In high school, while most students were hanging out with their friends or watching TV, Raven Martin was president of the local HOSA chapter, member of the homecoming and prom committees, co-captain of the volleyball team, and a teacher’s aide. At the time, she had no idea that her strong leadership skills would pay for college.

During her senior year of high school, Martin received a call from President Edwin Welch offering her the Welch Colleague Scholarship. This series of courses enables participants to develop their own leadership skills, solve real-world problems, work with leaders in non-profit organizations and create their own community programs. As a result of the curriculum, scholars will have a minor in leadership when they graduate.

Martin accepted the offer and a slot at the University of Charleston. “Whenever I came for college visits, UC impressed me more and more. It’s a small, private school that cares about its students.”

Martin’s not your typical college student either. She’s a junior nursing student juggling a number of extra-curricular activities, all aimed at improving campus and community life. When asked why she chose the nursing profession, Martin explained that “it’s known as the most caring profession and has endless opportunities.”

Martin is currently the vice president of the Student Nursing Association. In this role, she fosters and mentors nursing students and supports local charities in the community, Martin stressed how important the program had been for her last year. “Having a connection with juniors in the Student Nursing Association really helped because transferring into the nursing program was a really big adjustment.” That’s why she believed it was important for her to step up as vice president and continue to grow the organization this year.

The Ronald McDonald House is one of the local aid organizations that Martin and the Student Nursing Association assist. Martin is currently in charge of the pop tabs program that collects pull-tabs from aluminum cans. After collecting the tabs, Martin donates them to the Ronald McDonald house so that they can be recycled for money.
Jennifer Pack: A ripple in the community

by Rhonda Hines

When she graduated with her bachelor’s in physician assistant (PA) studies in 1997, Jennifer Pack probably had no idea her career path would lead her to teaching.

Pack was interested in medicine at an early age. In high school, she heard about a career as a physician assistant (PA) and decided to explore it. She did some research and liked the educational requirements, especially since PA school required less time to complete than medical school.

With so many benefits, Pack couldn’t resist the opportunity to pursue her dream. She graduated from high school on Friday, and immediately started college on Monday. She quickly finished all of her prerequisites for PA school in a year. By the time she was 21 years old, Pack had already graduated from PA school with primary care as her focus.

After practicing primary care for six years, Pack worked in emergency medicine and then hospital medicine. She then decided to pursue her master’s of medical sciences in physician assistant studies at Alderson-Broaddus College, graduating in 2004. Pack later got an opportunity to teach a class at Mountain State University. “I loved it, beamed Pack. Soon thereafter, a full-time faculty position opened, and she jumped at the opportunity. “Teaching worked well with raising a family,” she explained.

In October of 2011, UC hired Pack to help build their PA program. As the associate program director, she was integral in laying the foundation of the curriculum. She developed the syllabi, policies, assessments and admission procedures so that the program could get accredited. The accrediting body required two assessments and a syllabus for all 39 courses offered in the program. Thanks to Pack and her team, the department received their provisional accreditation in April of 2012. “It’s just a lot of work, everything had to be done from scratch”, stated Pack.

Pack is proud of UC’s program. She thinks it’s unique from other programs because it offers a lot of peer and team-based learning. The program also allows students to see patients early on, as soon as their second semester. Therefore, it gives them more real-world medical experience, which is vital to becoming a skilled physician assistant. Another factor that Pack regards as a unique element of the UC program is the pass-fail basis applied to all classes. The students must meet a certain performance average to advance. This grading system “eliminates competition and focuses on real learning and helping each other succeed,” which Pack regards as a tenet to producing more productive graduates. Because the PA department only accepts 30 students per year, it provides an intimate environment for fostering strong student-mentor relationships. Students feel they have a support system and someone to go to if they have a problem”, asserts Pack.

Pack also thinks UC’s program is producing assets to the medical community. She reasons that physician assistants “help to fill a definite need, because they’re well trained and capable of doing a lot of different things. Physician assistants allow physicians to see more patients because they’re seeing patients too.” Therefore, because of the PA, the patient gets a more patient-centered interaction, which helps improve the overall quality of healthcare. Outside of UC, Pack serves as president for the West Virginia Association of Physician Assistants, stepping up from vice president last year. “The West Virginia Association of Physician Assistants is important because it helps promote the profession in the state,” Pack stipulates. Pack’s husband can now make sure they’re well trained, “of my family one day, so I need to see patients, students and PAs and the community, Jennifer Pack has achieved at UC and throughout the state of West Virginia. She focuses on positively impacting the lives of patients, students and PAs and values the interrelation between community and family. “I know that former students will take care of my family one day, so I need to make sure they’re well trained,” which Pack’s husband can now attest, after cutting his finger. Pack’s former student saved him up. Another family member had surgery recently, with former students of Pack’s assisting with the procedure. Although she hasn’t given herself all the credit for the fabulous accomplishments she has achieved at UC and throughout the community, Jennifer Pack has touched the lives of many. Most students become a by-product of her dedication and devotion to a profession that still evokes passion in her. She becomes a ripple, positively influencing all of those students who have the privilege and willingness to learn from her.

A note from Dr. Kahler

Dear Alumni & Friends,

I am happy to report that the 2013-2014 academic year has gotten off to a busy, but exciting start! We are already halfway through the fall semester and the holidays will be here soon. I’m sure you remember Homecoming, mid-terms, and Fall Break – all of the same events our current students are experiencing. In this newsletter, we introduce you to one of those students, Raven Martin. Raven Martin is a recognized leader in her profession. Whatever direction she chooses, Martin will continue to be a recognized leader in her community by helping to make it better, stronger and more unified.

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Dr. Josephine Kahler
Dean, School of Health Sciences

Pack’s contributions to the PA profession can be seen at UC as well as throughout the state of West Virginia. She focuses on positively impacting the lives of patients, students and PAs and values the interrelation between community and family. “I know that former students will take care of my family one day, so I need to make sure they’re well trained,” which Pack’s husband can now attest, after cutting his finger. Pack’s former student saved him up. Another family member had surgery recently, with former students of Pack’s assisting with the procedure. Although she hasn’t given herself all the credit for the fabulous accomplishments she has achieved at UC and throughout the community, Jennifer Pack has touched the lives of many. Most students become a by-product of her dedication and devotion to a profession that still evokes passion in her. She becomes a ripple, positively influencing all of those students who have the privilege and willingness to learn from her.