

HOT PROSPECTS

**By Sue Bruskin Clarke
Photography by Bill Wittkop**

In 2001, Kevin Malley left his two-decade position with the New York City Fire Department to chair NJCU's Fire Science Program. His goal was simple but ambitious: to create a curriculum specifically designed to produce some of the nation's best career fire officers. Fifteen years and hundreds of graduates later, Malley, who now serves the University as interim associate dean of Professional Studies, has accomplished his goal; under his stewardship the program has earned a nationwide reputation for excellence and is widely considered to be the finest of its kind.

Immediately prior to joining the University, Malley worked as the FDNY's first-ever director of human performance, a position to which he was appointed in 1996 by then-Fire Commissioner and current NJCU Adjunct Professor Thomas Von Essen. His responsibility was to develop and implement programs to enhance the firefighters' work performance, health, and safety—a top priority of both he and Von Essen. While serving in this position, Malley had a vision he presented to the University. “I had been an adjunct professor at NJCU since 1993 in a program called Fire Safety, which was part of the Criminal Justice Department,” he says. “I proposed completely shifting the program's focus and making it more like what we were offering in New York, which was to prepare people for ultimate success in the rank of firefighter, officer, and chief officer.” The University agreed and the Fire Science Department was born.







Five fire chiefs, all NJCU graduates. From left: Springfield F.D. Chief Carlo Palumbo '08; Bayonne F.D. Chief Keith Weaver '05, '07 M.S.; South Orange F.D. Chief Daniel Sullivan '05; Jersey City F.D. Chief (Ret.) William Sinnott '76; and Millburn F.D. Chief Michael Roberts '91.

GREAT MINDS

To help rewrite the curriculum, Malley brought in some of the most knowledgeable people in the field. Among them was Thomas Gardner, an expert in hazardous materials (who later created one of the first online courses for NJCU); Kevin Donnelly, who developed the University's Fire Safety Manager Certification Program; and Patrick Boyle '81, the former director of the Bayonne Fire Department who was named chair of the Fire Science Department this past August. Unfortunately, Gardner and Donnelly, both FDNY firefighters, lost their lives on September 11, 2001, just as the program was beginning to take shape.

One key addition made to the curriculum was the incorporation of every textbook listed on New Jersey's bibliography for civil service exams—the tests all in-state firefighters take to land a job and advance in rank. “We use these textbooks, which many other states also follow, in each of our courses so our students receive an education that not only prepares them for getting a job, but also enables them to ascend from entry level to department chief,” Malley says.

“A large number of our graduates have reached the highest position in fire departments throughout New Jersey and elsewhere and their achievements are really the ultimate measure of our program,” he adds with a smile.

The faculty Malley recruited reads like a who's who of fire service. In addition to former Commissioner Von Essen, adjunct professors include former Fire Safety Director for the World Trade Center Mike Hurley, Bayonne Fire Department Chief Keith Weaver '05, '07 M.S., Bloomfield Fire Department Deputy Chief Kevin Nelson '96, and Teaneck Fire Department Battalion Chief Jordan Zaretsky. “The people we hired—and continue to hire—are

Mike Hurley

When Mike Hurley '93 went to work for the Port Authority at the World Trade Center (WTC) in the late 1980s, he was just finishing up his Fire Safety degree at NJCU. “People would ask what I was studying, and when I told them, they would chuckle because it wasn't a subject they were accustomed to hearing.” The chuckling stopped on February 26, 1993 when the World Trade Center experienced the first act of international terrorism on United States soil. His degree couldn't have been more valuable.

Soon after the attacks, Hurley, who at the time was a WTC observation deck supervisor, was called to the director of the Port Authority's office and given a new title, WTC fire safety director. His responsibility was to oversee all the fire and emergency management programs for the complex, an enormous task given what had just taken place. “The coursework I did for my degree was what helped me coordinate an effort between the Port Authority and all the first responders in the area in case of a future emergency,” he says. “We did a lot of training after 1993 to make sure everyone was certain of our procedures and we updated our equipment and our policies.”

Hurley also worked with occupants of the towers, conducting fire drills and monitoring floor wardens, deputies, and searchers to ensure they understood necessary emergency actions and could perform these measures independently if trained firefighters were unavailable. “Sure enough, the September 11, 2001 attacks occurred and that's exactly what happened,” Hurley says. “Communication systems went down, but the people we drilled knew what to do; we're very proud of that.”

On 9/11, Hurley's fire safety director role was truly tested. Working as liaison to the FDNY at the North Tower Command Center, he provided the chief and commanders invaluable information about the layout of the buildings, evacuations, and firefighting resources. He also helped move the command post to a new location in the moments prior to the North Tower's collapse. After the towers fell, he stayed with firefighters and paramedics to treat the injured and lead recovery teams through the debris.

Hurley retired from the Port Authority after the 9/11 attacks. He now serves as the director of operations for the 9/11 Tribute Museum in lower Manhattan to ensure that this tragedy will never, ever, be forgotten.



unequivocally the best in the area. They really separate our program from any other," notes Malley. "Just about all of them have been here for many years and they're committed to their own professional development, the development of the program, and the success of the students."

"I agreed to teach at NJCU because, as a longtime friend of Kevin's, I knew about his deep commitment to training and helping firefighters in New Jersey," says Von Essen. "I saw it as an opportunity to connect with students and professionals who were looking to advance their academics and their careers. I also appreciated Kevin's curriculum, which opens up students to all the different aspects that will make them not just better firefighters, but better people, and, in the future, better leaders."

Adjunct Professor Anthony Avillo, the deputy director of the Monmouth Fire Academy, former deputy with the North Hudson Regional Fire

Only the most experienced professionals teach in the NJCU Fire Science Department. Edward Campbell (upper left) and Richard Burrows (upper right) are both retired captains in the Jersey City and Bayonne fire departments, respectively.

Mike Conforti and Bill Raleigh

Both Mike Conforti '12 and Bill Raleigh '12, are longtime members of the Jersey City Fire Department. Both men also understand that getting an education is a lifelong endeavor. That was why they decided to enroll in NJCU's Fire Science Program. "We wanted to become better officers not only for our fellow firefighters, but also for the residents we protect," says Conforti.

Being able to take advantage of their fire department's tuition reimbursement policy "made it a win/win situation," he adds.

Conforti and Raleigh, were captains when they entered the program and are now battalion chiefs. Both men assert that the NJCU professors deserve credit for giving them the skillset needed to obtain those promotions. "The professors always encouraged us to work hard and they were willing to help in any way we needed," says Conforti. "It was a great experience to learn from the best. These elite officers have been in our shoes, and now they want to pay it forward."

Adds Raleigh, "Several of the professors became firefighters right around the time I did, in 1981, and I could relate to the stories they would tell. We had a lot in common."

Although they didn't go back to school until late in their careers, Conforti and Raleigh have no regrets. "All I ever wanted to do was be a firefighter," Conforti says. "To move up the ranks to where I am now is very fulfilling."

Interim Associate Dean of Professional Studies Kevin Malley

Department, and former chair of the Fire Science Department, is also a noted writer and lecturer in the fire service field. His textbook, *Firegrounds Strategies*, is used by the program—and others programs around the country. In March 2017, his second book, *Full Contact Leadership*, is scheduled for release. “Anthony is a prolific writer and that’s rare in this profession,” says Malley. “He really helped me take this program to the next level by finding ways to make it more enriching for the students.”

According to Boyle, who—like many of the professors mentioned above—is an alumnus of the program, “The students are being taught by individuals who have progressed in their own careers. These instructors don’t just talk to them about what it takes to do well on the promotional exams; they share with them their knowledge, experience, and enthusiasm for the profession.”

RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

Another factor that distinguishes NJCU’s Fire Science Program is its student-centered approach to teaching and learning. “You can sit in a class anywhere else in the country and chances are you’ll be presented with a drawn-out PowerPoint presentation,” says Malley. “But that’s not the way to get information across. They don’t need to be lectured, they need to be engaged.”

With oral and written communication skills essential not only for landing a job (New Jersey does not require an oral exam, but many other states do), but also for optimal performance in the field, the development of both is integrated into every class on a daily basis. When it comes to writing, students are taught early on how to take notes and, throughout the program, are required to come to classes with five pages of notes on each assigned reading. They also take over 600 written exams in their Fire Science classes alone. “When students



Denis Onieal

As the deputy fire administrator for the United States Fire Administration, Denis Onieal '76 is responsible for overseeing the National Fire Academy and the National Fire Data Center, as well as public education, research, and training efforts designed to reduce fire deaths and to make communities across the country safer. A member of the first graduating class of NJCU's Fire Safety Program, he acknowledges the University and his hometown of Jersey City for helping him get to where he is today. "When you grow up and work in a place like Jersey City, the diversity of the area gives you the interpersonal skills that allow you to work with anyone, anywhere," he says. "NJCU adds academics to that diversity and the combination is unbeatable."

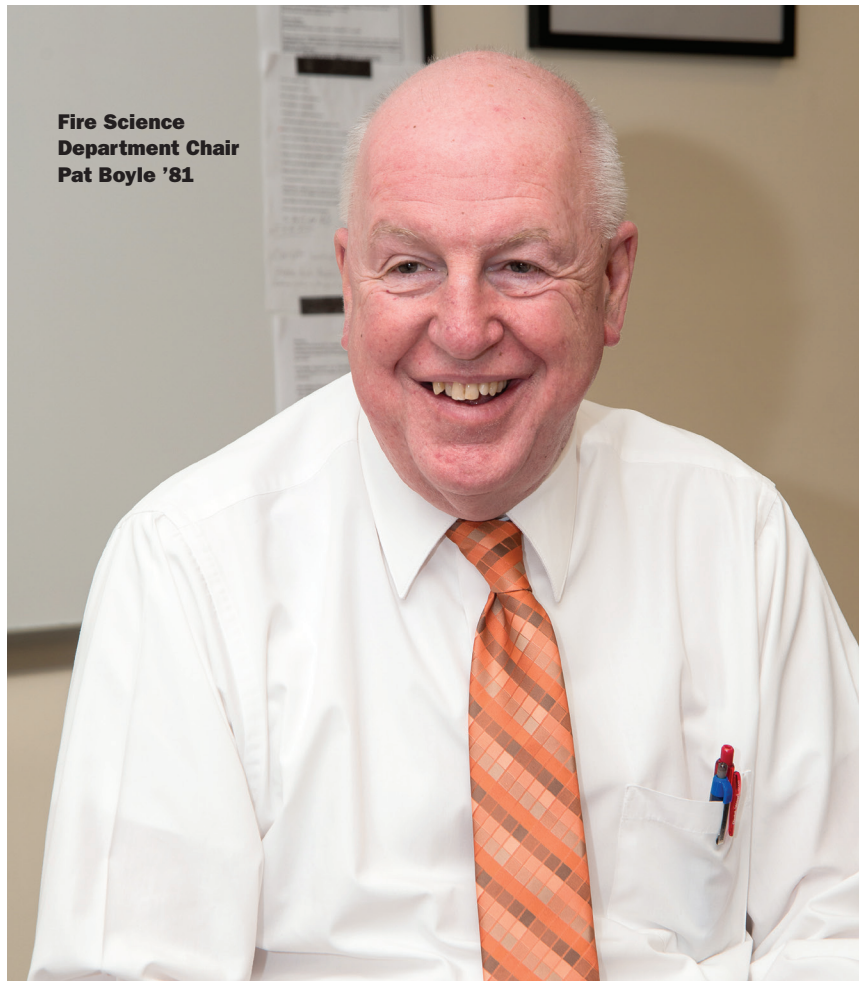
Onieal came to NJCU while working for the Jersey City Fire Department. "I realized from my experience in the army and in the fire department, that if you didn't have an education you really weren't going to go anywhere," he says. "The flexible schedule of the Fire Safety Program, the location of the campus and the G.I. Bill made it possible for me to earn a degree, but it was the extraordinary professors who really made the difference."

After graduating, Onieal earned a master's in Public Administration from Fairleigh Dickinson University before returning to NJCU to teach. "When I was on faculty, I loved going to the graduation ceremony and seeing so many people celebrating the first family member to receive a college degree," he says. "That's what NJCU will always mean to me—the start it gives so many deserving, hardworking people."

Several years later, Onieal left his faculty position to pursue a doctorate in education at NYU, where he later taught. Throughout this time, he was rising through the ranks at the Jersey City Fire Department, eventually becoming chief in 1995. He went on to land a federal position as the superintendent of the National Fire Academy before accepting his current post.

"Having to contend with the 1993 World Trade Center bombings while in Jersey City, and then responding to the 9/11 attacks, hurricanes Katrina and Sandy, and other natural disasters is sobering. Dealing with people who suffer in these situations requires unique skills," he says. "Critical thought, complex data analysis, strategic vision, academic approaches to emotional consequences, communication, and, of course, interpersonal skills, are all what I learned at NJCU."

Fire Science
Department Chair
Pat Boyle '81



go for their fire department exams, I tell them to look around the room and realize that there isn't anyone else sitting there as well prepared as they are," says Malley.

To simulate fire departments' engine companies, students are divided into small groups within classes, with one of them being chosen as a leader—or captain—of each group. The leaders are responsible for assigning tasks and facilitating the group's problem solving efforts. "This scenario enables students to get accustomed to the true dynamics of fire training and field operations, while they also learn relevant material and management skills," notes Boyle, who taught business law at NJCU before becoming an adjunct in the Fire Science Department.

To reinforce oral communication skills, at the end of each class the designated spokesperson for each group forms a panel and, one by one, answers questions pertaining to exercises completed that day. Each must recite the question back and state

the proper answer. The result is that by the time they graduate, they all sit up straight, look the instructor in the eye, are well-composed, and are well-prepared to walk into an interview, manage colleagues, direct emergency operations, or speak with superiors.

Physical training is also key for success as a firefighter and this, too, is tested in the Fire Science Program. Malley, who literally wrote the book on the subject (*Get Firefighter Fit*), spared no effort to make the fitness requirement as rigorous and true to life as possible. "We created a physical training course of study that simultaneously conditions students and teaches them how to train safely, effectively, and efficiently. We train them for success with their entrance-level physical ability test and, later, with the completion of critical fire and emergency tasks."

TAKING ATTENDANCE

Offered on both the Jersey City and Wall campuses, NJCU's Fire Science Program has a very low attrition rate

and a very high graduation rate, which may result from students entering the 45-credit bachelor of science degree program (the largest undergraduate fire science program in terms of credit in the country) directly as freshmen. “The notes, test-taking, and oral skills that we teach them that first semester enable academic success across the spectrum of classes they take through the full term of their studies at NJCU,” explains Malley. In essence, we teach them how to become better, lifelong

learners and to effectively utilize the content they need to succeed both academically and professionally.”

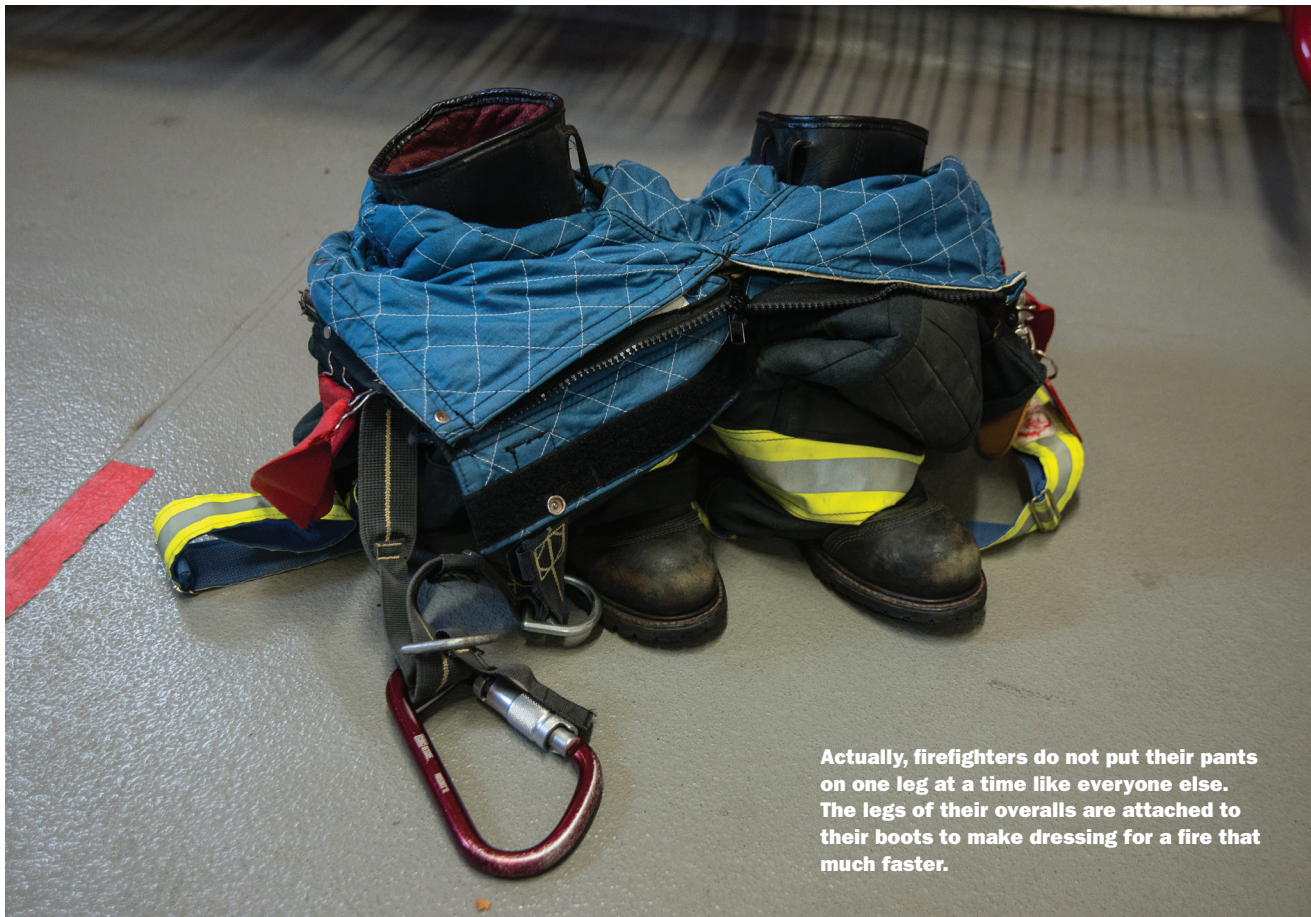
The past few years have seen a change in the makeup of students enrolled in the program. Classes that once primarily consisted of career firefighters seeking promotion, are now filled by more traditional students, some of whom have volunteered for local fire departments while in high school as well as those with no prior firefighting experience.

Thanks to an extensive co-op program, those individuals who haven’t worked in the field are given an opportunity to gain experience at a fire department or in some other fire service-related field.

In recent years there has also been tremendous growth in the program—from fewer than 20 students in 2001, to close to 200 this year. “Professor Malley built this program to what it is today,” notes Boyle. “It’s his vision,

Anna Scanniello advises Fire Science students.





Actually, firefighters do not put their pants on one leg at a time like everyone else. The legs of their overalls are attached to their boots to make dressing for a fire that much faster.

enthusiasm, and drive that have gotten us to the point we're at right now."

For students seeking employment after graduation, they need look no further than Anna Scanniello, the Fire Science Department's administrative assistant who tirelessly searches for available jobs nationwide and publishes her findings in a weekly newsletter sent to the program's students and alumni.

REACHING OUT

Plans are now underway for the Fire Science Department to expand its academic offerings to the New York City Fire Department through what's being called The FDNY Initiative. Because New York City requires its lieutenants and captains to have a certain number of college credits and its chiefs to have a college degree, NJCU will launch an online degree program in which current and prospective FDNY firefighters and officers can complete a full degree of courses featuring FDNY-based content. As Avillo, who is in the process of writing courses for

this new program, explains it, "The FDNY doesn't use the same textbooks as New Jersey. They have their own homegrown curriculum, which changes every quarter. We'll teach FDNY firefighters everything they'll need to know to pass their officer tests and perform at the highest level in the fire field."

In keeping with NJCU's commitment to the immediate community, the Fire Science Department keeps close ties with the Jersey City Fire Department. Prior to 9/11, Jersey City experienced several difficult fire situations in high-rise structures. The mayor at the time asked Fire Chief Fred Eggers, an alumnus of the NJCU program, to draft an ordinance requiring every high-rise building to have fire safety managers on hand 24/7 to execute basic fire prevention activities on a routine basis and to act as liaisons between incoming fire units and the buildings' staff, occupants, and systems. The result was the establishment of a Fire Safety Manager Certification program

delivered through NJCU's Fire Science Department. Since 2001, nearly 100 certification classes have been run. As of today, every single fire safety manager employed in each of the 150-or-so high-rise buildings in Jersey City has successfully completed the NJCU certification class. Teaching the certification classes since the loss of Kevin W. Donnelly are Jersey City Fire Captain Edward Campbell (Ret.) (one of the original fire code ordinance co-authors) and Bayonne Fire Captain Richard Burroughs (Ret.).

But the bond between the Fire Science Department and the community go much deeper than that. "I have a photo in my office that was taken at a Jersey City Fire Department promotional ceremony held on our campus years ago," Malley says. "Every single one of the guys getting promoted—in addition to the chief—was either a graduate of, was currently involved with, or had taken classes with our program. There's no better testament to the productivity and success of a program than that." **NJCU**