



Dr. Kevin Finn recently joined Colby-Sawyer College as Dean of the School of Nursing & Health Sciences and Director of Clinical Partnerships, bringing over ten years of teaching, research, and administrative experience—most recently as the associate dean for the School of Health Sciences at Merrimack College. At Colby-Sawyer, Finn will lead the existing health sciences and nursing programs and develop new programming that forwards the institution’s strategic plan and its partnership with Dartmouth-Hitchcock Health while maintaining the college’s commitment to a liberal arts education.

PROFESSOR SPOTLIGHT

A Strategic Partnership and New Programming at Colby-Sawyer College

A Foot in Both Worlds

After growing up in Boston, Finn spent his undergraduate years at Merrimack College focused on Sports Medicine. As an athlete, he was drawn to athletics in general, but he was also intrigued by the clinical aspect of healthcare. He became certified as an athletic trainer after completing his degree and is—in fact—still a licensed athletic trainer and certified strength and conditioning specialist, as well as a Fellow for the American College of Sports Medicine.

When determining his next steps, Finn opted for an M.A. in Teaching and Curriculum from Fairfield University, and while working as a T.A. he realized, “Wow, this teaching thing is kind of cool.” Soon, his next decision was facing him: pursuing education and teaching or returning to athletic training.

With the overlap between athletic training and teaching—and the similar nature of the tools used to motivate people—the connections were clear for him. Merrimack offered him a position as an Assistant Athletic Trainer and the opportunity to teach a course each semester, which made his decision easy. He explains, “It kept me in both worlds that I found interesting.”

Later, Finn earned his Ed.D. in Curriculum and Teaching from Boston University and became a professor and department chair at Merrimack. During his time there, he created initiatives on internships and clinical placements, oversaw curriculum development, and developed programs that were crucial to the growth of the department and the college.

Uniquely Qualified to Make a Difference

Ms. Jacquelyn MacDonald is the Experiential Education Manager in the School of Health Sciences at Merrimack College. MacDonald notes that Finn is unique in that he has so much “institutional knowledge,” as a teacher and administrator who has watched a program develop; she notes, he’s seen it “from all angles.” Because Finn had been part of an initially small department that expanded dramatically, MacDonald believes Finn is “uniquely set up to do that at Colby-Sawyer.”

This varied experience also helped him relate well to his students, MacDonald suggests; he would build out a curriculum map and help them choose a career right for them. Even in a program that grew to include 90 freshmen,

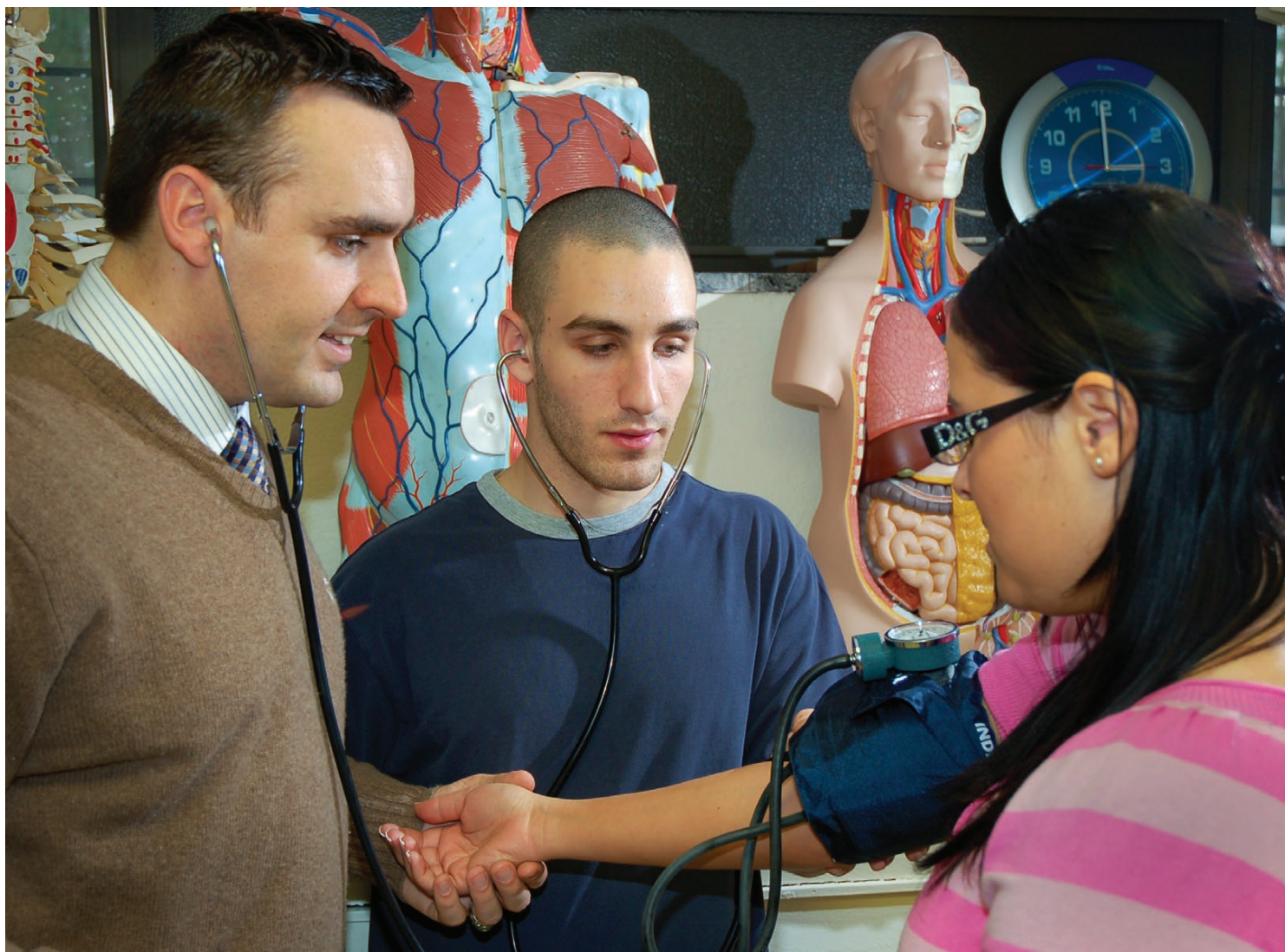
MacDonald recalls that Finn was fully engaged and approached each student with the same warm demeanor.

An Encyclopedia of Possibilities

When Merrimack College student Hayden Bagnell was first meeting campus advisors, she recalls seeing Finn speak. She immediately thought, “I want that guy.” Bagnell was impressed by his knowledge; because she was unsure of what to do in her career or even what her options might be, she was drawn to Finn—who she describes as “an encyclopedia” of possibilities that he could explain in detail.

Bagnell adds that Finn knew so much about what to do next, what would either help her or hurt on an application, but includes that he didn’t push her down any one path. Instead, she explains, “He led me.”

Merrimack student Declan O’Sullivan had a similar experience. When he first started courses, he was “in the dark” when it came to planning, having no concept of the diverse opportunities and careers that the major offered. O’Sullivan notes how supportive Finn was in their discussions, saying, “He talks you through your future.”



Directing at a Crossroads

Jess Molignano was an Assistant Dean at Merrimack during Finn's time there, and they worked on many of the same projects.

She states that one of her favorite things about Finn is how "even-keeled" he is when bringing people together, with their "warring desires"—how skilled he is at finding a middle point.

Molignano recalls how they always seemed to seek out Finn when they had an idea they wanted to bounce off someone because of Finn's passion for the students' learning and his academic integrity; he was someone who made sure education stayed the priority.

Dr. Kyle McNinnis, Vice President of Innovation and Learning and Founding Dean of the School of Health Sciences at Merrimack College, sees this quality in Finn as well.

McNinnis states that Finn will bring "tremendous energy and a positive outlook" to advancing the School of Nursing & Health Sciences.

Finn explains that while Boston doesn't have a workforce shortage, health-care overall is facing this challenge, and there are not many colleges and universities outside of urban medical fields who are filling this gap. Though many universities have partnerships with hospitals, of course, the Dartmouth-Hitchcock partnership is unique in its connection to a smaller college.

McNinnis also believes Finn's decisions are driven by the best interests of students, faculty, and the institution. Describing Finn as a considerate leader who makes no decisions in a vacuum, McNinnis adds, "He's able to keep things in perspective, even when times are uncertain." In the many instances they would be at a crossroads, McNinnis recalls that Finn would "always ask what's best for the students."

Finding a Win-Win

As content as Finn was at Merrimack, only an exceptional opportunity could have swayed him to change course, and Colby-Sawyer College had one to offer. At Colby-Sawyer, the timing of the program's growth is designed, in part, to benefit their students and assist with a workforce shortage at a local hospital. Finn will be able to develop and implement a



program that can move graduates into rewarding, meaningful jobs. It's a "win-win," Finn states, where students are gaining "world-class experience."

Finn further explains, while in certain areas of the country the healthcare shortage is less severe, healthcare overall is facing this challenge, and there are not many colleges and universities outside of urban medical fields who are filling this gap.

Though many universities have partnerships with hospitals, of course, the Dartmouth-Hitchcock partnership is unique in its connection to a smaller college.

Though Finn will start with growing programs that are already benefitting students, the room for much greater program exploration is there, including the possibility for training mental health experts and counselors.

The Human Side of Academia

Dr. April Bowling is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Public Health and Nutrition in the School of Health Sciences at Merrimack and director of the THRIVE lab. Bowling shares that Finn "really cares about the human side of academia."

During a time when new faculty are trained to "ruthlessly pursue funding" and their own research

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agendas from the moment they secure a position, Bowling appreciated Finn's ability to show her the importance of the "human infrastructure" on the campus. When we think about men in leadership roles in higher education administration, Bowling adds, we don't really think about that "community builder side." Finn, though, is always focused on the bigger picture.

Addressing a Critical Need

Colby-Sawyer College and Dartmouth-Hitchcock Health joined forces, in an enhancement of their already long-term academic connection—to address the critical need for health care professionals, not only in the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Health system, including New Hampshire and Vermont, but across the country.

Dartmouth-Hitchcock is making a multi-year investment of over \$3 million, starting with an initial investment of \$750,000. In this agreement between D-HH and Colby-Sawyer College, the college is provided with the necessary financial resources to implement new programming and to increase enrollment for their existing nursing program.

This fall Colby-Sawyer will offer students programs in five new disciplines for their bachelor's degrees: social work, healthcare administration, addiction studies, health science, and medical laboratory science. These new programs will complement the existing health-related fields at the college. Colby-Sawyer is also developing an associate degree program and working on two new tracks in the Master of Science in Nursing to broaden their existing clinical nurse track.

The college will meet milestones to earn additional investments from D-HH as they work together to address the workforce needs in the area, both current and long-term.

Developed with D-HH's input, the programs are going to produce skilled candidates ready to address open positions in the state's largest health system, and the only academic one. Over one thousand vacancies will be filled.

Statewide, more than 6,500 health care jobs are unfilled, and nearly one third of those currently working in health care are expected to

retire in the next decade. These statistics show either a crisis in the making or an opportunity.

Broadening the Programming

Dating back to 1981, the relationship between Colby-Sawyer and D-HH began when the college first trained nurses at the Bachelor of Science level. Over the years, the students of Colby-Sawyer have enjoyed internships, clinical placements, and multiple experiential learning experiences.

More than 80% of Colby-Sawyer's nursing graduates will move to positions within the



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D-HH system. The 2019 class included 32 nursing undergraduates, all of whom earned positions within six months of completing their degrees.

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Colby-Sawyer plans to increase the number of nursing graduates by 2027 by one hundred or more students. The enhanced partnership also adds a degree-completion program in respiratory therapy.

Dr. Susan D. Stuebner, Colby-Sawyer president, notes how excited the college is to develop this partnership with Dartmouth-Hitchcock Health, as they “look forward to responding collectively to health care needs in our region and beyond as they arise.”

President Stuebner adds that students will be well-equipped for their new positions because Colby-Sawyer's emphasis on “internships, clinical placements, and capstone projects” ensures their graduates have practical and theoretical experience.

A Proven History of Building Partnerships

With careful planning and perhaps a bit of good timing, they ended up with the right person at the helm as the dean of the School of Nursing & Health Sciences and director of clinical partnerships.

Stuebner notes, “As a leader, Kevin brings valuable administrative experience in the fields of the school, a proven history of building partnerships in support of academic programs, and success in developing and implementing academic programs at the undergraduate and graduate levels.”

Though only a few days into his new position, Finn is ready to embark on this challenge and adventure, collaborating with his new colleagues and furthering the outstanding programs and clinical opportunities at Colby-Sawyer that set up their students for successful careers.

Finn notes, “It is an exciting time for Colby-Sawyer College as we look to enhance the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Health partnership and expand the academic programs in health sciences and nursing to align with the needs of the healthcare field.”



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A Plan that Called for a Special Person

Dr. Laura Sykes, Academic Vice President & Dean of Faculty at Colby-Sawyer, knew they needed a special person to join their team to make everything work, someone with both the experience and the personality to make the transition a success.

She believes his unique background will help Finn unite programs with existing components and new components—while skillfully involving faculty in disciplines who may not have worked together closely before. “He has a lot of energy and enthusiasm for the work he’ll be doing,” Sykes adds, and that is exactly what they will need.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Dr. Rachel James Clevenger earned her M.Ed. degree from Mississippi College. After finishing her PhD in Composition and Rhetoric, she taught and served as the University Writing Center Director for Birmingham Southern College and University of Alabama at Birmingham. Most recently, she taught Business Communications at Samford University.

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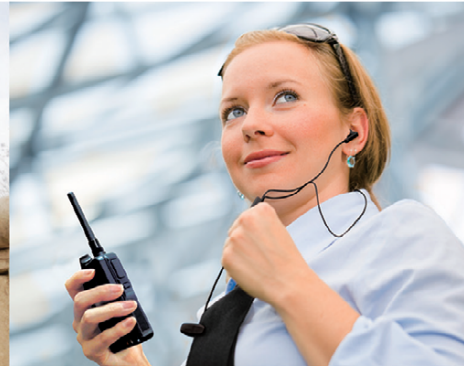
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