

MAY 2026

THE CROSS ROAD

Student Newsletter of American National University



We Celebrate You!

BY DR. CAROLYN SCOTT, CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICER

As commencement approaches, we celebrate more than completed coursework or earned credentials. We celebrate perseverance, sacrifice, growth, and the determination it takes to continue moving forward even when life becomes complicated.

Many of our students balance full-time employment, family responsibilities, caregiving, military service, and countless other obligations while pursuing their education. Their success is not simply the result of academic ability. It reflects sustained effort, support, encouragement, and the willingness to continue progressing toward a goal even during difficult seasons of life.

At American National University, we know that meaningful student support is not only about helping students recover when challenges arise; it is also about building strong academic relationships, habits, and communities that help students continue progressing toward their goals. Some of the most important moments in education happen long before a student reaches a crisis point. They happen in conversations with faculty, in encouragement from classmates, in thoughtful guidance from advisors, and in the quiet decision to log in, attend class, complete one more assignment, and keep moving forward.

One of the strengths of ANU's academic model is that students do not have to choose between connection and convenience. Whether attending live online classes or participating in on-campus residency experiences, our students engage directly with faculty and classmates while balancing the responsibilities of work, family, military service, and everyday life. Students participate in scheduled class sessions, real-time discussions, hands-on learning experiences, and meaningful collaboration with their peers—without relocating or placing their professional and personal responsibilities entirely on hold. In both online and residency environments, we continue to see strong academic communities forming across programs, campuses, and state lines. Those relationships often become an important source of encouragement, accountability, and support throughout the educational journey.

As we prepare to celebrate this year's graduates, we also recognize the families, friends, faculty, and staff members who supported them along the way. Educational achievement rarely changes only one life. It often creates new opportunities, stability, and inspiration for entire families and future generations.

To our graduates: congratulations on this remarkable achievement. Your persistence, resilience, and commitment to your future have brought you to this moment, and we are proud to celebrate alongside you. We look forward to seeing the effect you will continue to make in your professions, your communities, and the lives of those around you.

Back to School, Forward in Purpose

BY CHLOE DANIELS

Long Beach, California, native Siedra Johnson built her life around caring for others—both professionally and personally. Working as a direct support professional, she assists elderly individuals with their daily activities, a role that reflects her natural compassion and dedication. Raised by her grandmother, she grew up with a strong sense of resilience and creativity, often finding joy in creative ventures. Surrounded by a supportive boyfriend, family, and her two stepchildren, she found fulfillment in caregiving careers like home health, where helping others brought her a deep sense of purpose. Although she excelled in school, she once stepped away from her education—until the memory of her grandmother, who always believed she had what it took to work in healthcare, inspired her to pursue that dream with renewed determination. She joined American National University's online Medical Assisting program to pursue her passions. With her dedication, Siedra was named a Term Trailblazer for Term 258!

When she made the decision to return to school, she began researching programs online, determined to find the right fit for her goals. It didn't take long for American National University to stand out. **"ANU was just on it! They answered all my questions, everything was [sic] timely, everybody was nice and very helpful... I got a good vibe from everybody, it just felt right,"** she shared. That positive first impression was only strengthened by her experience with her admissions representative, I'Kea, who played a key role in making the process feel manageable and personal. **"I'Kea was very supportive and she understood little things I had going on, she would work around it, I would work around her schedule, it was very cool!"**

Throughout her time in the program, Siedra found encouragement and support from her instructors, including Carrie Rodriguez, Dr. Stephanie Denton, and Andrew Halverson. However, one professor who made a particularly lasting impact was Abby Chelstowski, especially during a challenging term when balancing school, work, and life became overwhelming. **"She worked with me for Term 258! It was hard! It was like – I wouldn't say it was hard, it was just with work and the things I had to turn in – I was exhausted! I started procrastinating a lot. And most professors won't get into depth... she was like, 'hey, you didn't turn this in, if you don't turn in something, you're gonna have to repeat all of this!' I was probably like four or five weeks in [a term], she would open things back up for me... I would get it done,"** she explained. In reflecting on her time in Professor Abby's class, she smiled and said, **"she was just like, 'Sisi relax, you got this!' She was just so supportive, it didn't seem like she got irritated by my questions... She was always nice and prompt and I love her! She really got me here at this point."**

"I think they, for some positions, they probably overly prepare us for!"

Her future goals include working in a unit for children or within a clinic to give back to her community. **"I would love to have an opportunity to work with babies!"** She enthuses.

Would she recommend ANU to others? **"I definitely would. Especially the busy person who [sic] can't physically go into a school, that are working or busy with homelife... [With ANU], you can move how you want to, just make sure you get it done. I would definitely recommend it, it's ten out of ten. And it's a great online school!"**

Her advice to new students: **"Come to class, make time for your work, study but don't overstudy, and just make sure you're paying attention to all of the material the professors are posting. Check your emails to keep yourself on top of everything."**



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SIEDRE JOHNSON

Business Department Spotlight

CONNECTING CLASSROOM LEARNING TO WORKPLACE SUCCESS

One of the most important questions students can ask during any course is: “How can I use this in my workplace right now?”

In the Business Department at American National University, we intentionally design learning experiences that help students connect classroom concepts directly to real workplace situations. Business education is not simply about learning terminology or completing assignments. It is about developing the ability to communicate effectively, solve problems, collaborate with others, think critically, and adapt to change.

Throughout our programs, students participate in live lectures, discussions, presentations, case studies, and scenario-based activities that encourage them to apply business theories to realistic professional situations. Whether students currently work in retail, healthcare, customer service, administration, operations, or management, many of the concepts explored in class can be implemented immediately within their work environments.

As workplaces continue to evolve through technology, artificial intelligence, and changing organizational expectations, employers increasingly value professionals who can combine technical knowledge with strong interpersonal and leadership skills. Our goal is to help students strengthen both areas, so they are prepared not only for future career opportunities but also for immediate professional growth.

— Dr. Lyndsey Obringer, Dean, Business Department

From Theory to Practice | Why Employers Want More Than Technical Skills

Today’s employers are increasingly emphasizing the importance of professional communication, teamwork, adaptability, and leadership skills alongside technical knowledge. According to LinkedIn, amid an AI revolution, soft skills are becoming increasingly important to employers (Brodnitz, 2024). The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) reported that employers identify a gap between the skills college graduates possess and those considered proficient. The study indicated opportunities for continued growth in communication, professionalism, and critical thinking (Gatta, 2026).

As technology and artificial intelligence continue to reshape industries, human-centered skills are becoming even more valuable. Professionals who can communicate clearly, collaborate effectively, and make thoughtful decisions are increasingly positioned for leadership opportunities and long-term career success.

Student Challenge | Take Advantage of the Safe Environment to Practice

One of the greatest advantages of higher education is the opportunity to practice professional skills in a supportive learning environment before applying them in the workplace.

Class discussions, presentations, group activities, and live lectures are more than classroom requirements. They are opportunities to strengthen confidence, communication, leadership, and professionalism. We encourage students to challenge themselves throughout their courses by contributing during discussions, asking questions during lectures, volunteering to share ideas, participating actively in group activities, and practicing professional communication with classmates and instructors.

For many students, speaking up or presenting ideas can feel uncomfortable at first. However, these classroom experiences create a “safe” environment to develop skills that employers increasingly value in professional settings. The more students practice these skills during their education, the more confident and prepared they may become in meetings, interviews, presentations, leadership opportunities, and workplace collaboration.

References

Brodnitz, D. (2024). The most in-demand skills for 2024. LinkedIn Talent Blog.

<https://www.linkedin.com/business/talent/blog/talent-strategy/linkedin-most-in-demand-hard-and-soft-skills>

Gatta, M. (2026). Employers say new grads are largely prepared for work, with room to improve. National Association of Colleges and Employers. <https://www.nacweb.org/career-readiness/trends-and-predictions/employers-say-new-grads-are-largely-prepared-for-work-with-room-to-improve>

Student Loan Repayment Plans are Changing This July

BY BETH OVERBEY

Federal student loan repayment options are changing beginning July 1, 2026, and many borrowers may see updates to the repayment plans available to them. If you currently have federal student loans, now is a good time to review your repayment plan and make sure your contact information is up to date with your loan servicer.

Some existing repayment plans are expected to be phased out over time, while new repayment structures are introduced. Depending on your situation, these changes could affect your monthly payment amount, repayment timeline, or future repayment options.

The most important thing alumni can do is stay proactive. If you receive notices from your loan servicer, take time to read them carefully and respond promptly if action is needed. Even if you are not currently struggling with repayment, staying informed now can help prevent issues later.

If making payments ever becomes difficult, do not ignore the situation or wait until payments are missed. Federal student loan programs may offer options that can help borrowers remain in good standing, but those options are usually most effective when addressed early.

Your student loans are part of your long-term financial journey. Taking a few minutes now to review your repayment status and understand upcoming changes can help you stay on track and protect your financial future.

A Note From Student Services

BY JESSICA WILLIAMS

Welcome back, ANU students! On behalf of the Student Services Team, we are excited to begin a new term with you and to support you throughout your academic journey. As we approach Memorial Day, we also take a moment to honor and remember the brave men and women who have served and sacrificed for our country. If you need help at any time this term, please reach out to Student Services at 833-388-1100 or email us at studentservices@an.edu. We are here to help and wish you a successful term ahead!



2026 Commencement Ceremony

AMERICAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY
COMMENCEMENT CEREMONY

Please plan to join the graduation celebration of American National University on Saturday, June 27, 2026, at 12:00 PM EST. For additional information, please visit our Graduation 2026 micro page:

<https://www.eventcombo.com/ms/ev/76322/american-national-university--university-of-fairfax-2026-com/home>



In Memoriam

With deep respect and gratitude, we honor the lives of our students and staff who have passed away. Their contributions to our university community and the impact they made in their personal and professional lives will not be forgotten. As we remember them, we extend our heartfelt condolences to their families, friends, and loved ones.

ONETTA "CAROLYN" COMER, 1946-2026

Carolyn attended National Business College where she met and married Jerry Comer. She began her career as an Administrative Assistant before returning to school and earning her Professional Human Resources Certification. She went on to work as a Human Resources Manager until her retirement in 2004.

LINDA REYNOLDS CUMINS, 1938-2026

Linda was a graduate of National Business College as well as valedictorian and later a commencement speaker.

CHARLES SHANNON JONES, JR, 1951-2026

A graduate from National Business College in Roanoke Virginia, A skilled storyteller and Dunkin Yo-Yo champion, Charles entertained family and friends with his tales and yo-yo tricks. Charles loved singing in the National Cathedral in Washington D.C. and also did a Kroger commercial at 5 years old for rocky potatoes with rocky marciano.

ROBERT FRANCIS MCNEELEY, 1946-2026

Bob served his country honorably in the United States Navy, completing four years of active duty followed by two years in the Naval Reserve. Bob built a successful and respected career in education administration, serving at National Business College and others.

MARJORIE REYNOLDS MONTGOMERY, 1935-2026

Marjorie met her husband Jimmy while attending National Business College. She was known for her organizational skills, devoted homemaker, and a passion for detailed coloring.

MELISSA LEA ARNOLD NOWLIN, 1971-2026

Melissa was a 1990 graduate of Bluefield High School and a graduate of National Business College in Bluefield. She was an Accounts Payable Clerk at First Community Bank Corporate Center and a member of the Stinson United Methodist Church in Princeton.

FRANK ALBERT SPENCER, JR, 1959-2026

Frankie earned an associate's degree in business management from National Business College. He was a loyal employee for J.D. Bassett Furniture for over 30 years, where was was an assistant superintendent.

BRENDA KAY STINSON, 1951-2026

Brenda was a 1969 graduate of Princeton High School and a graduate of National Business College. She worked for National Business College where she was an administrative assistant for 25 years.

MICHAEL JAMES THOMAS, 1941-2026

Michael was a graduate of Jefferson High School and National Business College, with a Business/Accounting degree. He went on to work for N&W, now Norfolk Southern Railway, for almost 40 years as a Payroll Accountant.