Colby-Sawyer College
Graduate Success Stories
The Colby-Sawyer graduates featured here are business owners, educators, nurses, administrators, athletic trainers, journalists, designers, organization and industry leaders, future doctors, and life-long learners.

Every one of them can name a Colby-Sawyer professor who made a difference in his or her life. Or two. Or more. They understand and appreciate the benefits of a liberal arts and sciences education that prepares them with hands-on experience for a world that demands versatile, creative, critical thinkers.

As students at Colby-Sawyer, these alumni led campus organizations, played on varsity and club teams, conducted research that still shapes the college’s future, studied abroad and studied hard. Input equals output, they will tell you, and from Colby-Sawyer, you can go anywhere.

For some of these graduates, Colby-Sawyer’s internship requirement turned into a first job, as it does for so many of our students. The Capstone project, which involves extensive research and is the culmination of each student’s academic experience, set the stage for some of the work they do now. They built solid foundations at Colby-Sawyer that prepared them for graduate school and careers in their fields.

They are confident. They are proud that Colby-Sawyer is part of their history. They are excited for the future. They hope that you will find what interests you and that you will relentlessly pursue it at Colby-Sawyer, a college where you won’t get lost in the numbers and professors who are passionate about what they teach will be there for you every step of the way.
The acceptance rate to University of Vermont College of Medicine is only 3.7 percent. My class includes Ivy League graduates and college valedictorians, but after only a few weeks, I knew I belonged among them.

When I visited Colby-Sawyer’s campus as a high school student, I found the environment comfortable and friendly, but what really made the college click for me were the small class sizes. At Colby-Sawyer, professors know you, give you lots of one-on-one time, and push you to learn. The small group setting gave me a great opportunity to grow—I learned to stand out in the crowd and to build relationships with professors, which has helped me succeed in medical school.

A lot of medical schools look for applicants with something beyond the typical biology major; they are looking for well-rounded students who will bring diversity, creativity and knowledge to their program. Anyone can memorize facts, but in medicine you have to think on your feet. Colby-Sawyer’s liberal arts education, and in particular the Wesson Honors Program, pushed me to expand beyond the facts of science. The first-year honors seminar forced a deeper personal exploration, and the senior honors projects taught the importance of a multidisciplinary approach to problem solving. Colby-Sawyer and the honors program did a great job preparing me to understand both the science and art found in medicine.

My experience as captain of the Colby-Sawyer soccer team built my time management skills, which I’ve had to use during multiple rotations with 12-16 hour days plus studying piled on top. The soccer team also strengthened my interpersonal skills and taught me the importance of teamwork, which is helpful when you’re working with nurses, other doctors, medical assistants and office staff.

I now have only a few months to decide on and apply to a specialty. I enjoyed the many rotations of my third year but was most drawn to dermatology with its fast-paced clinic, specialization and ability to visually diagnose conditions. With any luck, I will match into a dermatology residency position and continue training in that program for another four years. I feel well prepared with the foundation Colby-Sawyer provided, and I look forward to continuing to learn, teach and help others in the medical profession.
Soon, I will be Dr. Lisa Giordano.

I’ve always wanted to earn my doctorate degree, and during a semester studying in Australia I found my passion: forensic psychology. This field bridges the gap between psychology and the law.

I loved being at Colby-Sawyer, and the psychology program prepared me well for graduate school. Even in my doctorate program we’ve covered things that I learned about at Colby-Sawyer.

The Capstone project was really helpful, too. I had to do a literature review along with a study, and I can’t tell you how many lit reviews I’ve written in grad school. Learning as an undergrad how to read research articles and focus on the details, as well as critique articles for their limitations, has been invaluable.

I earned my master’s degree in forensic and counseling psychology in 2010. My thesis was on cultural and linguistic considerations when working with Spanish-speaking clients for competency to stand trial evaluations. While working on my master’s, I interned at a medium-security prison that later hired me as a part-time clinician. I completed another internship at the only state facility that is a male prison as well as a state forensic psychiatric hospital.

Now, I am completing my year-long APA internship at a forensic psychiatric hospital in California as the final requirement for my Doctor of Psychology degree. I work with incarcerated males with severe mental illness. The site accepted me for the required postdoctoral fellowship, another year of training and supervision where I will accrue hours for licensure.

My hope is to do forensic evaluations, which would put me more on the court and legal side of things rather than treatment. It will be up to me to assist the court in deciding if someone should be held responsible for a crime they allegedly committed or if they need mental health care.
I took honors classes at my Maine high school, but for a long time I had no desire to go to college. A friend went to Colby-Sawyer, though, and invited me to visit. It was beautiful, and I like small communities where you know a lot of people, so I applied.

I used to question some of the required classes; at the time you can’t envision how they might help, but in the end, you can communicate with people who have a wide variety of interests. Every day I use business skills, history, politics, economics, science, communications, even law. You have to be versatile.

With regard to the major, the third-year project is the heart of the environmental studies program. My class conducted a year-long, community-based research project to develop a plan to green Colby-Sawyer. The work continues to influence the future of the college. All the pieces of my education have come together: My Capstone project was to develop a land management plan, and now I often craft land management plans for properties that OCT intends to acquire.

I’m the administrator of the Orleans Conservation Trust, a nonprofit whose goal is to preserve open space. I’m the only full-time employee, but my work is overseen by a board of trustees. I write grants; raise funds; create land management plans; negotiate land acquisitions; work with local, state and federal agencies; clear trails, manage volunteers and steward the land. I’m proud of how our educational programs have grown and that our membership has doubled since I started.

I am always interacting with the public, and having a liberal arts education has been a real benefit.
I entered Colby-Sawyer shy and introverted but graduated with confidence, tight friendships and a determination to deliver positive messages in my career as a broadcast journalist.

As facilitator of the Wesson Honors Program, I developed essential leadership skills. The caliber of the courses challenged me to think creatively and critically, which has been an asset when developing television storylines. My internship at New Hampshire’s ABC affiliate gave me experience and great contacts. It also compelled me to consider whether broadcast news was the right industry for me. I didn’t want to perpetuate a culture focused on negativity and hyperbole, and the internship helped direct me toward the health and wellness niche.

Colby-Sawyer is a community where the students encourage each other and the professors give invaluable feedback. Professor Ann Page Stecker taught me the importance of service and the potential for a small group to enact great change. My adviser was a strong female role model, and she taught me that we in the media industry have to be aware of what message we send out and that above all, we must maintain our integrity.

Some in my industry are surprised to learn I graduated from a liberal arts college, but Colby-Sawyer has a way of making you feel as if anything is possible. Colby-Sawyer students are grounded in authenticity but encouraged to reach for our dreams, and given the tools to get there.
There are two types of people in the world: Those who wake up and want to go slay the dragon, and those who want to watch the dragon get slayed. My dragon is oil, and I founded Poly Recovery to eliminate landfill dumping, reduce carbon waste, and sustain both the environment and the local economy. We are a plastics processor and full service recycler, and I’ve created a company with people who want to go slay the dragon. We love what we do and are the pioneers who have defined what we call sustainable recycling.

Colby-Sawyer taught me so much. I would not be half the person I am today without that education. The business department is second to none. It’s hands-on and you can’t get lost in the numbers. They pushed us to find ourselves. Colby-Sawyer gave me the ability to say you know what, I can do anything. I have the skills, I’ll bump shoulders with anyone. I was accepted into plenty of other schools, but choosing Colby-Sawyer was hands down the best decision I ever made. I wouldn’t change a thing. If you told me I had a free ride to some Ivy, I’d tell you to forget it. I couldn’t be happier with my education.

The internship program is fabulous; I wouldn’t expect to get a business degree without practical application. What does your résumé say, that you took HR? Wonderful. So did everyone else with a business degree. I got a job right out of the gate teaching CEOs and CFOs all over the country how to use and implement hospital information systems. When that got old, I started selling mortgages. I got licensed, started my own mortgage company when I was 22, and grew it to 75 employees. I sold it when I was 26.

I’ll never forget the professor who told us that a business plan is basically a living organism. The day you try to stick to that piece of paper and follow it like a road map, you’re in big trouble because everything changes every day. I learned that immediately with Poly Recovery, dealing with the largest manufacturers in the area. And you know what? We’ve grown just over 5,000 percent in the last six months.

What my Colby-Sawyer education gave me was the confidence to say I will go out there and I will slay the dragon.
I was one of 500 candidates who applied to be a cardiac nurse at University of Colorado Hospital. Only 40 candidates were offered positions, and I was one of them.

I knew for a long time that I wanted to be a nurse—I’ve always enjoyed communicating with people and even worked in a hospital while still in high school.

When I visited Colby-Sawyer, the campus was beautiful, and I looked forward to snowboarding at Mount Sunapee. Most important, though, Colby-Sawyer was a small school with a competitive nursing program. I wanted one-on-one attention and professors who were going to help me. I visited a lot of colleges, but my heart kept coming back to Colby-Sawyer.

I got to know amazing professors at Colby-Sawyer, from nursing professors who pushed me to think critically to biology professors who asked us to analyze the meaning behind lab results. They were great at engaging students and were more than willing to talk whenever I needed guidance. I learned to pay attention to details and to always do what’s best for the patient. A doctor recently thanked me for advocating so strongly for a patient, and that strength can be traced right back to my Colby-Sawyer education.

For my Capstone project, a group of us helped design a plan for how hospice can better care for heart failure patients. Through this project, I built my teamwork skills, which is the core of nursing. You have to work with other people, and trust them, and rely on them to have your back. Being able to ask for help is important, and I do. I also found, through that project, that I loved cardiology, and that’s where I started my career.

As a working nurse, I’ve learned the key to success is confidence. In the last few years I’ve noticed the way other nurses, doctors and managers deal with me has changed because I have become more confident in my nursing practice, and that only comes with time. You have to stand up for yourself and your patients. Listen to your instincts.

Because of Colby-Sawyer’s liberal arts program, I feel more well-rounded than other nurses who do a two-year program and don’t have exposure to other disciplines. I am better able to identify with my patients and their various professions, and to treat the whole person, not just their illness.
I graduated in May and three weeks later had a position teaching English, art and history at the private German International School of Boston in Massachusetts.

The biggest thing I learned at Colby-Sawyer is the idea that you’re teaching the whole child. A kid is not just your student in class. He’s also part of a family; he’s a big or little brother, or someone whose parents aren’t together anymore. There’s a whole life behind that student in your classroom. We need to understand who the kids are, what they need, and what excites them to learn. When you study child development and education, you’re really studying developmental psychology.

The philosophy taught at Colby-Sawyer is the constructionist approach, which is literally that the students construct their own education. I use that approach as much as possible now by having my students work independently and with others, aside from teachers. That’s putting your trust into the student.

Many child development classes at Colby-Sawyer come with a practicum, just like a science class has a lab. The college has its own early childhood laboratory school, The Windy Hill School, right on campus. Windy Hill offers the opportunity to do real, practical work with toddlers and kindergartners instead of just learning about what a classroom would be like. By the time I graduated, I’d completed three practicums and had experience teaching in two public elementary schools.

My student teaching experience was significant in helping me understand how to be a teacher. I doubt I would have been able to find a full-time job right out of school without it. I student taught in a second-grade classroom in New London for half my senior year. It’s an awesome public school, and I worked with the kids every day. I got to know them, give lessons and learn about classroom management as well as teaching. Now I have student teachers in my classroom!

For child development majors interested in teaching certification and master’s degree programs in education or mental-health related fields, affiliation agreements with Plymouth State University (N.H.), Springfield College (Mass.) and Wheelock College in Boston assist qualified Colby-Sawyer seniors and alumni into their graduate study programs.

What makes a good teacher? You have to be a people person. Kids are little people. You have to be outgoing and flexible. We need teachers who are motivated to learn and grow and participate in their own education so that they can pass that love of learning on to their students.
Colby-Sawyer’s liberal arts-based education, combined with the close personal connections I built within its community, has set the stage for my confidence and success as an associate designer at Simon Pearce. Because of them that I consider myself both an artist and a designer. That duality frees me from being so rigidly stuck at the computer, a pitfall of many graphic designers, and allows me to be more open-minded when designing and thinking about how to market products.

I wear a lot of hats in my role at Simon Pearce, but that’s nothing new. I learned to wear different hats at Colby-Sawyer, from processing critiques in my art classes and presenting my Capstone to communications and philosophy classes. Now, I can analyze a product and consider how to market it to a specific audience: Do we want to talk about the way it was made, the idea behind it, or do we want to talk about its shape and form, its look and feel? I see a lot of philosophy in my job, and writing and marketing. I need all those facets to create and present a design concept to colleagues, work with copywriters and copyeditors, and to collaborate with the product design department to brainstorm fresh ways of reaching our consumers.

My experience at Colby-Sawyer was fun and personal. The college brings students together to build tight-knit relationships. Surrounded by friends who were leaders and explorers, I felt both comfortable and inspired there.

In the future, I plan to further my education, perhaps earn a graduate degree. I really just want to keep learning, always, and putting myself out there. It’s good to grow.
I like challenging myself, and Colby-Sawyer did just that. It provided me with room to explore and lots of support, and it encouraged me to pursue my passion for healthcare and build a sturdy baseline from which I will jump into challenges for the rest of my life.

Inspired by a doctor who cared for me when I was growing up in Japan, I knew when I was applying for college in the United States that I wanted a school with a strong nursing program. Colby-Sawyer’s reputation, combined with its small size and warm, welcoming students and professors, convinced me that it was the right place for me.

During my junior year, Colby-Sawyer proved just how supportive a place it is. When stress began to take its toll on my health, I wondered if I should just go home. Instead of letting that happen, Colby-Sawyer invited me to view this difficult time as an opportunity to evaluate my strengths and weaknesses. My friends and my adviser encouraged me, guided me and reminded me of my potential. I changed my major from nursing to public health, a path that would allow me to continue to pursue my passion for healthcare and my long-term goal to promote health on a global basis as well as to utilize my bilingualism.

I received so much support from Colby-Sawyer that I wanted to give back. I created a Medical Reserve Corps club on campus, which works to promote healthy living and prepare for and respond to public health emergencies. Doing so had the added benefit of enhancing my leadership skills.

The public health major prepares students to work in the public and private sectors to serve and protect the health of others.

Classroom, laboratory, internship and research experiences provide graduates with the knowledge and practical skills to work within the public health system as well as pursue graduate education in public health.

Today, I am a site operations associate at Ora, a company that conducts clinical trials on ophthalmic drugs. One of my current roles is to use my knowledge of Japanese language and culture to help Ora communicate effectively with the Japanese doctors and nurses running a clinical trial for a drug to treat cedar allergies. Japanese communication style is different than American, and so I do not just translate directly; when I was in Japan for a month-long business trip, I found I needed to employ the critical thinking skills I had learned at Colby-Sawyer to communicate well and diplomatically. Colby-Sawyer’s eye-opening liberal arts courses helped me build these skills.

I am challenged at work, and I know that with challenge comes success. Colby-Sawyer prepared me for all the challenges I will face, and for that, I am grateful.
Michael Vigneau ’03 & Zac Kershaw ’16

B.S., Exercise and Sport Sciences
Associate Director of Sports Medicine
at Boston College

When Michael Vigneau ’03 had an opening on his 2013 intern roster for Boston College’s pre-season football camp, he contacted Colby-Sawyer’s head athletic trainer, who presented the opportunity to Zac Kershaw ’16. He leapt at the chance.

“I said yes because it allowed me Division I clinical experience and the opportunity to connect with well-established professionals in my career path, including some of the best-known athletic training names in New England,” said Kershaw. “I took advantage of learning from the six certified athletic trainers. I asked questions, and they taught me how to tape ankles, provide select rehab treatments and remove staples. I was able to see injuries and conditions that were new to me.”

Kershaw’s impressive performance was noticed, and he was asked to return to B.C. in the fall to work all the home football games, including a bowl game, plus two road games. Kershaw accepted and clocked 37 hours of Division I game coverage.

“It was an exhilarating experience. I gained vital information and made connections for my future,” said Kershaw. “But the most significant thing I learned is that you never know who is watching. It’s important to put effort into everything you do because the people you impress with your work ethic are the people who can provide you with opportunities.”

Vigneau is always watching out for Colby-Sawyer students. “As alumni, it is our responsibility to offer opportunities, when we can, to help students find their direction. And it benefits everyone,” he said.

After graduation, Vigneau worked as an orthopedic technician at Boston’s Brigham and Women’s Hospital and was certified in strength and condition. In 2004, he earned his athletic training certification and became a resident trainer for B.C. football. He was named assistant director for sports medicine in September 2006. He earned his master’s degree in education administration from B.C. and was promoted to his current position of associate director for football sports medicine in September 2012.

As for Kershaw, he will do his first clinical rotation with Dartmouth football, just as Vigneau did while at Colby-Sawyer. “I have always known that I wanted to be an athletic trainer,” said Kershaw. “I may pursue graduate studies, physical therapy school, or look into becoming a physician extender, but I know for sure I will become an athletic trainer.”