

# An officer and a student: Marie Finelli earns her degree

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Campus Peace Officer Marie Finelli has a deep understanding of what it means to wear a uniform, and not just because she wears 30 pounds of gear and a Kevlar vest.

Consistent training. Dedication, duty, diplomacy. The ability to make tough and even life-altering decisions, often in a manner of seconds. Protecting and deeply knowing your community, even amid tension and distrust.

“We all get involved in law enforcement to make a difference,” said Finelli, who has served in SUNY Broome’s Department of Health and Safety since 2006.

She was one of the first two Campus Peace Officers hired when the college transitioned from Broome County Security to its own law enforcement agency and has been instrumental in the department’s growth, noted Public Safety Chief Joe O’Connor.

But for one evening this month, Finelli will wear a different uniform – one that she took 18 years to earn. On May 21, she will wear her mortarboard and tassel with SUNY Broome’s graduating class, earning her Associate’s Degree in Liberal Arts.

“Her dedication to SUNY Broome as an employee and student has made her one of the most valuable members of our campus community,” O’Connor said.



**Marie Finelli**

## **A long road**

Many of SUNY Broome’s students have stories of overcoming obstacles and hardship in their pursuit of

education, and they're not shy about sharing them with Officer Finelli. She has heard some heartfelt stories of difficulty and triumph along the way – and her own is no less inspiring.

A single mother, she had her daughter when she was 15 years old and often missed days at Binghamton High School when her daughter was ill. Not to be deterred, she finished her GED and graduated on stage with her original high school class.

When she attended SUNY Broome for the first time in Fall 1997 and Spring 1998, she enjoyed the social life on campus – skipping class to hang out with “the popular kids.” She tried college again in the following fall semester at Lackawanna College in Scranton, but working remained the priority rather than school.

In 2002, she returned to SUNY Broome to earn her EMT certification – a full-time student and single parent working in night security at a local hospital. She worked as a police dispatcher in Johnson City in 2003 and 2004, ultimately resigning to attend the Broome County's Law Enforcement Academy. She served in police departments in Afton and Deposit before returning to SUNY Broome – this time as both an employee and student.

“I've been here ever since, taking classes when I can,” said Finelli, who is also a part-time officer with the Town of New Berlin police department. “You've got to do it at your own pace.”

Her degree in Individual Studies in Liberal Arts combines medical studies, law enforcement and general education. One of her last classes – Professor Doug Garnar's Community Internship class – allowed her to receive credit for her years of community service, which she documented in a portfolio. (Fun fact: she first met Professor Garnar while writing him a parking ticket. Don't worry; they're quite congenial today.)

## **The perfect job**

In addition to an education, SUNY has given Finelli what she considers “the perfect job,” reminiscent of the 1950s-era beat cop. Rather than patrolling in a vehicle, she is on her feet all over campus – not only responding to calls, but giving students fist-bumps, high-fives and the occasional talking-to.

“People know us by name and by faces. You're more accessible,” she said. “It's a relationship you wouldn't normally have when you're in a car. I've always enjoyed that.”

Police work is an ever-changing field, and officers do in-service training twice a year to keep their skills sharp – a necessity in a field in which split-second decisions can make the difference between life and death.

A Broome-Endicott crisis negotiator known for her ability to keep calm in tense situations, Officer Finelli also helps facilitate presentations on conflict resolution, workplace violence, safety and other topics at SUNY Broome. She is also a member of the Southern Tier Law Enforcement Memorial Association, which plans the region's Police Week events and remembers fallen officers, and has taught classes in mental health,

contemporary police problems and officer survival at the Broome County Sheriff's Police Academy.

Now that she has achieved her associate's degree, she is considering pursuing a bachelor's degree in human services to aid her career. And while Finelli is graduating from SUNY Broome this month, she's also passing the torch as a Hornet; her daughter is enrolled for the fall.

"My path was 18 years long. Life gets in the way. It doesn't mean you can't get it done," Finelli said of her academic journey. Despite the twists and turns along the way, she has no regrets.

"Every avenue I've taken has led to something better," she said.

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