executive Program at Wharton, University of Pennsylvania. She serves as a Lake District Commissioner in Northern Wisconsin.

“As a new nurse, Alverno’s approach women’s education gave me confidence, a sense of empowerment and assisted me early in my career to take on challenges and opportunities. As my nursing roles changed and expanded over the years, the eight core abilities centered in the curriculum provided a strong foundation in meeting my evolving roles in health care. Alverno’s diverse approaches to education also exposed me to new areas of interest and lifelong learning.”
Danita Cole Medved
1980, Art Therapy

Danita Cole Medved is the executive vice president and global client advocate for Willis Group (WSH, NYSE), a leading provider of insurance and reinsurance brokerage services.

Throughout her 30 years in the industry, Cole Medved has been the vanguard creating opportunity for women in commercial insurance. Serving in a role usually held by men, she has set the standard for leadership and professional excellence, helping to put women on an equal footing with men and change the perspective of who can be leaders in insurance. Cole Medved drives the Fortune 1000 and Global Risk Solutions strategies for Willis Wisconsin Group as part of the company’s Midwest region.

Cole Medved began her career underwriting with Liberty Mutual and became a broker to work more closely with clients. She progressed through several client-focused leadership roles with multinational brokers in Wisconsin, electing to join Willis Milwaukee as a senior vice president.

Cole Medved is part of Willis’ most elite network of senior professionals with the credentials, credibility and leadership skills required to have responsibility for its largest, most complex risk accounts. She is a frequent speaker at industry and Willis events.

“I know the skillset I acquired at Alverno was integral to my success. Alverno had always stressed the transferability of competencies from course to course, curriculum to curriculum; in real life I found it was, and still is, a huge asset in adapting to changing career environments.”
Mary Jean Collins is the founder and principal of MJC Consulting, where she provides strategy for grassroots political efforts to change policies at local, state and federal levels.

She has held several executive leadership positions in prominent national organizations focused on equality, women’s rights and social justice. Previous positions include vice president for action for the National Organization for Women. During this time, she was one of 15 individuals selected to serve on the official 1984 Democratic National Convention Drafting Committee.

As deputy director and director of public affairs for Catholics for Free Choice, Collins pioneered a Hispanic outreach program to encourage Hispanic organizations’ involvement in women’s health issues. As senior vice president and political director for People for the American Way, she organized a network of 100-plus progressive organizations in Washington, D.C., and founded an Election Protection Program in 2001. An influential activist during the early women’s movement, Collins helped direct the efforts to ratify the Equal Rights Amendment in Illinois and was executive director of NOW-Chicago.

“The Alverno years completely changed my life. Being part of a woman-affirming learning environment was exactly what I needed to develop my skills and life plan. I was a history major who learned at Alverno how to make history. Sisters Joel and Austin were excellent teachers and part of the generation that shaped a new world for women and girls. I’m proud to be a part of the Alverno tradition of meeting the needs of each generation of women to make a difference personally and in the world.”
Sister Frances P. Cunningham
1965, History

Vatican II Award for Service to the Church in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee, 1994
Co-founder, Cultural Audit workshops, Global Awareness Task Force for Saint Francis Seminary
MA School Administration and MS Cultural Foundations of Education, UW–Milwaukee

Sister Frances Cunningham served as a leader in the School Sisters of St. Francis, having served as a provincial in the Chicago province and as president of the international congregation for two terms. She retired as the parish relations coordinator for Catholic Charities.

She has traveled to many countries. Specifically in her work with the World Mission Office, she made multiple trips to the Dominican Republic to serve La Sagrada Familia Parish. She also traveled to Africa, Europe and many of the Central American countries to serve an international community. Cunningham, director of the Archdiocese’s World Mission Office, believes seeing with your heart opens your eyes to the needs that exist in the world.

“I am most proud of the many opportunities I’ve had to support the development of leadership of women in church and society in various countries and cultures. Thanks to the Alverno spirit, which challenges me to actively engage difference in my life and in my ministries, I am better prepared to think globally and to act locally with compassion for others.”
Vivien De Back
1954, BSN

Delta Gamma Living Legend Award, 2016
Fellow, American Academy of Nursing
Outstanding Achievement Award, YWCA of Greater Milwaukee
Outstanding Alumna Award, Alverno College, 1992

For more than 50 years, Dr. Vivien De Back has been involved in nursing education and practice redesign. She was director of the Alverno College School of Nursing and directed the U.S. National Commission on Nursing. As editor of the *International Nursing Review*, she directed content to inform nurses throughout the world. She has published more than 30 articles and chapters in books and periodicals.

De Back was clinical professor at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee where she assisted the school of nursing in grant proposal development and increasing community involvement in the school’s activities. As senior consultant to Eastern Europe for Project HOPE Nursing Education Programs, De Back assisted in the redesign of nursing education and practice in Slovakia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Romania.

De Back serves on boards and committees of local, state and national nursing, consumer and health care groups. The Wisconsin Nurses Association rededicated its leadership award the “Vivien De Back Nursing Leadership Award” in her honor. She received the Alverno College Ambassador Award in 2015.

“As an educator at Alverno, I learned and taught a new way of educating. This work gave me new tools for teaching others whose lives I would touch throughout the world. My commitment to others and willingness to give of self are so much a part of my family life, my professional life and my community life, thanks to Alverno.”
Sister Mary E. Diez
1967, English

Mary Diez is the president of the International Leadership Team for the School Sisters of St. Francis. Previously, she was the dean of and a professor in the School of Education at Alverno. She directed a number of projects at Alverno College in support of urban schools, and has worked preparing teachers for national board certification and professional development. As the former president of the American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, Diez chaired the AACTE task force on teacher education as a moral community.

Diez formerly directed the Southeastern Wisconsin Assessment Collaborative and was co-director of the Leadership Academy for Character Education and the Milwaukee Public Schools/Alverno College Administrator Mentoring Program.

In the past 20 years, Diez has played a lead role in securing and directing more than $3.36 million in various grants from local and national foundations benefiting Milwaukee schools. She has presented her research on teacher dispositions, assessment and teacher education reform at more than 500 conferences.

“When I ask my students to try something they think they cannot do, to revise a paper or to take an idea farther, it is because I care about them becoming more of who they could be. When they say, ‘I can’t do it,’ I tell them to put a ‘yet’ at the end of the sentence, to remind themselves that growth is a developmental process.”
Dr. Patricia Dix Brewer practices neonatal-perinatal medicine with Cox Health in Springfield, Mo. She was listed in 417 Magazine’s Top Doctors in 2015 and 2017. She expertly treats women with diabetes, birth defects, high blood pressure, rhesus disease and pre-term labor. Specializing in high-risk pregnancy consultation allows her to focus on giving her patients the level of care that they deserve and to teach them about various conditions that may pose a risk to a patient’s pregnancy and future pregnancies.

Dix Brewer is an award-winning practitioner with a wealth of experience that facilitates her ability to provide well-informed medical decisions. Throughout her more than 35-year career, Dix Brewer has garnered recognition for her first-rate patient care and passion for her profession.

“Attending Alverno College was one of the best decisions I’ve made in my life. It was there that I developed into a thinking adult human being. My education allowed me to live the rest of my life grounded in Catholic principles and social justice. It prepared me for my life as a doctor.”
Carol Zinner Dolphin
1962, Speech/Theatre, English

Carol Dolphin is known as an actor and director in theatres throughout Milwaukee and Waukesha counties. She has performed internationally as a professional storyteller.

Now retired, Dolphin enjoyed a nearly 40-year career as an educator. At New Berlin High School, she began the city’s drama program. At Alverno College, she was the first lay alumnae director. Dolphin was professor of communication arts/theatre at the University of Wisconsin–Waukesha and statewide department chair for the 13 University of Wisconsin Colleges. She also conducted numerous communication workshops in the corporate and nonprofit sectors.

Currently, Dolphin plays the role of community volunteer. She has been an Alverno College external assessor since the first year of the program. She is also a Ten Chimneys docent and actor/director for various community theatres and serves on the board of the University of Wisconsin–Waukesha Foundation. She also sits on the Advisory Committees for the Women and Girls’ Fund of Waukesha County and for Waukesha Civic Theatre. She is an avid traveler.

“The development of Alverno’s signature characteristics — confidence, competency and caring — all have been important in my professional and personal lives. The quality of my education, the skills which I learned, the lifelong friends I made — all have enriched my entire life.”
Karen Doppke retired in 2017 as an instructor in the department of radiation oncology at Harvard Medical School and a radiation biophysicist at Massachusetts General Hospital, where she taught physicians and physicists and provided clinical physics support. She serves as a Eucharistic minister at St. Thomas Aquinas Parish in Jamaica Plain, a Boston neighborhood.

After earning her master’s degree in radiation physics from the University of Wisconsin, Doppke became an instructor in the department of radiology at University of Wisconsin Hospitals.

Doppke served on American Association of Physicists in Medicine committees and was president of the New England chapter of the AAPM. As a member of the American College of Radiology, she served as a site reviewer in the Radiation Oncology Practice Accreditation Program.

She is a member of the American Association of Physicists in Medicine and the American Society of Radiation Oncology.

“The transformation that I experienced at Alverno was how the faculty expected all students to be successful women in all aspects of life, and that it was possible for me. They provided the leadership and educational direction for each student to succeed.”
Catherine Dowdell retired in 2012 from her position as corporate new product brand manager at SC Johnson, where she specialized in new business development, strategic brand positioning, and turning consumer insights into market-winning ideas. Dowdell held various positions at SC Johnson, including strategic sales support and market research, and delivered positive sales and share increases for all the brands she worked on.

Dowdell’s commitment to Alverno and advocacy of its unique approach to education started as a student and has not stopped. She served on the Alverno Alumnae Association Board for more than 10 years, including as co-chair and chairwoman. She initiated a board development task force and chaired the first alumnae wine tasting fund raiser.

Dowdell has been a member of the Serrv International board of directors since 2012 and chair of the board from 2015 through 2018. She is currently business manager of the Shields Valley Farmers’ Market in Clyde Park, Montana.

“Alverno is like an ecosystem. Each part of the institution, from the people to the concepts and the buildings, are critical to accomplishing its mission. It succeeds year after year at the very complex task of developing competency rather than simply teaching courses because everyone understands and is committed to accomplishing that purpose. Whether managing a project, a group of people or my life’s path, it is that level of integration and sustainability that I emulate.”
Sister Margaret M. Earley
1952, Mathematics

Outstanding Alumna Award, Alverno College, 2010
Faculty assessor since 1972

Sister Margaret Earley is professor emerita of religious studies at Alverno College. Her deep commitment to her faith, to the college and to her students has bestowed upon her the unofficial honor of most beloved professor. Earley’s passion is the ministry of higher education and the development of the spiritual life of college women — helping them find the core of faith inside themselves and giving expression to that faith in religious practice and public service.

In her career, Earley taught elementary and high school, studied at the Pontifical Institute Regina Mundi in Rome, Italy, and was a formation minister in the postulancy for seven years. In 1969, she became part of the Alverno College community and began her PhD studies in theology at Marquette University. Upon completion of her doctorate, she began teaching theology at Alverno. She recognizes that different students are at different stages in their spiritual lives and she responds to their needs, perspectives and experiences.

“Alverno prepared me for the opportunities I’ve had in ongoing involvement with current issues and developments in my own field of study as well as in social and civic issues across cultural environments and perspectives. I strongly and gratefully attribute who and where I am today, to my spiritual-centered foundation, to Alverno, as a student and alum.”
Lisa Elliott is a lifelong educator. She is the superintendent in the school district of Greenfield, and was the first woman to be named to that position in the district’s history. She works with an amazing team of dedicated educators who are preparing students for college, career, leadership and life through developing learners who can apply knowledge and think innovatively as a result of engaging in rigorous and relevant opportunities in and out of the classroom.

She previously served the school district of Greenfield as a high school chemistry teacher; a volleyball, basketball and track coach; a high school assistant principal and an elementary principal. She also spent two years as the director of curriculum and instruction in the Nicolet School District. Her positive experiences and the exceptional educators at Milwaukee Tech High School are what kindled the flame to be an educator.

Elliott earned her bachelor’s degree in chemistry with a minor in secondary education from Carroll College. Her master’s degree in the administrative leadership is from Alverno. She is currently working on her PhD through Cardinal Stritch University.

“My experiences at Alverno College have profoundly impacted my view of what is important to tend to as an educator and as a leader. The importance of strong, positive relationships as a foundation for the important work of teaching, learning and leading was the core of my experience at Alverno. I am deeply grateful for the opportunity to learn what powerful, contemporary teaching and learning looks like, sounds like and feels like from Mary Diez and Georgine Loacker.”
Suzanne M. Felan
1962, Education

Honorary PhD, Cardinal Stritch, 2016
Sponsors an endowed scholarship at Alverno College
Established an Alverno College athletic award to honor Sister Margaret Mary Martin

Suzanne Felan has been honored in the teaching profession from the classroom to the administrative level and in numerous volunteer settings. She has been sought out to advocate for students deemed unable to learn and developed and guided reading programs that changed the lives of countless young people. Felan has held numerous offices in local and state organizations. She frequently speaks for parent groups, college classes and church organizations.

Felan has taught on a variety of levels from Red Cloud School in South Dakota to Milwaukee Area Technical College. As an assistant principal with the Richfield School District, she developed special education programs. She was a reading supervisor with the Franklin School District and facilitated district-wide in-service training to develop reading and language arts curriculum. She also coordinated the IMPACT program for the profoundly disabled in the West Allis/West Milwaukee School District. Felan’s leadership in the field of education was evident throughout 15 years of service as a reading specialist at Ethan Allen School for Boys in Wales, Wis., where she initiated a peer tutoring program.

She is a board member at St. Colleta of Wisconsin.

“I learned I was a capable student able to learn more than I ever realized. As a result, I became a lifelong learner and continue to be so both through my life experiences and ongoing academic pursuits.”
Janet Fitch
1995, Philosophy & Professional Communication

Janet Fitch founded New Moon Productions in 2000 to conceive and direct projects with potential to convene robust civic engagement experiences and expand thinking and actions within local, regional and global communities.

As an established documentarian, Fitch creates films that offer a fresh glimpse of critical thinking and sensible solutions to societal dilemmas. Her films, after airing on public television, lead extended lives in middle and high school leadership, prisons, communities of faith, university graduate programs, women’s groups, civic and professional programming. She directed the award-winning, three-part documentary series, Guns, Grief and Grace in America, which reframes the debate on gun violence to a non-polarized public health focus on prevention. Her film Changing the Conversation: America’s Gun Violence Epidemic took first place at Alverno’s 2012 Alumnae Juried Art Show.

As a thought leader and invited speaker, she presents at national and international conferences, guest lectures in a broad range of university classrooms and keynotes national webinars. She is currently working with a number of local academic and community leaders to create an interdisciplinary toolkit on gun violence prevention. She is a member of the Milwaukee Film Education Committee and the League of Women Voters.

Woman of Influence Award in Public Policy, Milwaukee Business Journal
Activist of the Year, Shepherd Express, Milwaukee
Communicator of the Year & Service to the Community Award, Alverno College
Donna Gaffney
1968, BSN

Bank of America Local Hero Award, 2012
Nominee, Tampa Bay Lightning Community Hero Award, 2011
Outstanding Alumna Award, Alverno College, 1994
Thomas and Donna Gaffney Endowed Scholarship, Alverno College

Donna Gaffney began her career as a public health nurse first with the Milwaukee Visiting Nurses Association and later with the Visiting Nurse Association of Chicago where she became an assistant supervisor. She then took a consulting position with the Illinois Division of Services for Crippled Children. Gaffney went on to obtain a master of science in nursing degree at the University of Illinois in 1976. Nursing education became her chosen career path and she taught at the University of Illinois, Wayne State University, Madonna College and Oakland University.

As a guardian ad litem for more than 15 years, Gaffney has advocated on behalf of neglected and abused children in the Florida child welfare system. Because of her exposure to the problems these children face, Gaffney co-founded Suncoast Voices for Children, a nonprofit organization that provides financial assistance and resources to fulfill the unmet needs of children in the foster care system.

“Alverno put me in control of my destiny by assisting me in realizing my own inner strength. I left Alverno with an ‘I can do whatever I set out to do’ attitude, an attitude that has served me well and has remained with me to this day. I have passed that attitude on to my son and I am working on my two grand-daughters!”
Ellen Gardner was one of the first female CEOs in Wisconsin and she retired as president of Ameritech-Wisconsin. She began her career with the Wisconsin Telephone Company as a management trainee and gained experience as she advanced through marketing, regulatory, strategic planning and operations.

During her 30-year career with the company, Gardner helped to manage its transition from “The Telephone Company” to a full service, competitive communications business known as Ameritech, now AT&T.

Gardner earned an MBA at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. She has served on a variety of boards, but her most sustaining and satisfying board involvement has been as an Alverno College trustee. In addition, she has served Alverno as an assessor and Alumnae Association Board member.

“As a result of my Alverno education, I learned to assume that a woman could do whatever she wanted to do as long as she was prepared and willing to work hard for it. In the 1960s that was a breakthrough assumption.”
Amanda Gentine
2003, LIC, 2013, MA

Served on Alverno Building a Culture of Philanthropy Committee
Worked to implement Alverno Abilities into Carmen Schools
Former school reform adviser in Abu Dhabi

Amanda Gentine started her teaching career in juvenile and men’s prisons, then taught in a Milwaukee charter high school while receiving her teaching licensure from Alverno. She went on to teach English in Paris, France, and was a school reform adviser in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates.

Most recently, Gentine was the Carmen Schools of Science and Technology director of curriculum and assessment. While at Carmen, Gentine worked to integrate the Alverno abilities into the comprehensive assessment plan, ensuring all students develop and demonstrate all abilities multiple times a year across the curriculum. She received her bachelor’s degree from the University of Notre Dame and master’s of letters from the Université Sorbonne Nouvelle - Paris 3.

Having relocated with her family to Lisbon, Portugal, in 2016, Gentine is enjoying the opportunity and challenge of applying her years in education to the rearing of her two small children. She continues to serve on foundation boards where she directs funding to urban schools and universities and social justice initiatives in Wisconsin.

“Alverno College taught me that making learning relevant and applicable is the key to making it engaging and lasting. Lifelong learning isn’t about prestige or senseless challenge, but about ensuring that every student can find the nugget of what makes a particular subject or concept important to him/her presently or in future studies. Alverno helped me understand that we never stop learning—and that the journey is usually so much more memorable than the destination.”
Marie G. Golanowski
2007, BSN

Marie Golanowski has spent the last four decades in the service of health care throughout the Milwaukee area. She was appointed president of Aurora St. Luke’s Medical Center in 2013.

She had previously served as senior vice president of operations and vice president of clinical integration and practice at Aurora Health Care. Golanowski also held positions as regional vice president and chief nurse executive for the four magnet-designated Aurora Health Care Hospitals in the Milwaukee market.

Prior to that, Golanowski was nurse executive at Aurora St. Luke’s Medical Center where she was responsible for inpatient acute care, rehabilitative and critical care nursing in a 600+ bed facility. She has demonstrated quality leadership in the nursing profession at Sinai Samaritan Medical Center and Milwaukee County Medical Complex.

Golanowski has authored several papers and contributed to a number of texts in the health care and leadership field.

“The eight core abilities of the Alverno learning model remain an integral part of my growth both professionally and personally through the reflective process and alignment of my personal behaviors with these abilities.”
Cecelia I. Gore
1992, Professional Communication, 2008, MBA


Director, North Milwaukee State Bank


YWCA Outstanding Woman of Achievement Award

Cecelia Gore is executive director for Brewers Community Foundation Inc., where she leads fundraising and grant-making efforts for the Milwaukee Brewers Baseball Club’s charitable arm. Her focus is implementing philanthropic strategies to assure that the team serves in an actively engaged community leadership role in areas of health, education, recreation and basic needs, with a particular focus on low-income and disadvantaged youth and their families.

Gore previously worked as program director for the Jane Bradley Pettit Foundation, which focuses on arts and culture, health, education, community and social development. A number of quality initiatives and partnerships were established during her tenure.

Prior to that, Gore served as president of the board for the YWCA of Greater Milwaukee and the Wisconsin AIDS Fund and continues to serve the community at a high level of involvement. She is an Alverno trustee and a board member of the Milwaukee Public Library Foundation, City Year, MKE Film and Greater Milwaukee Foundation.

“My intellectual curiosity is fostered by the tools I have learned from my Alverno experiences. The Alverno spirit helped me embrace the positive impact that higher education has on women and girls along with the beauty of being a lifelong learner. I always take great pride in sharing the power of Alverno with others.”
Lois F. Gresholdt is the vice president/business systems consultant for U.S. Bank, Integrated Card Systems. She manages a team responsible for assessing business requests, research, analysis and development of business/technical requirements to support development and implementation of requested card programs and processing services. She previously held positions as director of retail services, information systems manager and data center manager at various Midwestern organizations.

Community service plays an important role in Gresholdt’s life. She has served as an assessor and Alumnae Association board member for Alverno and was a board member for the United Way of Waukesha County, Milwaukee Area Girl Scouts, and the National Federation of Business & Professional Women, for which she was also the Wisconsin state president. She also tutored grade school and high school students for 18 years as part of Our Next Generation’s after school program.

Currently, she is a member of the IT United Council for the United Way of Greater Milwaukee and Waukesha County. She helps to engage technology professionals in the work of the United Way.

She earned her executive MBA from the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee.

“Outside of family, Alverno is one of the most, if not the most, supportive environments I have experienced. As a student it’s a great place to learn and to grow; as an alum you continually recognize how much your Alverno experience positively impacts your professional career, your personal life and your desire to ‘pay it back’ in your volunteer activities.”
Nadine T. Guirl
1982, Business and Management, Professional Communication

Nadine Guirl served as chief human resources officer and senior vice president of human resources for ProHealth Care Inc. Guirl has held executive and leadership roles at Fortune 500 firms such as Rockwell Automation and Jos, as well as Schlitz Brewing Company and professional services firm Jefferson Wells International, a subsidiary of Manpower.

She is a committed continuous learner and dedicated volunteer. Guirl is a past president of the Alverno College Alumnae Association Board and has served the community as a former Big Sister and board member of Big Brothers Big Sisters of Ozaukee County. She was president of the board of Advocates of Ozaukee County, a nonprofit organization working to end domestic violence and sexual assault.

“Yes, I’m an Alverno woman. After more than 30 years since graduation, I’m still recognized for my energetic presence in public speaking, for my collaborative problem-solving abilities and positively regarded for always striving to see the whole picture. Alverno abilities make my voice heard.”
Barbara Haag-Heitman is managing partner at Nursing Consulting Partners, which provides health care organizations with expert assessments, guidance and educational services. Haag-Heitman has been involved in health care for more than 30 years, and has worked as a staff nurse, educator, clinical nurse specialist, director and regional manager of women’s services for a large multi-hospital health care system. She also is a consultant for the American Nurses Credentialing Center’s Magnet program and adjunct professor at Cardinal Stritch University’s School of Nursing and Saybrook University’s doctoral program.

Haag-Heitman was part of the whole systems-shared governance design team at Aurora Health Care and a team leader for the shared governance design and implementation team at Wheaton Franciscan Healthcare.

Haag-Heitman is the co-author of the first nursing books on peer review and the 2009 Shared Governance Tool Kit for the American Nurses Credentialing Center, as well as additional books and articles on peer review, shared governance, clinical practice development and organizational development.

She is a member of the American Academy of Nurses, the American Organization of Nurse Executives and the National League of Nursing. She is a board member of Delta Gamma-at-Large and the Wisconsin Nurses Association.

“One of my proudest achievements is helping to establish an Alverno chapter of the international nursing honor society Sigma Theta Tau International. Delta Gamma-at-Large recognizes excellence and exceptional achievement in nursing scholarship and nursing leadership among Alverno graduates and faculty.”
Mari-Anne Hechmann
1991, Professional Communication

Mari-Anne Hechmann retired from Baxter International as a manager of customer relations in 2000 after 25 years in the corporate sales and marketing group. In her position, Hechmann interfaced with key customer associations and customer health systems’ corporate executives and staffs. She was the primary internal liaison between corporate officers, public relations and shared values group, and the corporate resource liaison to the company’s seven major divisional health system organizations, as well as Allegiance Healthcare Corporation.

During her tenure Hechmann was honored with the Murdough Award, Baxter’s corporate sales and marketing’s highest annual recognition for service and commitment to its customers, employees and family; and the BWI Award, for development and implementation of a formal management mentoring program.

Hechmann is currently a volunteer with the Mano a Mano Family Resource Center, teaching English as a second language and United States citizenship/naturalization to Spanish-speaking adults.

She co-chaired Alverno’s Promise & Power alumnae working committee.

“A signature quality I developed during my time at Alverno has to be thoughtful listening and respect for other opinions. This quality has enhanced my ability to look at issues from other perspectives and find the best answer to the opportunity at hand.”
Chris Her-Xiong
2002, MA, Administrative Leadership

Fulbright Award: Hays Group Projects Abroad
Woman of Influence Award, Milwaukee Business Journal, 2016
Wisconsin Hmong Woman of the Year, Hmong Consortium
Outstanding Alumna Award, Alverno College, 2014

Chris Her-Xiong founded and is executive director of Hmong American Peace Academy Ltd., a K-12 charter school with more than 1,300 students. As a refugee herself, Her-Xiong has dedicated her work as a teacher, principal, administrator and activist to the education of immigrant Hmong families and their children.

She distinguished herself early in her career in the Milwaukee Public Schools for her success in teaching reading to primary grade children. She was one of the first Hmong teachers in Milwaukee and the first Hmong principal. Seeing that much more was possible to assist children, she established a plan to reform education for the under-served Hmong students in the Milwaukee area.

Her-Xiong serves as a leader in the charter school movement, working to change educational equity not only for Hmong students but also for other under-served groups in the city. She is the author of The Hmong: The People and Their History. Her-Xiong is also a member of the Service Academy Selection Committee for Senator Tammy Baldwin, on the board of directors of the Wisconsin Historical Foundation and a mayoral appointee to the Milwaukee Board of Equal Rights Commission.
Erin Hilgart, PhD
1997, Social Science

Founder of an organizational development and leadership strategy firm
Published dissertation Exploring Professional Identity Shift: A Case of Business Partnering in Finance
Traveled to more than 60 countries and lived and worked in Asia, the U.K. and the U.S.

After working internationally in leadership, learning and development, and change management roles, Erin Hilgart returned to the United States in 2010 and founded Hilgart LLC, an organizational development and leadership strategy firm that believes engaged, inspired employees build great companies and that successful teams are built by leaders who inspire.

As an expert change consultant, certified executive coach and thought-provoking facilitator, Hilgart brings a holistic approach to helping great leaders build great companies. Observing over the years that the development of an organization’s talent is often viewed as a top-down exercise that starts in the C-suite, Hilgart is passionate about ensuring that such leadership development includes strengthening the organization’s middle.

Previously Hilgart held executive positions with Deutsche Bank in London and Singapore, including serving as U.K. head of talent and leadership/global head of finance talent and leadership. In addition to her Alverno degree, Hilgart holds a master of art in organizational psychology from Columbia University. She received her doctorate in adult learning and leadership from Teachers College, Columbia University.

“In my early career, even when the hard work that comes with practicing the Alverno abilities was not rewarded in the workplace, in favor of a ‘keep your head down’ and ‘get the transactional work done’ approach, the capabilities I developed at Alverno helped me to keep my aspirations high. Rather than focus on the more superficial aspects of career, such as the next promotion or short-term praise, my Alverno education gave me the strength to transcend external pressures and focus on solving important problems. That’s been so much more rewarding, and I thank Alverno for influencing me to live and work in this way.”
Sister Elaine Hirschenberger  
1965, English

Elaine Hirschenberger is the executive director and co-founder of Womanspace, a center for the development of women in Rockford, Ill. She has dedicated her career to growing Womanspace into a beautiful, well-respected, independent, interfaith organization that has as its mission “connecting, empowering, creating and transforming our world, one woman at a time.” Womanspace facilitates women’s creative growth and encourages their service to the community and to the broader world.

Hirschenberger has been an administrator, facilitator, art instructor, leader of many initiatives and jack-of-all-trades at Womanspace. She has guided Womanspace’s development for more than 37 years, sharing the transformative power of vision that she learned while a student at Alverno.

Before co-founding Womanspace in 1975, Hirschenberger taught art from kindergarten through 8th grade, art and science in junior high school and high school journalism, drama and art.

“My Alverno education transformed me into an effective and articulate teacher through learning from brilliant and exciting educators. They modeled for me an inner liberation that comes from knowing and speaking one’s true vision.”

Co-founder, Womanspace  
Editor of 10 volumes of Koroné: Women’s Voices  
Caroline Griffith Award for Outstanding Nonprofit Professional, 2006

“My Alverno education transformed me into an effective and articulate teacher through learning from brilliant and exciting educators. They modeled for me an inner liberation that comes from knowing and speaking one’s true vision.”
Patricia Hoben is the co-founder and head of Carmen Schoold of Science and Technology, a network of college preparatory schools that emphasize science and the liberal arts and integrate the eight abilities developed by Alverno College into the curriculum.

Hoben earned a doctoral degree in molecular biophysics and biochemistry from Yale University, but left research early in her career to work in public health policy and science education reform initiatives at the national, state and local levels.

She served as a policy analyst on biotechnology issues for the U.S. Congress Office of Science and Technology, then worked for the U.S. Assistant Secretary of Health as an adviser on public health and science policy issues. Later she headed the pre-college and public science education program at the Howard Hughes Medical Institute, a multibillion dollar philanthropy for funding research, and served as associate director of a Minneapolis-based science museum. Her political and legislative experience positioned her for success in establishing and leading a $6 million community collaborative to strengthen K-12 science curriculum and instruction in the Minneapolis Public Schools.

Hoben serves on the boards of Schools that Can Milwaukee and Teach for America–Milwaukee. She also served as vice chair of Minnesota’s public-private science and math education reform board.

“A transformative insight I gained while taking courses toward my teaching and administrator’s licenses at Alverno was that a single assessment tool can be created and delivered to a group of students who represent a wide range of levels of understanding and still challenge each student to work at her maximal level of performance.”
Patricia Race Hoefler
1963, BSN

Founder and president, MEDS Publishing
Author of Successful Problem Solving and Test Taking series
Exemplar Award, Alverno College, 2015

Patricia Race Hoefler is the founder and president at MEDS Publishing. As a leading nurse educator, Hoefler has taught hundreds of workshops and the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX) reviews for educators and students throughout the United States. She is also the author of MEDS’ best-selling Successful Problem Solving and Test Taking series and the Complete Q&A for the NCLEX series.

A nationally recognized expert on Test Question Logic (TQLogic), she has consulted with numerous schools on the teaching of critical thinking and problem solving. Many of the MEDS Publishing products are considered the gold standard. Hoefler led MEDS Publishing’s continued growth for more than 20 years by developing superior products that offer total curriculum support for nurse educators, hospitals and students. In 2008, after 26 years, Hoefler sold the company.

Hoefler has an active role in creating products and services for health care practices that incorporate state-of-the art technology. With both clinical and educational experience, Hoefler knows what challenges health care professionals face on a daily basis and is diligent in her hands-on work to improve the health care industry.

“I cherish the liberal arts education I received at Alverno College along with my nursing education, which enhanced my personal and professional life greatly.”
Ellen L. Hopper has been chief operations officer of the Northwestern Mutual Wealth Management Company since 2010. She has more than 25 years of experience in the financial services industry.

Her responsibilities include oversight of operational and administrative aspects for the Private Client, Trust and Signature advisory programs.

Previously, Hopper held positions in the compliance department at Northwestern Mutual, including assistant director of human resources. Prior to joining Northwestern Mutual in 2004, she was operations director of private client services at Strong Capital Management.

Hopper is a graduate of Alverno College and the Securities Industry Institute at the Wharton School. She holds the Series 7, 24 and 66 securities licenses.

In the community, Hopper is a board member at St. Joan Antida High School in Milwaukee and sits on the investment committee at Alverno College.

“Alverno has always been ahead of its time, starting with its trailblazing assessment and competency-based learning model. This prepares a woman to be a self-aware professional who is primed to quickly ascend into leadership roles. The big picture is the only picture at Alverno.”
Peggy House
1963, Mathematics & Physics

Peggy House is professor emerita at Northern Michigan University, where she was a professor of mathematics and mathematics education, and the director of the Glenn T. Seaborg Center for Teaching and Learning Science and Mathematics.

During her career, House presented at more than 240 conferences, at state, national and international levels. She also worked with NASA to develop the series, Mission Mathematics II: Linking Aerospace and the NCTM Standards.

She received the Northern Michigan University’s Distinguished Faculty Award and the University of Minnesota College of Education’s Distinguished Teaching Award. In addition, she received the School Science and Mathematics Association’s Excellence in Integrating Science and Mathematics Award and Exemplary Service Award, and Kansas State University’s Alumni Fellow Award. She was the first recipient of the Michigan Council of Teachers of Mathematics’ Outstanding Contributions to Mathematics Education Award.

She served on the board of directors for the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, National Council of Supervisors of Mathematics, Minnesota Council of Teachers of Mathematics, Michigan Council of Teachers of Mathematics, and School Science and Mathematics Association, for which she also served as president.

House earned her master’s degree and PhD from Kansas State University.

“As a double major in physics and mathematics at a woman’s college long before STEM education was in the national vocabulary, I found myself in small classes, many of which could qualify as private tutoring. How would my education compare to a larger university? I had only to step into my own classroom and begin my graduate studies and I knew beyond any question that the educational foundation I received at Alverno was second to none.”
Edith Hudson is chief of Marquette University Police Department.

She is the former assistant chief of police of the Milwaukee Police Department, where she oversaw two of the department’s seven district stations and the Office of Community Outreach and Education. She was the second female ever to hold the position and the highest-ranking African-American woman in the department.

Hudson served previously as sergeant, lieutenant, captain and inspector. She was the first female field supervisor in the history of the department’s Tactical Enforcement Unit. She received numerous awards for her efforts to reduce crime, improve community relations and promote lasting economic development in the city.

During her 25-year tenure with the MPD, she worked to eliminate misconceptions about law enforcement. She initiated numerous programs to open up the lines of communication between police officers and community members, including Community Action Day and Students Talking it Over with Police, a program that educates teens about police procedures. Her partnership with the Martin Luther King Drive Business Improvement District earned national recognition from the Metropolitan Life Foundation.
Katherine M. Hudson
2014, Honorary Alumna

Chief Information Officer of the Year, Information Week
First female president/CEO of a major public company in Wisconsin
Trustee, Alverno College Board

Kathy Hudson became the first female president and CEO of a major public company in Wisconsin when she joined the Brady Corporation in 1994. She retired in 2003 after doubling the company’s global presence and nearly doubling its number of employees.

Prior to taking the helm at Brady, Hudson spent 24 years with the Eastman Kodak Company, where she was the top female executive. She received numerous accolades during her career, including being named “Chief Information Officer of the Year” by Information Week and listed as one of the “25 Most Influential People Shaping the Computer Industry” by CIO magazine. She was named Wisconsin Business Leader of the Year by the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel and the Harvard Business School Alumni Association. She was also named a Worldwide Who’s Who Professional of the Year.

Hudson has served on the boards of directors of Apple Computer Corporation, Honeywell, Case Corporation CNH Global, Ericsson and Charming Shoppes. She is a past chair of the board of trustees of the Medical College of Wisconsin.

She currently serves on the board of International Flavors and Fragrances. She has served on the Alverno Board of Trustees since 1994, leading efforts to bring together the Alverno Texas Alumnae Group.
Mary R. Ingram
1977, BSN

“My critical thinking skill that I developed at Alverno enables me to choose, with my patient, a compatible treatment modality from a myriad of clinical remedies. I owe much of my success as a nurse practitioner, researcher, teacher, administrator, author and leader to this one very important skill that I learned at Alverno College.”

Mary Ingram retired from the U.S. Public Health Department after 30 years of service. She served on two reservations and one urban Indian health hospital as a family nurse practitioner, community health nurse and director of community health nursing.

As a commissioned officer of the U.S. Public Health Service, Ingram was deployed to Mississippi in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. As a family nurse practitioner, she was assigned to provide clinical care to those displaced by the hurricane in Meridian, Gulfport and Ocean Springs. Along with staffing makeshift clinics in department stores and churches, Ingram assisted in transforming two hangars at the Meridian Air National Guard base into a 500-bed hospital with a 250-bed overflow facility and the ultramodern mobile hospital, Nevada-1, in Gulfport.

Ingram has conducted original research into Lakota health and caring practices that was adopted as a curriculum model for the nursing program at Oglala Lakota College and her work has been published in professional journals, books and websites.

In 2014, she received the Alverno Professional Achievement Award.
Georgiana Jungels  
1960, Art

Georgiana (Haumann) Jungels has worked in clinical and educational settings since graduating from Alverno. As a teacher, clinician and professor, she worked in various settings from developing college courses, producing films and presenting at conferences to publishing, consulting and participating in the White House Conference on the Handicapped and the Geriatric Education Center Core Faculty. She testified to the U.S. Senate Committee on Aging and served as president of the American Art Therapy Association and on the boards of directors for People Inc. and Headway Inc. Jungels was an international exchange professor in Jamaica, England, Egypt and Canada.

Jungels received research grants and awards for her advocacy work. Under a NIMH grant, she developed an art therapy training program for mental health and developmental disability services at New York State Hospital. Subsequently, she developed a graduate program in art therapy at State University of New York.

After retiring from state service and the university, she continued consulting as a licensed psychotherapist and serving as a board member of People Inc.

“The work-study program at Alverno provided a solid and realistic foundation for my future. At Alverno, we worked hard in our classes and worked hard in our on-campus assignments. Going from my classes to my work in the kitchen gave me a solid foundation of how to reach for the stars in ideas and walk on the earth in my professional and personal life.”
Sister Joannes Klas
1965, Education

Sister Joannes Klas served as a pastoral minister, community organizer, teacher, social worker and librarian in the Village of San Jose El Tesoro, Yalpemec, a village of returned-refugees from the 36-year-old war in Guatemala.

After teaching 17 years in Wisconsin, Klas followed her dream to work in the missions among the poor in a small village in southeastern Kentucky. She started a Big Brothers Big Sisters program and a special school working with Cumberland River Mental Health to help children with emotional and psychological problems.

Klas worked for the Southerners for Economic Justice in Mississippi on labor and race issues, and then followed her dream to work in foreign missions. After studying in Mexico, Klas lived and worked for nine years in Honduras, where she started a school for refugees.

Klas returned with the refugees to Guatemala where she has lived for the past three decades teaching, supporting and promoting efforts to rebuild communities recovering from the upheaval and trauma of war and displacement. She was honored by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe for her work.

“I appreciate my well-rounded Alverno education. I loved Alverno because I felt the love of the teachers, their genuine interest and willingness to give us all the help we needed. I developed a love for art, literature, music and sociology — and a love for teaching.”
Barbara Kluka is a court commissioner for Kenosha Circuit Court. She retired as a judge from the Kenosha County Circuit Court in 2011. Kluka brought passion to the bench, always taking the time to guide new attorneys in her courtroom. Kluka holds the distinction of being the first woman to serve on the Kenosha County Circuit Court. She was first elected to the bench in 1989, after working in private practice, serving as a Kenosha County district attorney and following a seven-year career as a high school teacher and 11 years in the private practice of law.

Kluka is a former chief judge for the Second Judicial District and served as a member of the Judicial Education Committee, Judicial Conduct Advisory Committee, Planning and Policy Advisory Committee Planning Subcommittee, and as an associate dean of the Judicial College.

Kluka was an instructor in criminal trial practice for judges and law professors in Shanghai and Xian, China. She was a sponsor and mentor for college students interested in law-related careers for University Wisconsin–Parkside and Carthage College; she also taught at the National Judicial College in Reno, Nevada. For 10 years, she taught jury trial management in the Wisconsin Judicial College.

In 2010, Kluka celebrated 25 years as part of the School Sisters of St. Francis mission of giving, healing and defending life, as an associate.

“The biggest transformation I experienced at Alverno was in my faith life. I was fortunate to attend Alverno during Vatican II. Our theology professors were excellent teachers and models for a mature faith life. The experience has seen me through many challenges and changes since then.”
Jennifer M. Kopps-Wagner
1993, English

Jennifer Kopps-Wagner is the head of legal for the life and health division at Kemper Corporation, one of the nation’s leading insurers.

She was previously the executive vice president and COO of Assurant Health. She served as secretary for Assurant Health Foundation until the end of 2011. Kopps-Wagner joined Assurant Health in 1999, holding a succession of positions in its legal department. In her role as vice president of legal, she provided legal support and counsel for Assurant Health’s individual medical, worksite and specialty products lines, as well as operations.

Kopps-Wagner was one of 26 women selected to receive the “Women in the Law” award from more than 70 nominations received. Nominees were evaluated for tackling difficult cases, balancing work and family, volunteering time to mentor others and furthering the role women play in the modern legal community.

Among her many accomplishments, Kopps-Wagner was instrumental in helping Assurant Health to comply with all provisions of the 2010 health care law. As a member of the company’s executive management committee, she plays a critical role in setting the strategic direction of the business.

“Alverno taught me to think critically, to question the status quo and to consider as many sides of an issue as possible. These skills are critical in today’s ever-changing business and regulatory environment.”
Sister Barbara Kraemer
1965, History

Author, *Honduras: Economic and Social Data on the National Reality*
Founder, Center for the Study of Religious Life, 1998

Sister Barbara Kraemer is a member of the School Sisters of St. Francis and has served in leadership of her religious community at the national and international levels. She was elected for second four-year term on the International Leadership Team at the congregation’s assembly in India in 2018. She has taught policy design and analysis, research methods, statistics and the integrative seminar to graduate students in the School of Public Service at De Paul University.

Throughout her career, Kraemer has taught elementary, secondary and higher education students. After earning a master’s degree in social studies education, she became a social studies consultant at the elementary level in the Chicago Archdiocese. She later served as education director for the School Sisters of St. Francis in the United States and was a member of the Chicago Archdiocesan School Board.

Kraemer served in Central America preparing and teaching courses on Catholic social teaching and formation of local church communities in Honduras and Nicaragua. She founded a Center for the Study of Religious Life at Catholic Theological Union at Chicago to help U.S. religious congregations benefit from research on the future of religious life. Kraemer served as president of the corporate members of six institutions sponsored by the School Sisters of St. Francis, including Alverno College, and she was an Alverno trustee for 18 years. She also helped to establish Casa Alexia, a community of six sisters serving the immigrant community at the Texas-Mexico border.

“Two aspects of the Alverno spirit that are important to me are inclusion and engagement in learning. As an educator I try to know my students — what motivates them, how their cultural background affects their learning style, and what supports they need to become self-confident and successful learners.”
After 45 years in health care, Cathie Kurek-Ovshinsky retired from Madonna University as an associate professor in the undergraduate and graduate hospice and palliative studies department. She practiced as a board certified clinical nurse specialist in psychiatric-mental health for 32 years before receiving her doctorate in clinical psychology.

Kurek-Ovshinsky began a teaching career at Wayne State University in 1973 as an assistant professor in psychiatric-mental health nursing. Ten years later, she returned to clinical practice as a primary therapist on an inpatient psychiatric unit at Sinai Hospital-Detroit, after which she joined the psychiatric consultation-liaison team at a level 1 trauma center.

Kurek-Ovshinsky served on a court-ordered mental health team implementing mental health programs in two Detroit-area county jails. Kurek-Ovshinsky went on to spend four years as a therapist in the counseling service at Karmanos Cancer Institute. Her dissertation involved open-ended interviews with individuals who had stopped active treatment for cancer and/or were enrolled in hospice. Kurek-Ovshinsky had a private practice for 40 years. She specialized in treating individuals living with chronic illness.

“The signature characteristic developed during my time at Alverno was an understanding that learning did not end with a college degree but was a lifelong privilege and with it went the responsibility of continuing to heal the world.”
Syneathia LaGrant leads the global People Development team for Molson Coors, the third-largest brewer in the world. She brings nearly 20 years of experience working in training, leadership development and talent management. Her experience includes managing global teams and developing learning interventions for multinational organizations.

LaGrant started her career in beer at MillerCoors, leading onboarding and leadership development programs, including the Women in Beer Development Program and executive coaching. Prior to joining MillerCoors, LaGrant was director for enterprise learning and development for Fiserv Inc. and also held several roles at Johnson Controls, including director of functional learning.

LaGrant holds a bachelor’s in English and secondary education certification from Bradley University. She earned a master’s in adult education with an emphasis on Instructional design from Alverno College. LaGrant is currently in the dissertation phase of the PhD program for Chief Learning Officers at the University of Pennsylvania, which is anticipated to be complete in 2019.

LaGrant also serves on the board for the Community Memorial Hospital Association and as a member of the Pilgrim rest Missionary Baptist Church Advisory Board.

“Being an Alverno graduate student was a unique experience that gave me the confidence and drive to pursue my dreams. It prepared me to think differently and deeper about education. The uniqueness of Alverno is what makes it such an amazing institution of higher learning.”
Norma Lang is professor and dean emerita at the University of Pennsylvania School of Nursing. She is also a senior research emerita fellow with the Annenberg Center for Public Policy, and a senior fellow emeritus in the Leonard Davis Institute for Health Economics and the Center for Health Outcomes and Policy Research at the University of Pennsylvania.

She was the Wisconsin Regent Distinguished Professor and Aurora Distinguished Professor of Healthcare Quality and Informatics. Lang was also the dean at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee College of Nursing.

Lang led the knowledge-based nursing initiative at UWM. This work was a partnership between Aurora Health Care, the Cerner Corporation and the university. She served on the evaluation committee for the Joint Commission Codman awards and chairs the selection committee for the Eisenberg Awards. Lang was vice president of the commission on graduates from foreign nursing schools.

She is a member of the Advanced Health Models Committee of the Office of National Coordinator for Health Information.

She has honorary doctorates from the State University of New York and Marquette University.

“Alverno modeled leadership by women. My years at Alverno happened at a time when women were not visible leaders. I had the opportunity to have Alverno leaders like Sister Joel continuously demonstrate that women indeed could be leaders. She and her colleagues remain amazing right up to the current time. I formed a belief that I really could make significant achievements.”
Grace Larsen
1981, Business and Management

Grace Larsen was the first female vice president of bank operations at the Marine Bank in Milwaukee, and she was responsible for more than 200 employees in three locations. She began her 35-year career at the bank as an entry level clerk. When Marine Bank was acquired by Bank One in Columbus, Ohio, she was promoted to operations specialist and worked on corporate initiatives with representatives from 13 states for the Bank One Holding Company.

Larsen earned a master’s degree from Cardinal Stritch University and a banking certificate from the Stonier Graduate School of Banking at the University of Delaware. She served on the Alverno Alumnae Association board and as an assessor. She and her husband, Thor, established the Grace and Thor Larsen Endowed Fund in 1993 to help other women experience an Alverno education.

Since retiring, she has served on the board of the Southeast Florida Archeological Society for 10 years and was president of that organization for two years. She has volunteered as an amateur archeologist on significant digs throughout the United States and has also volunteered extensively at the Nature Conservancy in Florida.

“I credit my Alverno education for much of my career success in banking. The ability-based system helped me demonstrate to my various bosses that I could apply my knowledge to the various work environments that I encountered throughout my career.”
Kal Lawler is a recognized pioneer for women in the motorcycle industry. She was Harley-Davidson’s first female vice president, its first employee given an expatriate assignment and was its leading advocate for marketing to women during her tenure.

Lawler began her career in advertising. Initially on the agency side of the business, she moved to the client side by joining Harley-Davidson in the 1970s. She subsequently moved through the corporate landscape to vice president of marketing, after which she became vice president and managing director for Harley-Davidson in the United Kingdom. Lawler lived and worked in Europe for five years, developing a strategic plan for the company’s pan-European business while growing the U.K. business.

Upon returning to the U.S., Lawler established a corporate communications function at Harley-Davidson. As vice president of communications, she reorganized and led the communications functions for the company.

To honor her parents, Lawler sponsors the Eugene and Joyce Lawler Endowed Scholarship.

“My colleagues describe me as apolitical, in the business sense, and ‘the one in the room who is always willing to ask the tough questions.’ I am inquisitive and undeterred by the elephant in the room.”
Gerri Lietz-Staffileno
1980, BSN

Gerri Lietz-Staffileno is the retired vice president of hospital operations, Milwaukee campus, and system chief nursing officer at Columbia St. Mary’s Hospital. She joined Columbia St. Mary’s in 1988 and held numerous positions, including director of nursing support and senior director of hospital operations.

Lietz-Staffileno began her nursing career at Theda Clark Regional Medical Center in Neenah, Wis., and St. Vincent Hospital in Green Bay, where she specialized in orthopaedics and telemetry. She earned a diploma in nursing from Mercy Medical Center in Oshkosh, a bachelor’s degree in nursing from Alverno College and a master’s degree in business from Keller Graduate School of Management.

She has been a member of numerous boards, including the advisory board of the Wisconsin Donor Network, the Horizon Home Care and Hospice Board and the WHA Foundation Board. She is also a volunteer assessor for Alverno, a mentor for the Health Administration Program at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee and a member of the American Organization of Nursing Executives, the Wisconsin Organization of Nurse Executives and Sigma Theta Tau International.

“The Alverno I experienced was akin to a warm blanket — a sense of support, nurturing and challenge wrapped around me by my teachers and fellow students. The people around me were as invested in my success as I was! The knowledge I learned around communication, natural inquiry and my connection to the world has served me well throughout my career.”
JoAnn Lomax
1974, BSN

JoAnn Lomax is the nurse liaison in the patient relations department at Froedtert Hospital, where she serves as a link between hospital administration and a multidisciplinary team of health care providers and patients and family members.

Lomax started her nursing career in 1959 as a nursing assistant and became a licensed practical nurse. Lomax is a strong patient advocate, and part of her role is to perform “rounding” in Froedtert’s four intensive care units daily, where she may deal with a crisis at any moment. Lomax is known for her ability to handle stressful and complex patient and family issues, and she coaches staff in methods to help them in resolving stressful patient-family situations.

Lomax is a co-chair of the Inclusion Advocates Patient Team and is responsible for the creation of the Cultural Ally Program, designed to assist staff in cultural issues.

She is the former president of the Wisconsin chapter of the Society for Healthcare Consumer Advocacy and the Milwaukee chapter of the National Black Nurses Association.

“An Alverno signature characteristic for me was the ability to clearly articulate my beliefs with compassion and understanding.”
Jeanne M. Lowry
1988, BSN

Robinson Humanitarian Award
Outstanding Homeless Advocate, State of Wisconsin, 2009
Outstanding Alumna Award, Alverno College, 2008
Alumna of the Year Award, UWM School of Nursing, 2000

Jeanne Lowry is retired from 20 years of service with the American Red Cross, where she devoted herself to caring for others in the mental health community. Through this agency, she developed the Homeless Outreach Nursing Center and other programs and services for homeless people, including a respite care program in collaboration with the Salvation Army. She also previously taught part-time at Alverno in the Community Psychology graduate program.

Lowry started Autumn West Safe Haven, a center that provides mental health–related services to people who are homeless and have a mental illness. In retirement, Lowry remains dedicated to the homeless community who suffer from mental illness. She also conducts community classes on nonviolent crisis intervention and instructs shelter staff and other agencies on engagement with people who are homeless.

Lowry serves on the boards of directors of Vital Voices for Mental Health and Justice Point and volunteers at National Alliance for Mental Health Illness of Greater Milwaukee. She volunteers with Midwest Meditation and is on the Milwaukee Mindfulness Committee.

“My time at Alverno helped me to see my work as collaboration with others, embracing respect for people often held in contempt by society, and an appreciation of a free exchange of ideas as we work together toward solutions.”
Kathleen Marsh
1984, Business & Management

President, Music Publisher Association of the United States
Board member, International Confederation of Music Publishers
Company recognized as one of the top 500 retail websites every year since 2006

Kathleen Marsh co-founded and serves as CEO of Musicnotes Inc., which sells digital sheet music online. The concept was unheard of in the early 1990s. Marsh brought together technology and creativity to create Musicnotes in 1998, and under her leadership it has become the largest digital publisher of sheet music in the world. The company provides nearly 300,000 pieces of officially licensed digital sheet music and guitar tablature to more than 4.5 million customers around the globe.

Marsh began her career at Robert W. Baird & Co., where she built a successful business by teaching college-level investment courses. After being recruited into magazine publishing at A-R Editions, she developed and launched an innovative and highly successful specialty magazine to serve the furniture and design industry and spent five years in sales leadership.

She has served as president of the Music Publishers Association since 2012. In 2016, she joined the board of the International Confederation of Music Publishers in Brussels, a worldwide confederation of national music publisher associations.
Pamela Maxson-Cooper
1984, BSN

Women of Influence Award, Milwaukee Business Journal, 2009
Board member, Wisconsin Organization of Nurse Executives
Member, Alverno Graduate Nursing Advisory Board

Pamela Maxson-Cooper is the retired senior vice president of patient care services and chief nursing officer at Froedtert Hospital and the Medical College of Wisconsin. As CNO she established an onsite bachelor of science in nursing program and created a scholarship program for nurses who want to pursue advanced degrees.

Maxson-Cooper helped Froedtert become one of the first hospitals in the region to implement electronic medication barcode scanning at the patient's bedside to assure safe medication administration.

Under her leadership, Froedtert was named a “Magnet” hospital, the prestigious designation for nursing excellence and quality patient care, which is held by only 5 percent of hospitals nationwide. Maxson-Cooper also served as a nursing instructor at Alverno College, held a governor’s appointment to the State Board of Nursing for 12 years, served in leadership roles in neuroscience at Froedtert Hospital and University Hospital in Madison and leadership and staff roles in two California hospitals.

Maxson-Cooper has published articles on Six Sigma in health care and the unique Seven Seventy scheduling pattern, which was implemented for nursing when Froedtert opened its doors and is still predominately in use throughout the hospital.

“The Alverno spirit is to never stop learning and believing in yourself! Alverno taught me anything is possible. I learned to speak publicly with confidence delivering heartfelt messages of my passion for nursing and being able to make a difference in others’ lives forever. Alverno taught me obstacles are blessings and help us endure to be the best in whatever we pursue!”

ALVERNO VANGUARD SOCIETY
Jestene McCord
1979, BSN

Jestene McCord was a geriatric nurse, unit manager and health care executive who has touched countless lives through her care, mentoring and volunteer work. During her career, McCord designed and supported a mentoring program for young people interested in health care careers. She adopted North Division High School as her major health care initiative and paired young people interested in health care with professionals in the field.

McCord has worked with InRoads, a nonprofit organization that develops and places under-served youth in business and industry and prepares them for corporate and community leadership. Upon her retirement, a scholarship was established in her name.

McCord volunteers and previously served as one of five women who ran a talk radio show on a volunteer basis at WMCS. She is a mentor, mother, friend, community activist and role model to many.

In 1996, then-Representative Tom Barrett called McCord “a tireless advocate for the people of Milwaukee and cities throughout Wisconsin,” during a tribute to her at a Black History Month event.

Academy of Legends, Milwaukee Community Journal, 2011
Courage Award, Alzheimer’s Association, 2010
Woman of the Year, Career Youth Development, 2003
Member, Alverno Graduate Nursing Advisory Board
JoAnn McGrath
1957, BSN

Outstanding Philanthropist, 2015
Bene Award Recipient, Alverno College, 2009
Golden Jubilarian Award, Alverno College, 2007
Honorary Degree, College of the Holy Cross, 2001

JoAnn McGrath is a trustee of the Highland Street Foundation, which she co-founded in 1989 with her late husband, David J. McGrath Jr. Since its inception, the foundation has contributed more than $200 million to nonprofit organizations in Massachusetts and California, primarily in the areas of education, housing, mentoring, health care, environment and the arts.

She serves or has served in a leadership capacity with many organizations including the Museum of Fine Arts Boston, the Kennedy Center for Performing Arts, McCallum Theatre, Eisenhower Medical Center, the Barbara Sinatra Children’s Center, Boston University, the Archdiocese of Boston, Catholic Schools Foundation, St. Elizabeth’s Medical Center, Boston University Medical Center, International Film Festival and The Living Desert.

Her generosity to Alverno College is unmatched. In 2012, Alverno was proud to introduce the JoAnn McGrath School of Nursing in recognition of her extraordinary gift to her alma mater. McGrath also sponsors annual scholarships for nursing students and formerly served on the Alverno Alumnae Association Board.

“The signature characteristic that Alverno instilled in me was an awareness of the whole person. Specifically when I began the nursing program, early on I learned a patient was not just ‘the appendix in Room 203’ but a patient with an illness who also needed attention psychologically, spiritually and mentally. I carried that awareness with me to better understand and help family and friends and to relate to them as a whole person.”

Jean McKey
1996, Business and Management

Jean McKey is president of McKey Perforating Company Inc. McKey took over the company from her father, Douglas McKey, who died in 1983. In 2000, the company expanded by opening a branch facility in Tennessee. The company, a contract manufacturer, has applications in tight-tolerance custom components for automotive, electronics, construction and agriculture equipment, mining, and many other industries. In 2012 the company was acquired by Reliance Steel and Aluminum, a Fortune 500 company voted one of the world’s “most admired companies.” McKey remains as president.

In 2008 and 2010, McKey Perforating Company was listed as the 12th largest woman-owned and operated Wisconsin business in the Milwaukee Business Journal’s Book of Lists.

McKey is grounded in the community through various philanthropic work with the United Way of Waukesha Co., Rotary Club of Milwaukee, American Red Cross, the Women and Girls Fund of Waukesha and the United Performing Arts Fund.

“My Alverno education helped me identify and take advantage of my own thinking and learning patterns. This knowledge guides me every day in my personal and professional decision making.”
Sister Jo Ann Miller
1960, History

Co-author, *Teach with Your Strengths: How Great Teachers Inspire Their Students*

Earned a master’s degree in history from Loyola University in Chicago

Sister Jo Ann Miller, co-director of the Strengths Development Center, retired in 2014 from Gallup in Omaha, after 40 years of employment with SRI (now Gallup).

Returning to Milwaukee, Miller was eager to continue the “Strengths Revolution” initiated by Dr. Don Clifton in his 2001 book *Now, Discover Your Strengths*, introducing the Clifton StrengthsFinder. Miller continued her strengths ministry of enhancing human life and wellbeing through strengths in the Milwaukee area. The center's mission is to provide training to individuals, equipping them to use their strengths to develop the strengths of others for meaningful engagement in life, service and work, especially in urban education and nonprofit organizations. Miller has more than five decades of educational ministry as a high school teacher, teacher educator and Gallup consultant.

Through her work, Miller has seen many people grow personally and professionally by adding appropriate knowledge and skills to best use their natural talents. Miller has a positive psychology philosophy that continues to serve her and many well.

“I have been a School Sister educator since I left Alverno in 1960. To me, this means being a woman of generous giving, excellent service and unwavering hope no matter where I am or with whom I am engaged. I believe in each person’s God-given talent and have been blessed to work for an organization dedicated to identifying and developing human talent.”
Sarah Miller is the director of marketing strategy at Rodan + Fields. Previously she was the director of growth insights at J.M. Smucker Company and senior director of consumer strategy and insights for Del Monte Foods’ Pet Food Division, where she was the strategic lead for more than 40 new pet product launches.

Before joining Del Monte, Miller was responsible for brand planning and new business development at a succession of major international marketing firms. She has held executive positions at a top global digital communications agency and a worldwide ad firm, and has worked with clients such as Gallo Wines, Dell, General Motors, Mitsubishi, Starbucks, Mars Petcare, Merck and more.

Miller was an adjunct instructor in brand planning at the San Francisco Academy of Art. She received several advertising industry awards for Mitsubishi campaigns as leader of the brand planning team and was honored with the Milo Award, presented annually to a Del Monte employee who demonstrates creativity and innovation in strategy and insights.

Miller is active in philanthropic giving with a focus on humane shelters and animal welfare programs.

“Alverno’s Philosophy Department taught me to question assumptions. Many large companies have a set of ‘known truths’ about who their customers are, what these customers believe and how to communicate with them. I ask questions that challenge sacred cows. Philosophy teaches you to think rigorously, to consider and critique assumptions, to pursue essential meanings.”
Jeanette Mitchell
1982, Business and Management

“Alverno unveiled a new passion in me: community service. I remember being asked in one of my classes, ‘When you die, what will your tombstone say: that you just passed through this world or that you made a difference during your journey?’ That question and its answer have stuck with me, and I continue to want to make a difference as an Alverno woman.”

Jeanette (Reed) Mitchell is the retired program director at Cardinal Stritch University’s Leadership Center, where she co-founded the organization in 2001 and was its first executive director. Mitchell leads the Leaders of Color Practice within the Leadership Center.

She has more than 30 years of management experience in the corporate world, including overseeing multimillion dollar budgets, building and developing cross-functional teams, and launching project initiatives.

Before joining Cardinal Stritch, Mitchell spent eight years as an educational program officer at the Helen Bader Foundation. Before joining the foundation, Mitchell spent more than 30 years in corporate America in senior management roles at Ameritech/SBC/AT&T. She had a strong track record of success, rising from directory assistance operator to become the company’s first African-American female district manager.

Mitchell was a three-term president of the City of Milwaukee School Board and has consulted for SEED Boarding School of Milwaukee and the Partnership for Education in Milwaukee. She currently serves on the national board of the Frances Hesselbein Leadership Institute and is a member of the City of Milwaukee Charter School Review Committee.
Judy Murphy
1975, BSN

Don Eugene Detmer Award, AMIA, 2014
Federal Health IT Leadership Award,
Health Information and Management Systems Society, 2014
President’s Leadership Award, AMIA, 2013
Fellow, American Academy of Nursing

“For me the Alverno transformation was realizing that with hard work and the right attitude, I could do anything I set my mind to.”

Judy Murphy is the chief nursing officer for IBM Global Healthcare, where she is responsible for building relationships and expanding business across the health care industry. She is a member of the IBM Industry Academy and is a much sought after consultant and speaker on the digital transformation of health care.

Murphy has been involved in many aspects of organizational work at American Medical Informatics Association and Health Information and Management Systems Society, serving on numerous committees as well as their board of directors.

Prior to working at IBM, Murphy was CNO and deputy national coordinator for programs and policy at the Office of the National Coordinator for Health IT (ONC) in Washington, D.C. She led federal efforts to assist health care providers in adopting health information technology to improve care and to promote consumer understanding and use of health information technology for their own health.

She went to ONC with more than 25 years of health informatics experience at Aurora Health Care in Wisconsin, where she led their electronic health record program when Aurora was one of the early adopters of health IT. She was named one of the “20 People Who Make Healthcare Better” in 2007 by HealthLeaders magazine.
Sirri A. Nomo-Ongolo
1967, Medical Technology

Sirri Nomo-Ongolo is the founder and medical director at Complete Home Health Services and the medical adviser of a member clinic of The Travel Clinics of America.

Nomo-Ongolo never intended to change the face of medicine in her communities, but she managed to do just that. Following her Alverno graduation, Nomo-Ongolo returned to Cameroon where she grew up and took on a challenge medical professionals dismissed. Surgeons at Yaounde Central Hospital in Cameroon’s capital struggled with shortages of blood for surgery and for treating young children with sickle cell anemia. With the urging of a hospital physician, Nomo-Ongolo accepted the challenge of creating the hospital’s first blood bank.

Also in Cameroon, Nomo-Ongolo tackled diabetes education and created a program for low-literate diabetics to help patients to live healthier, more productive and longer lives. As a result of her groundbreaking work, she was asked to speak at the International Diabetes Federation in Washington, D.C., in 1991.

Nomo-Ongolo’s current volunteer work in the community includes home health care visits to the elderly, working with individuals suffering with opiate addiction and providing medical training to volunteers working with elderly patients.

“I arrived at Alverno as a timid teenager and left with the conviction that the sky is the limit. I took Sister Joel’s voice in my mind telling me, ‘You can do it. You might have to work a little harder, but you can do it.’”
Sister Kathleen A. O’Brien
1967, History

Kathleen O’Brien is the vice president of academic affairs for the American Islamic College. The college provides students of all backgrounds with a solid liberal arts and sciences education that includes a rigorous academic formation in Islamic studies.

She was previously senior vice president for academic affairs at Alverno College. She came to the college in 1976 to design and implement the Business and Management degree program and served on the team that instituted Alverno’s Weekend College program in 1977. She was Alverno’s academic dean for eight years and interim president of the college in the 2003–04 academic year.

O’Brien has consulted on student assessment with colleges and universities throughout the world. As an extension of her work on assessment, she directed a team of faculty and staff that developed the diagnostic digital portfolio, software that helps students track their learning progress and that is patented in the U.S.

O’Brien’s community service has included membership on the board of the Wisconsin Women in Higher Education, Milwaukee Science Academy, Milwaukee Montessori School as well as Girl Scouts of Southeast Wisconsin, where she served as chair. As a member of the Rotary Club of Milwaukee, she has worked on numerous committees, including one that provides scholarships and mentors local high school graduates through their college years.

“Alverno College is about reaching one’s potential while growing a generous spirit. As an undergraduate, I was challenged by a caring faculty and staff who helped me become a lifelong learner who cares about and serves the broader society. As a faculty member and administrator, I’ve had the opportunity to help foster potential in both students and faculty while working to grow a culture of hospitality and care.”
As CEO of Advicent, Angela Pecoraro leads the global executive team and steers them toward a common mission of enabling everyone to understand and impact their financial future through state-of-the-art financial planning technology. Her personal goal at Advicent is to develop extremely satisfied, lifelong clients as well as a team of first-in-class leaders across the business.

Sharing her vast knowledge and expertise on publications such as Huffington Post, InvestmentNews, RIA Central, Financial Planning, Financial Advisor Magazine, and WealthManagement.com, Pecoraro is dedicated to providing best practices, thought leadership, and industry-leading technology throughout the financial services technology (FinTech) industry at large.

As a technology executive with more than 15 years of industry experience, she has operated software-as-a-service (SaaS) companies of various sizes, holding leadership positions, including director of customer relations, vice president of professional services, president and chief operating officer, throughout the biggest growth phases in their history.

“As an Alverno MBA student, I experienced tremendous personal and professional growth throughout the entire program. The experiential learning opportunities were invaluable and unlike any other program around. The collaboration between the instructors, students and other business professionals positively impacted my individual performance, set the stage for future role opportunities and, ultimately, strengthened our company’s business results.”
Silvia N. Perez-Rathell
1998, Social Science

Silvia N. Perez-Rathell is the Washington, D.C., Satellite Office Government Relations chairwoman for the National Association of Women in Real Estate Businesses.

She previously served as the national chief development officer for the National Association of Hispanic Real Estate Professionals and before that as the national senior director of corporate and federal relations at the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC) in Washington. Founded in 1929 and representing more than 900 councils across the U.S. and Puerto Rico, LULAC is the oldest, largest and most widely respected Hispanic civil rights organization in the United States.

Perez-Rathell served as the vice president of corporate relations at the United States Hispanic Chamber of Commerce. Her ultimate goal is to continue to be an advocate at the national level, to find ways to increase the leadership and involvement of the Hispanic communities across the nation and to empower them to bring positive change to make their communities more resourceful and self-sufficient.

“While at Alverno, I was always encouraged to be involved, to choose challenging classes, to volunteer and to help others by becoming a peer advisor and by becoming an Alverno ambassador. My professors challenged me beyond any limits I had set for myself.”

President’s Award, MAFO, 2016
Service to the Community Award, Alverno College, 2015
Governor’s Council on Migrant Labor, 2004, 2006
Board member, National Farmworker Alliance
Barbara Ramusack is the Charles Phelps Taft Professor Emerita of History at the University of Cincinnati where she taught South Asian and Chinese history at the undergraduate and graduate levels. She has published three books and many essays on the princes of India and women and gender issues. Her current research analyzes efforts to improve maternal and infant health in late colonial south India.

After serving two terms as director of graduate studies, Ramusack became the first woman to head the department of history at Cincinnati. In 1974 she was a co-founder of the women’s studies program. She was also elected to the national councils of the Association for Asian Studies and the American Historical Association.

She served on the Joan Kelly Memorial Prize Committee for the best book each year on women in history and/or feminist history from 2016 to 2018. The American Historical Society awards the Kelly Prize.

Ramusack also participates on the “Legacy Project,” which seeks to record and preserve the oral histories of its faculty in honor of the bicentennial of the University of Cincinnati in 2019.

“Because Sister Joel Read and Sister Martine Hundelt were such extraordinary mentors, I gained the self-confidence to pursue graduate degrees in history and to teach at the university level when few women did so. Consequently I have tried to be as supportive as they were in my relationships with my undergraduate and especially with my graduate students. I have sought to help my students achieve an understanding of how history can enrich our lives and sharpen our analytical skills, a willingness to accept adventurous challenges and a greater self-confidence in order to pursue their dreams.”
Joan Reardon is a culinary historian, cookbook author and biographer. Reardon brings to her research and writing credentials as diverse as a doctorate in English literature, a former professorial career at Barat College in Lake Forest, Ill., and an accredited culinary certificate from Kendall College in Chicago.

Reardon’s cookbook, Oysters: A Culinary Celebration, was published in 1984 to critical acclaim. Her book M.F.K. Fisher, Julia Child, and Alice Waters: Celebrating the Pleasures of the Table was nominated for an IACP Award. Her biography, Poet of the Appetites: The Life of M.F.K. Fisher was published in October 2004 and received the International Association’s Award for Culinary Literary Writing. In 2008, her work honoring Fisher’s 100th birthday, M.F.K. Fisher Among the Pots and Pans, was published. She also received her second IACP Award for Culinary Literary Writing for As Always, Julia: The Letters of Julia Child and Avis DeVoto in 2011.

Reardon also contributed essays to Scribner’s Encyclopedia of Food and Culture and Oxford’s Encyclopedia of American Food and Wine. She wrote the “Introduction” for the 50th Anniversary Edition of M.F.K. Fisher’s Art of Eating.

She is currently writing a book on three women: Madame Kuony, Alma Lach and Abby Mandel, who made distinctive contributions to the cuisine of the Midwest. Reardon’s archives and culinary collection are housed in Alverno’s library.

“Perhaps it was editing my high school’s literary magazine and then Alverno College’s creative writing journal, or perhaps it was teaching everything from technical writing to poetry as a college professor that made all this come about. Whatever the reason, my publications tell a story of someone who fell in love with words and never fell out of it.”

Joan Reardon
1952, English

Literary Food Writing Award for As Always, Julia: The Letters of Julia Child & Avis DeVoto, International Association of Culinary Professionals, 2011

Cuisinart Award for Literary Food Writing for Poet of the Appetites, International Association of Culinary Professionals, 2004
Cathy Rick is a health care consultant focusing on leadership development, innovation and patient engagement. She held the highest ranking nursing position for the Department of Veterans Affairs (2000–2014) where she had responsibility for strategic vision and policy-setting related to nursing practice, research, education and disaster relief. She is a fellow of the American Academy of Nursing.

Rick served as an adjunct assistant professor of nursing at the Uniformed Services University and has been a guest lecturer at the George Mason Health Policy Institute. She holds a position on the editorial board for Nursing Administration Quarterly. Prior to retirement from the Department of Veterans Affairs, she focused on White House objectives for the Department of Health and Human Services under the Joining Forces initiative. She also worked with the Health Resources & Services Administration on health care reform workforce programs. She was a senior advisor to the Jonas Center for Nursing Excellence following her retirement.

Currently, she is a faculty member for the Arizona State University Executive Fellowship in Innovation Healthcare Leadership program and has been a board member for the AvaSure company since 2014.

Rick has published on a variety of topics in nursing and health care and she is a frequent speaker on topics related to advancing nursing practice, patient care delivery models and leadership principles for all nursing roles. She has an honorary doctor of science from Marquette University.

“A signature characteristic that I developed while attending Alverno was a creative sense of inquiry that has shaped my ability to focus on the future while learning from the past—strategic thinking and staying focused on what really matters.”
Diane Rowe
1990, Psychology and Business and Management

Diana Rowe is a captain with the Milwaukee Police Department. She serves as the commanding officer of the First District, which encompasses downtown Milwaukee, the Third Ward and the Upper East Side. She also oversees the department’s Harbor Patrol Unit, the Underwater Investigation Unit and the Mounted Patrol Unit.

During her 27-year career with the Milwaukee Police Department, Rowe has served as the commanding officer for several critical areas of the department, including the Office of the Chief, the Intelligence Fusion Center and the Internal Affairs Division.

She was the first female to be promoted to supervisor and later captain, within the Forensic Division. She was the only female to serve as the representative for Milwaukee Police Department with the Major City Chiefs Intelligence Commanders Group.

She currently serves on the Milwaukee Urban Stables Steering Committee and the Fire Life Safety and Security Committee for the Milwaukee Street Car.

Rowe has served as a board member for the St. John the Evangelist School’s Athletic Association, and board member and treasurer for the Home and School Association.

“My Alverno experience provided me with courage, self-confidence and inner strength to accomplish my goals and achieve professional recognition while overcoming obstacles in a male dominated environment.”

First female captain within the Forensic Division, MPD
Only female representative with the Major City Chiefs Intelligence Commanders Group
Received departmental award for exemplary achievement, MPD Sixth District, 2014
Sister Catherine M. Ryan
1969, History

Catherine M. Ryan is the executive director of Maryville Academy, a child care agency of the Archdiocese of Chicago. Maryville provides shelter, respite, residential and hospital care to about 200 children per day, and offers after-school programs to 2,000 additional children each year.

Ryan is also a member of and the general treasurer for the School Sisters of St. Francis, a religious community of women serving in 10 countries on four continents.

Prior to her work at Maryville, Ryan was chief of the Juvenile Justice Bureau, Cook County State’s Attorney’s Office, where she worked with children who were abused and neglected or were involved in juvenile delinquency. Prior to that, Ryan was a partner with the Chicago law firm of Ryan, Miller & Trafelet PC, where she concentrated her law practice in child welfare and family law. She has written for professional legal publications and presents on topics of continuing legal education.

“Alverno opened a window for me to the histories and cultures of the U.S. society and of the larger world. It is a hallmark of Alverno education that we do not simply learn facts, but also consider the questions why, how and what if. It is a gift of Alverno education that we learn to value and work for right relationships in our society and in our world.”

Justice John Paul Stevens Award, Chicago Bar Association
CARES Award for Community Service, Holy Family Medical Center and Resurrection Health Care
Cardinal Bernardin Award, Chicago Legal Clinic Inc.
Kim D. Schaffer
1981, Business and Management

Kim Schaffer is the senior vice president and director of operations at Park Bank. She is part of the senior management team and has responsibility for treasury management, deposit and loan operations, and IT/IS. She is also involved in strategic planning and budgeting.

Schaffer began her banking career at Park Bank in 1994, but left for 18 months to help establish Community Bank in Delavan, Wis. She continued a lifelong journey of learning by earning an MBA and attending the Graduate School of Banking Program at the University of Wisconsin–Madison.

Schaffer is involved in community efforts as a member of the Rotary Club of Milwaukee. She is a former member of Alverno’s School of Business Advisory Council.

“My have modeled the Alverno spirit by utilizing the eight core abilities in both my professional and personal life.”
Sister Celestine Schall
1948, English

Honored by the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning
Honored by the American Society for Training and Development
Service to the Community Award, Alverno College, 2012

Sister Celestine Schall is a career coach and admissions liaison at Alverno College. She has contributed to the college in numerous ways in strategic roles, most notably as the first director of the Off-Campus Experiential Learning program, now known as the internship program. She laid the groundwork and structure of the program, connecting numerous business people in the community with Alverno. To this day, *U.S. News & World Report* ranks Alverno’s internship program among the nation’s best.

Schall pioneered the college’s career development program, infusing into Alverno’s curriculum career courses with academic credit and founding and directing Alverno’s Career Development Center and its many community outreach programs, including the Making Alternative Plans program, an individual career-counseling program which served clients from the greater Milwaukee area.

Schall has held key roles with the School Sisters of St. Francis. She was elected provincial coordinator of the U.S. Province of the School Sisters of St. Francis. At an earlier time, Schall served as provincial of the Rockford Province in Illinois. She was the assistant dean of Student Sisters – Sister Formation, Alverno College.

“My Alverno College education prepared me to carry forward Alverno’s values: a spirit of service to others, hospitality, a faith-centered focus and a love of learning. On this foundation, I built my life of SSSF service to others in many varied responsibilities that make up my professional/religious career.”
Sister Judeen Schulte
1971, BSN

Judeen Schulte is a professor in the JoAnn McGrath School of Nursing and the director of partnerships and study abroad in the International and Intercultural Center at Alverno College. She has served as dean of nursing, dean of graduate studies and director of Alverno’s Nursing Center for Wellness and was the FIPSE project director for the Faculty Consortium for Assessment Design and the FIPSE Consortium for Using Self-Evaluation Protocols.

Before joining Alverno, Schulte worked at the Visiting Nurse Association of Omaha as a staff nurse and then supervisor of PHN, LPN and clerical staff. She also worked at the Nebraska Methodist Hospital in Omaha, first as a staff nurse and team leader and then as an instructor in the school of nursing.

Schulte has written several books and articles and has authored a chapter on Mastering the Teaching Role: A Guide for Nurse Educators. This book received the AJN 2008 Book of the Year Award. As a nurse educator, Schulte is a national and international consultant.

An active volunteer, Schulte serves on boards of directors of health care and educational institutions as well as on numerous committees for the School Sisters of St. Francis. She also serves as a peer review team leader and member of committees for the Higher Education Commission.

“Alverno’s educational processes emphasize questioning and being open to new learning; these are central characteristics I bring to any endeavor.”
Mary Ann Schwartz
1962, Sociology

Mary Ann Schwartz is professor emerita of sociology and women’s studies and a former chairperson of the sociology department at Northeastern Illinois University, where she co-founded and was actively involved in the women's studies program. She also served as a faculty consultant to the Network for the Dissemination of Curriculum Infusion, an organization that presents workshops nationally on how to integrate substance abuse prevention strategies into the college curriculum.

Throughout her educational career, Schwartz advocated for improving student access to higher education, the academic climate for women and the quality of undergraduate education. As an official in the University Professionals of Illinois Local 4100, she worked to win collective bargaining for higher education faculty in Illinois.

Schwartz co-authored two college textbooks: Sociology: Making Sense of the Social World and Marriages and Families: Diversity and Change, now in its eighth edition. Currently she is the board vice president of Lincoln Park Village, whose mission is to help older people age well in their homes and communities.

“Two lessons I learned at Alverno stand out in my personal and professional life: the importance and need to be a lifelong learner and the obligation (and rewards) of sharing what we learn and giving back to our communities. These two lessons led me to a life of social activism.”
Marilyn Shrude is a composer, pianist, teacher and contemporary music advocate. She has consistently promoted American music through her many years as founder and director of the MidAmerican Center for Contemporary Music and as chair of the department of musicology/composition/theory at Bowling Green State University.

Shrude’s music is characterized by its warmth and lyricism, rich timbre, multi-layered constructions and complex blend of tonality and atonality. The result is a bright, shimmering and delicately wrought sound world that is at once both powerful and fragile.

Shrude’s compositions have been recorded by a number of artists; her works for orchestra, wind symphony and choir have led to collaborations with conductors of renown. She has had the honor to work with the impressive musicians from around the world and she has premiered, recorded and presented hundreds of works by living composers in the United States and abroad.

Shrude was the first woman to receive the Kennedy Center Friedheim Award for Orchestral Music.

“Alverno sewed the seeds for lifelong learning by providing a stimulating academic environment that fostered creativity and encouraged inquiry.”
Gina Spang
2008, MBA

Women of Influence, Milwaukee Business Journal, 2018
President, Italian Community Center and Chair, Festa Italiana, 2013 & 2014
40 under 40 Award, Milwaukee Business Journal, 1992
Outstanding Woman of Achievement Award, YWCA

Gina Spang is a senior project manager for VJS Construction Services Inc., which has extensive experience in building schools. She has a solid background in operational efficiencies, construction administration and large community wide initiatives. In 2009, Spang became the first, and to date only, female to serve in the position of director of facilities and maintenance services for Milwaukee Public Schools. During her tenure, she prioritized projects and directed resources focused on sustainability, green infrastructure, energy conservation, facility modernization and pursuing projects that fostered public/public and public/private partnerships.

Spang was appointed as MPS chief of staff in 2015, serving as a liaison for the superintendent with the Milwaukee Board of School Directors, local officials, community organizations and other local agencies on districtwide issues. In addition, she helped to identify, develop, engage and integrate external resources to support schools, students and their families.

Spang’s professional career, board service and community involvement have nicely intersected with a continued focus on supporting children and women in Milwaukee.

“I like to think that I had a positive affect on people’s perception of a woman in the construction industry and that I made it a little easier for those women who entered the field after me. Alverno women are leaders and have it together, so when the opportunity presented itself to apply for the inaugural class of the MBA program at Alverno, I jumped at it!”
Rose E. Purpero Spang
1962, Sociology

Rose Purpero Spang is a senior financial representative with the Holter Group, a top ranked office of Northwestern Mutual, and earned “Million Dollar Round Table” status in her first year. In 2011, Northwestern Mutual recognized Spang for outstanding volunteerism as part of its annual Community Service Award program for her work on behalf of Alverno. Her first such award from NM was for her work as one of the founders of the Circle of Women for the YWCA.

Spang also served on the board of the Italian Community Center and Festa Italiana. She has been honored by the Thurgood Marshall Scholarship Fund for her leadership in helping “to prepare a new generation of leaders.”

Spang is a former Alverno trustee and past president of the Alumnae Board. She served on the leadership committee to engage alumnae in the Promise & Power campaign. Along with her siblings and husband, Joseph Spang, Spang established the Charles and Rosalia Purpero Memorial Endowed Scholarship Fund in 1986 in honor of her parents, which she supports annually.

She earned her master’s in sociology of law and criminal justice from Marquette University and her chartered life designation from American College. She served five years as associate director of the Mental Health Association of Milwaukee County.

Spang is a member of TEMPO, Professional Dimensions, Women’s Court & Civic Conference, and the Greendale Women’s Club. She is also a member of the FBI Citizens Academy Alumnae Association and in 2017 was made a lifetime member.

“I see how so many Alverno alumnae are doing meaningful, momentous work to positively transform our communities — and I’m honored to be part of that movement.”
Mary E. Staten
1981, Biology, 1998, MA Director of Instruction

Mary E. Staten has more than 20 years of experience in public education and is the director of clinical placement and licensing at Alverno College. She retired from Milwaukee Public Schools as the K-12 science curriculum specialist in 2012 where she led the development and implementation of science curriculum, instruction and assessment. Staten began her career with MPS as a high school science teacher and worked in the capacities of teacher leadership, project/grant management and partnership development in science education.

Since that time, Staten has served as an instructor and supervisor in science education for Alverno, Marquette University and Cardinal Stritch University. As the director of clinical placement and licensing for Alverno, she identifies field and student teaching experiences in K-12 schools for education students. She also serves as the authorized licensing officer for the School of Education.

One of Staten’s most treasured professional experiences is her leadership role in developing, implementing and coordinating the Girls’ Academy of Science and Mathematics after-school program with faculty from Alverno’s Natural Sciences, Mathematics, and Technology Division. She began this work in 2013 to provide first-generation students of color from families with low-incomes an opportunity to engage in a rigorous science and mathematics education curriculum taught by college science and mathematics professors. The program works to increase ACT scores and prepare junior and senior girls for success in college.

“Sister Leona Truchan’s teaching, mentoring, and friendship greatly influenced my decision to change my major from medical technology to biology so that I could do a microbiology lab internship at Miller Brewing, which eventually led to a position at Miller as a microbiologist. This internship, in addition to Alverno’s ability-based program, helped to build my confidence interacting with others one-on-one and in group settings in both my personal and professional lives.”
Mary Stryck is a retired rehab services coordinator for acute inpatient services and manager of the Day Treatment Program at the Milwaukee County Behavioral Health Division. Stryck is an adjunct faculty member of the Alverno College Music Department, where she teaches a music therapy clinical course. She is also a violinist for the Festival City Symphony.

Stryck is an active member of the American Music Therapy Association and serves as a delegate to the AMTA assembly. She has also served as the national chair of the Association Internship Approval Committee.

Stryck has served her profession on regional and state levels. She has given presentations for music therapy conferences and state meetings, as well as for the Department of Health and Human Services, Division of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services of the State of Wisconsin.

Stryck balances her commitment to working with people with mental illness with her other passion: playing the violin in Southeastern Wisconsin and the Chicagoland area. Since her youth, she has been actively involved in music ministry and continues to play violin in area churches.

“To thine own self be true’ is a hallmark of the educational philosophy at Alverno. Through this philosophy, I have learned to move beyond competing against others to the never-ending journey of taking self-inventory and working toward development and growth. It has changed me as a person, giving me the ability to accept and value myself while still learning, growing and changing.”
Mary Stull
1979, BSN

Mary Stull is a health care executive at Cerner Corporation. She previously served as senior director of consulting services at Nextgen Healthcare, where she provided overall direction for a team of 75 professional and technical consultants.

After graduating from Alverno in 1979, Stull pursued her PhD in nursing service administration research at the University of Illinois Health Science Center in Chicago. After completion of the program in 1984, she served as director of a federally funded grant that spanned 13 Midwestern states.

Stull has held administrative and executive positions in health care consulting and service at organizations such Northwestern Memorial Healthcare, Watson Wyatt Worldwide and Elmhurst Memorial Healthcare in west suburban Chicago.

Stull speaks nationally on topics such as population health management and integration of physician practices.

“The signature characteristic that I developed during my time at Alverno is confidence. This confidence has allowed me to continually challenge myself both personally and professionally.”
Kiyoko Toyama
1981, Business and Management

Kiyoko Toyama is the past president of NKK Switches, where she served 13 years as president. At one time, she was the only female president in the multibillion-dollar American switch industry and one of few female presidents of a Japan-based technology company. She is an influential leader with vision and business savvy.

Toyama’s bilingual, bi-cultural background and intuitive management skills proved advantageous in her career in the technology industry. She began her career in the operational department when Nihon Kaiheiki (NKK) opened its U.S. operations in 1981. Her business expertise focused on applying switch technology to industries in the U.S. and Canada, and a commitment to exceeding customers’ expectations. Her significant accomplishments were rewarded with a promotion to vice president and director in 1984 and president in 1999.

Since retirement from NKK Switches, Toyama has been active as a guest speaker and lecturer at various Arizona organizations, including Arizona State University’s business school, where she has shared her expertise and experience of being a female executive of a Japanese based corporation.

As a vice president of the board of directors at Japanese Friendship Garden of Phoenix, she is actively campaigning to raise the capital to complete the garden’s master plan it has had before it was opened to public 15 years ago.

“I transformed from a passive learner to a student who not only internalized subject matters but was able to communicate them effectively in front of an audience or in a group setting through interactions by taking various roles dependent on a situation and matters at hand.”
Sister Paula-Jane Tupa is the director of education at Escalade Academy. An educator and diagnostian, she has a long history of giving children, teens and adults with learning disabilities hope for the future. Tupa has an uncanny ability to figure out why a child, a teenager or even an adult struggles with learning.

Tupa has been a special needs diagnostian and instructor at every level of learning. She has taught from Chicago and New York to Loyola Marymount in California. She has been recognized and honored for her work with special needs students. Tupa’s nonprofit school, Escalade Academy in Lake Forest, Ill., lives up to its philosophy of “providing the forward thrust that every child deserves in order to develop his/her talents.” The emphasis is on success, not achievement.

The learning disabled person may have any of the variety of learning disabilities, from dyslexia to non-verbal learning disorders, each requiring specific remediation, and Tupa starts where they are, not where one thinks they should be.

Tupa has also established schools, tutoring programs and workshops for instructing teachers to learn her methods.

“The gift of teaching is only successful when you can identify the true gifts of ability inherent within each student.”
Linda Umbdenstock
1968, Social Science

“...a Franciscan charisma in an Alverno education: I was not only routinely engaged intellectually by smart, caring women, I was also challenged to take learning into the community and apply it to the issues of the day. Today people say I, too, am a bridge person, vigorously engaging heart and mind, connecting past and future across various cultures, adapting the strategies of the arts and sciences and natural ecosystems for work with social justice issues.”
Maria Varela
1961, Speech

Maria Varela is an economist, educator and community organizer. She has also been an adjunct professor at the University of New Mexico (1983–1992) and Colorado College (1997–present).

Varela began her organizing career for the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee civil rights movements in Selma, Ala., in 1963 and in 1968 moved to New Mexico to work for the Hispano Land Grant movement and rural activists in Rio Arriba County, New Mexico.

Varela received a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship for her work of promoting culturally sustainable development in poor rural communities and was the subject of a Smithsonian magazine article on conflicts between environmentalists and land-based people. She was listed as a “Hero for Hard Times” by Mother Jones magazine and was one of the activists featured in the 1996 PBS documentary Chicano! A History of the Mexican American Civil Rights Movement.

Varela is co-author of Rural Environmental Planning for Sustainable Communities and contributor to Hands on the Freedom Plow. Her photographs of the civil rights movements in the South have been widely exhibited across the country.

“The theology of Rerum Novarum, a ‘Magna Carta for subsequent social teachings for decades’ was most influential in my growing consciousness. It called on Catholics to reconstruct society altogether, a task which would have to engage people at all levels of society beyond their personal acts of piety or works of mercy.”
Maria Lopez Vento
2013, MBA

Maria Lopez Vento started her career in philanthropy when she joined the Helen Bader Foundation in 1992 as an operations assistant. Vento has held a variety of operations and program roles at the foundation, including assistant to the president, grants administrator and program associate. In 2007, Vento was promoted to program officer, where she oversaw the foundation’s Community Partnerships for Youth grants portfolio.

In 2013, Vento was appointed vice president of programs and partnerships. In this senior leadership role, Vento offers strategic guidance to a team of five program officers and a community engagement coordinator, who steward the foundation’s annual $16 million investment in organizations focused on aging, arts, employment, youth, social services and other key program interests in Milwaukee and internationally. She also directs the foundation’s efforts to enhance Milwaukee education, bring the arts to under-served audiences and support a stronger nonprofit sector in the region.

Vento serves on a number of local boards and advisory committees that address youth development, urban education and nonprofit management. These include the Latino Arts, Holton Youth+Family Center, Greater Milwaukee Committee for Community Development’s Downtown Taskforce, Milwaukee Succeeds Funders’ Collaborative at the Greater Milwaukee Foundation and Islands of Brilliance.

“Alverno is an incredible and diverse learning community that challenged me intellectually and personally. The in-classroom and team experiences offered opportunities for me to reflect on my professional work, as well as bring new tools to enhance Bader Philanthropies’ footprint in the community. On a personal level, the experience reinforced the value and importance of servant leadership in transforming the world. As I continue on my life journey, I hope I can share Alverno’s passion for lifelong learning with people of all ages and walks of life.”
Sister Marion Verhaalen worked on the updated international history of her School Sister of St. Francis congregation. She is an educator, musician, composer and author.

Verhaalen's doctoral dissertation was on two Brazilian composers, and she was awarded a research grant from the Organization of American States to spend a year in Brazil working with composers Camargo Guarnieri and Francisco Mignone. At the time, her research on Brazilian music was some of the first works done in this area.

Verhaalen returned to Alverno College to study and teach, then went on to teach piano and piano pedagogy at the Wisconsin Conservatory of Music. She was an instructor and coordinator of piano for Milwaukee Public Schools for nearly two decades. While at MPS, she wrote Keyboard Dimensions, the piano curriculum for MPS students. In 2005, she began teaching at Cardinal Stritch University.

Verhaalen conducted piano pedagogy workshops in the United States and in Brazil and was a Fulbright professor at the Federal University in Porto Alegre, Brazil.

“Working in a creative art — music — it was very apparent that the gifts each of us brought really belonged to all of us. We worked together to create something new (that spirit) that none of us could have created alone. That is a treasured spirit that does not always exist in other institutions.”
Sister Mary Jane Wagner
1964, Music

Sister Mary Jane Wagner is the director of music ministry at St. Joseph Center Chapel, where she develops programs in music, liturgy and spirituality for musicians in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee and the larger ecumenical community. She also is an adjunct professor of music at Silver Lake College, Manitowoc, Wis., and is a member of the summer graduate faculty in the Rensselaer Program of Church Music & Liturgy in Rensselaer, Ind.

Wagner has been the director of music for a number of parishes, including Milwaukee’s Cathedral of St. John, for more than 15 years. She has been on the faculty of Alverno College and St. Francis Seminary, Milwaukee. Wagner was among the first women nationally to be named a cathedral music director, and while at the Cathedral of St. John she inaugurated *The Play of Daniel*, a medieval music drama, which was presented annually from 1985 to 1992 and remains an outstanding accomplishment of the fine arts series.

As an educator, Wagner shares her love of music. She has taught at various levels, including National Pastoral Musicians Organ School, and conducted workshops and master classes at regional and national music conventions. Wagner has been a guest organ recitalist throughout North America, including performing at the National Cathedral in Washington, D.C., honoring the beatification of Edith Stein.

“Ever striving for excellence along with maintaining integrity and generosity of spirit were significant qualities of my Alverno learning experience. Outstanding faculty, especially Sisters Theophane and Seraphim, Sisters Mary Hueller and Agnes Meysenburg provided marvelous opportunities and experiences.”
Patricia Milliken Wilde, retired teacher, brought the love of science to high school students by teaching chemistry at a community college in Illinois for 25 years. Wilde received her master of science degree from Clarkson University and did postgraduate work at the University of Illinois. She also conducted endocrinology research at Northwestern University Medical School.

Today, Wilde enjoys volunteering. In 2007, she and her husband were honored with the Leadership Award from Catholic Charities, recognizing their longtime commitment to the community and parish. She received the Baraboo Area Literacy Council Award in 2004 for her ongoing commitment to children, reflecting her commitment to Kids’ Ranch, which serves children through educational and recreational programs. Wilde also founded Ozanam House, now called Safe Harbor, a shelter for homeless women and children located in Reedsburg, Wis.

Wilde serves on a mission advancement advisory committee, is actively involved on a justice and peace committee, remains connected with the Kids’ Ranch and is a source of support for the Safe Harbor homeless shelter.

“My Alverno education helped to develop the intangible aspects of my life, such as the imparting of love for learning, the realization that education is truly a lifelong process and a challenge to develop the gifts I have been given.”
Laurie G. Winters
2012, MBA

Laurie Winters is the executive director and CEO of the Museum of Wisconsin Art. She was appointed the third director in the museum’s history after being recruited from the Art Consortium, an international think tank of museum and art world leaders, which she founded.

Winters established her reputation as a curator at the Milwaukee Art Museum, where she served for 15 years. During her tenure, she developed a nationally and internationally acclaimed exhibition program that helped more than double the museum’s attendance. Her work on Leonardo da Vinci and the Splendor of Poland was named one of the top five exhibitions of the year by Apollo magazine.

Her exhibit Summer of China brought Chinese art to Milwaukee for the first time, and her collaboration with the Albertina in Vienna led to a Beidermeier exhibit that is recognized as a model of international collaboration. Winters was a fellow in the inaugural class of the Center for Curatorial Leadership and in the Getty Museum Leadership Institute’s Museum Leadership Institute Program.
Barbara Wyatt Sibley
1982, Business and Management

Barbara Wyatt Sibley is the former executive director of the Milwaukee Christian Center, a faith-based organization focusing on meeting the needs of all people in our community regardless of race or age.

From 2002 to 2005, Wyatt Sibley was the president and CEO at YWCA of Greater Milwaukee. She was appointed by Gov. Jim Doyle to be deputy secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Regulation and Licensing and was one of the first African-American women to hold a top position in a state department.

Wyatt Sibley spent much of her career in a corporate setting. During her 30 years at AT&T, she was in management/operational site environment. While there she helped establish the Ameritech Black Advisory Committee and the Leadership Forum. Wyatt Sibley has been a consultant with Fortis Healthcare (now Assurant), and was a regional manager at Time Warner Cable.

Wyatt Sibley is a longtime community and civic activist as she continues service on a number of boards. She is a trustee on the Alverno College board and is the co-chair of Alverno’s academic and student affairs committee.

“The spirit of the Alverno community has been with me since graduation. It gives me pleasure to give back to the college whenever I can. I have been an assessor, class speaker, on the Alumnae Association and now a trustee. I am truly proud to be an Alverno graduate, ‘a place where all belong.’”
We thank these Vanguard women for the leadership and inspiration they gave to so many women.

Dorothy Bock ’50
Dorothy Bock devoted her life to inspiring and empowering women through the creative process. After studying curriculum development at Northern Illinois University, Bock wrote and piloted an integrative program of literature, art, music, theatre, religion and social studies for high school students. In 1975, she applied the core of this program to Womanspace, a center for the development of women, that she co-founded and served as program director for until 2008.

Sister Austin Doherty ’54
Sister Austin Doherty’s influential leadership left an indelible mark on Alverno College in her 46 years of service. She played a crucial role in the development of Alverno’s world-renowned ability-based curriculum and student assessment model in the early 1970s. More than 40 years later, educators from around the world visit Alverno to learn its teaching methods. Above all, Doherty was a well-respected and dedicated scholar and incredibly connected to students, cheering them on and challenging them to be their best.

Judith A. Drinka ’61
Judith Drinka planned to teach after earning her Alverno degree, but she instead took a job in a real estate office, where she worked with the firm’s lawyers. After a respected colleague told her, “Women aren’t going to make it in law,” she trusted her instincts. She received her law degree from Marquette University and later established Drinka Law Offices. She received the Distinguished Alumna In Law from Marquette University and the Outstanding Alumna Award from Alverno College.

Sylvia Edstrom ’91
Sylvia (Bruff) Edstrom journeyed a full and accomplished life, raising four successful children; co-founding Edstrom Industries, which became a worldwide leader; creating passionate art, and continually making people smile. She enrolled at Alverno when she was 55, and her love of painting was ignited. She was honored with the prestigious Alverno Exemplar Award in 2013. She also became a certified scuba diver, a licensed pilot and traveled the world extensively.

Sister Agnes Marie Henkel ’60
Sister Agnes Marie Henkel was a woman of faith and strong commitment to God, her religious community, family and friends. With her gentle but driving passion, she effectively led Milwaukee Achiever into the new millennium, serving as its third executive director until her retirement in 2000. She also provided leadership to the Wisconsin province from 1966 to 1976 and from 1979 to 1983 when she was elected as U.S. regional director to bring the seven U.S. provinces together to become one U.S. province.
Sister Mary Hueller ’43

Sister Mary Hueller ’43 was a professor of music at Alverno College for 55 years and chaired the music department and the fine arts division. Hueller was a natural teacher and clinician of the arts. She knew from a young age that student learning depended on the passion and commitment of the teacher. For 10 years, Hueller assumed a leadership role in the Milwaukee Symposia of Composers and Liturgists.

Sister Georgine Loacker ’47

Sister Georgine Loacker was one of the chief architects of Alverno’s student assessment program. She became an internationally known scholar on performance assessment, conducting workshops and seminars at Alverno, co-writing texts and traveling to teach in South Africa, Costa Rica, Hong Kong, the Netherlands, Puerto Rico, Australia and New Zealand. While heading the English department, Loacker also participated in the development of the ability-based education and student assessment process begun in 1973. Her talents as a writer and editor were legendary, as were her direct yet thoughtful critiques.

Carol Meils ’75

Carol Meils was a beloved and ardent support of Alverno. In addition to a distinguished medical career and numerous accolades, including Wisconsin’s first recipient of the American Heart Association’s Lifetime Achievement Award, Meils passionately shared her time, talent and expertise to the benefit of Alverno College. She served on the Board of Trustees for eight years and, for countless young women, was looked up to and viewed as an amazing female trailblazer whom they could learn from and emulate. Her spirit, zest for life and enthusiasm were unsurpassed, making her presence so memorable.

Sister Joel Read ’48

A courageous and pioneering leader, Sister Joel Read ’48 embodied Alverno’s mission to educate strong women. Sister Joel was one of the nation’s longest-serving college presidents and a renowned advocate for education reform. Her tireless work and countless achievements benefitted not only generations of Alverno women but also the Milwaukee community and beyond. During her 35 years as Alverno’s president, Sister Joel grew her alma mater into an internationally renowned educational institution. She led the development of Alverno’s 8 Abilities and its assessment-based learning model, which has produced legions of successful graduates and inspired educators around the globe.

Sister Leona Truchan ’53

During her 50-plus years at Alverno, Sister Leona Truchan ’53 was a strong mentor to students and faculty alike. She had a history of challenging students to become more than their original intent. She played a key role in developing Alverno’s abilities-based curriculum and was the first faculty member to chair the Developing a Global Perspective ability department. She served as the dean of the science, math and technology division, and chair of the biology and natural science and technology departments.
Filippa (Flip) Weber ’92

Flip Weber brought passion and commitment to all her endeavors. She was one of the first women to serve as a director at Harley-Davidson, and during her 42-year tenure, she helped transform the business for growth. Her passion for mentoring business people, especially women, continued after retirement, and she established the Filippa DiBella Foundation. Flip was one of Alverno’s staunchest advocates, particularly when it came to supporting students. She was an active member of the Alumnae Association Board for many years, and she left an amazing legacy by creating a student service main street on campus.