

UP

A magazine for alumni and friends of the
University of South Carolina Upstate

FALL/WINTER 2021-2022

REIMAGINING UPSTATE

*Dr. Bennie Harris
lays out his vision
for the campus*

First Class

New teachers share their
classroom experiences

Game Time

Esports arrives at
USC Upstate

Following His Art

Alum explores themes
of identity in his work



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MANAGING EDITOR

Elizabeth Anderson

ASSOCIATE EDITORS

Trevor Anderson '04

DESIGN

Bridget Kirkland
Hannah Jordan '18
Erik Brandt
Latresea Ellis '04
Studio Upstate
Mikayla Woods '22
Jarred Bradley '22

PHOTOGRAPHY

Les Duggins
Myles Austin McDaniel '22

WEB DESIGN

Eric Swearengin

CONTRIBUTORS

Erin Callicott '19
Chaunte'l Powell
John C. Stevenson '90

MULTIMEDIA PRODUCER

Javier Rivera

CONTACT US

UMC@uscupstate.edu

MAILING ADDRESS

ATTN: UP Magazine
University Marketing and Communications
800 University Way
Spartanburg, South Carolina 29303

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ADMINISTRATION

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Letter from THE CHANCELLOR

I am honored, humbled, and excited to be your new chancellor!

These first six months have been a whirlwind of getting to know the people who make USC Upstate a stellar university, building relationships in the community, assessing strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges, and setting a vision for the future.

One of my first actions was to add the academic deans, and faculty and staff senate chairs, to the Chancellor's Cabinet and take them on a working retreat. The focus of that retreat was to think collaboratively and articulate a transformative value proposition for USC Upstate.

As this diverse leadership group deliberated, I was impressed. These are people who deeply care about students and the university. We talked a lot about the impact we should have on the Upstate region. The result of that process was this phrase:

"Education for all that inspires a just and thriving society."

USC Upstate is well-positioned to fulfill this value proposition. We're the No. 1 public university in South Carolina for the third consecutive year and No. 2 among public universities in the South, according to U.S. News and World Report.

USC Upstate is also the top-ranked

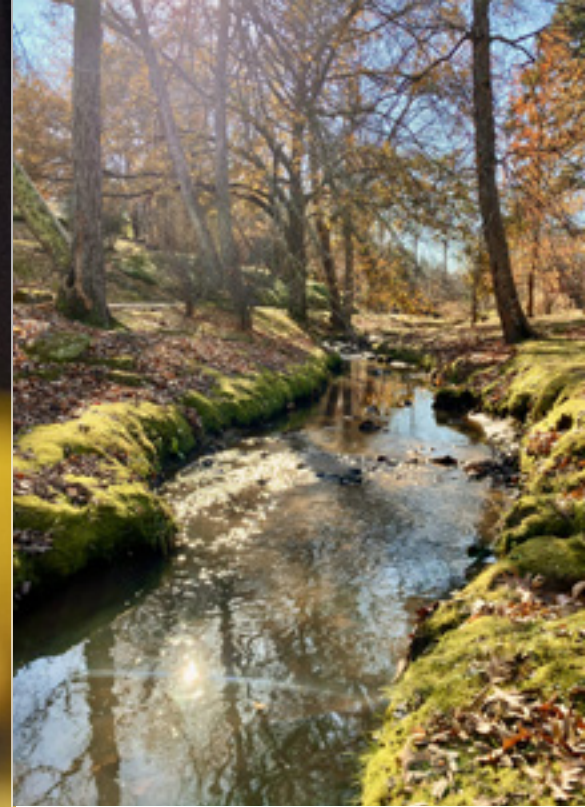
public institution in South Carolina on CollegeNet's Social Mobility Index, or SMI. The SMI measures the extent to which the university educates more economically disadvantaged students at lower tuition, so they can graduate and secure well-paying jobs.

Clearly, our faculty and staff do a great job in preparing students for post-graduate life, positioning them for increased generational wealth and mobility, heightened health and education outcomes, and to adapt and excel in professions that have yet to be conceived.

But even with this academic muscle and social commitment, achieving our transformative value proposition is a lofty goal that will be determined by our success in student enrollment, retention, and innovation.

Assessing the value of a four-year degree, a 2019 Forbes magazine article proclaimed, "There's no better investment return than college — not even close." The Social Security Administration reports that men with bachelor's degrees earn about \$900,000 more in median lifetime earnings than high school graduates, and women earn about \$630,000 more. It's even higher for those with graduate degrees.

Still, enrollment and retention are significantly declining at universities



across the nation and USC Upstate is not immune to this trend. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused many students to put off enrolling or to leave school before completing their degrees.

Public policy also plays a large role, as governments continue to shift the burden of paying for public education from the taxpayer to families, which is compounded by tuition increases. This means that students, especially the economically disadvantaged, must secure increasingly substantial loans to make college accessible. When they graduate — as they most often will at USC Upstate — they face years of loan payments rather than increasing their personal wealth proposition or starting a business.

This may contribute to the fact that minorities are not broadly participating in the Upstate region's entrepreneurial growth. In Spartanburg County alone, the number of Black-owned nonemployer businesses is nearly 30 percent below the national average while the number of White, non-Hispanic businesses is within 95 percent of the national average, according to the U.S. Census Bureau Annual Business Survey and Nonemployer Statistics by Demographics.

Recently, I convened the REIMAGINE Enrollment Summit, during which our faculty and staff considered these

challenges and created exciting strategies to increase enrollment and retention. The university is already focused on innovation, as evidenced by recent or new, market-driven degree programs in cybersecurity, exercise science and business analytics.

We have plenty of opportunities to grow. In Spartanburg County, only 25 percent of persons aged 25 and above have earned a bachelor's degree. Clearly, we have to make a college degree more accessible, more attractive and more valuable — not just for the sake of the university, but for the economic growth and well-being of the region.

Michelangelo is quoted as saying, "The greatest danger for most of us is not that our aim is too high and we miss it, but that it is too low, and we reach it." At USC Upstate, we have set the target high, and we aim to reach it. Again, I am grateful to join with you on this journey and to be part of the USC Upstate community. Go Spartans!

Bennie L. Harris, Ph.D.
Chancellor

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Despite a warmer than usual fall, campus trees displayed spectacular color.



Searching for the Right Words

Students add to research on Holocaust by translating privately held documents.

The paper is yellowed with age, the neat handwriting faint but still legible.

"My dearest," the letter from Ravensbrück Women's Concentration Camp begins. "I have received the letters from December 8th and January 6th, the three packages also. I thank you very much for your effort with everything."

The message, penned by Czech prisoner Libuše Marianová in February 1943, is among a trove of World War II documents that were translated for the first time by students in Assistant Professor Alex Lorenz's Introduction to German Translation class in fall 2019.

Those documents were shared with Lorenz by a private collector, Brad Lephew, who had been searching for someone willing to undertake the time-consuming task of translating the German script. When Lephew connected with Lorenz, the professor saw an opportunity for his students to learn about a dark part of German history through primary sources.

Now Lorenz's class, held every two years, has a new collection to work with – the papers of Holocaust survivor Samuel Finkel, whose granddaughter reached out to Lorenz after hearing about the first project.

The work is meaningful on many levels, Lorenz says. "I took this on because I knew there's a need," he says. "Most of these families are Americans who have this background from the Holocaust, and

they have all these documents at home that they tried to decipher and nobody is helping them with that."

Professional translators generally prefer high-paying jobs, he notes – documents or manuals needed by companies or corporations. Having students translate these personal collections provides a service to the community, Lorenz says, while also developing important career skills – research, teamwork, writing, revising.

Like other students, senior Nataliya Vykhovanets found deciphering the old-fashioned handwriting one of the biggest challenges of doing a translation. "You don't want to misinterpret one of the words, since that could change the whole meaning," Vykhovanets says.


Though she's a German minor, Vykhovanets was pleasantly surprised she could successfully translate something written in a language she isn't fluent in. Lorenz says students only need two semesters of German to be able to translate. "Writing is the first thing that develops in language acquisition," he explains.

Just like in a professional translation agency, students work in teams on a batch of documents. Lorenz mixes students of different fluency levels, so those more experienced in German can help those who aren't, and from different majors, to bring a variety of perspectives to the work.

The Finkel collection includes many personal letters and documents that trace the family's history from the time their home in Austria was seized by the Nazis and the family split up, to communications sent by Samuel Finkel from the detention camps in England and Australia where he was held, to Finkel's efforts to reunite with his daughter in San Francisco and find out the fate of his wife after the war.

Freshman Julius Storino says working with the documents makes personal the devastation of the Holocaust. "Normally when you hear about the Holocaust, you just see a big number. You forget that behind all these numbers is a person with their own story," he says.

At the end of the semester, each group presents their work to the client and shares their reflections about what they've learned. The translations, which bear the students' names, and the scanned documents are then submitted to the South Carolina Digital Library Collections, where scholars and history buffs anywhere in the world can access them.

Lorenz says he would like to secure funding that would allow a student or students to work year-round on translating Holocaust-era collections. These are documents that are significant not just to the people who own them, he notes, but to all of us. "That whole time really shaped the society that we are today." 

Images courtesy of

University of South Carolina Upstate Archives.





Game Time

Esports arrives at USC Upstate.

BY TREVOR ANDERSON, '04

In October, USC Upstate launched its esports program aimed at attracting prospective Spartans and enriching the student experience by creating a thriving gaming community on campus.

A varsity program is scheduled to debut during the fall 2022 semester, but esports will be offered as a club activity in spring 2022.

Esports is located in a 1,600-square-foot gaming center within the university's Health Education Complex. The center can feature up to 45 gaming stations, each equipped with a state-of-the-art computer by Alienware that includes an 11th generation Intel Core i9 processor 2.5 gigahertz with a 1 terabyte hard drive and 32 gigabytes of RAM memory, and an Nvidia GeForce RTX 3090 graphics card.

"Few co-curricular options in American higher education are expanding like esports," says Dr. Brit Katz, interim vice chancellor for student

affairs at USC Upstate. "As greater numbers of universities work to create meaningful experiences for students through egaming, USC Upstate also aspires to compete with our consoles, keyboards and headsets."


"Research confirms that esports players will enroll in an institution that is hundreds of miles away from home if elements like a terrific gaming station, excited peers, meaningful competition and affiliation exist," Katz adds.

USC Upstate leaders and officials from other Big South member institutions are actively pursuing the development of competitions that could result in an informal conference championship.

The varsity program will initially compete in three games: "League of Legends," "Valorant" and "Rocket League." A range of other games will be available to club players, and the university plans to continue to grow

those options over time.

Nick Ames, assistant director of intramural sports, club sports and summer camps at USC Upstate, says student polling showed overwhelming support for the inception of an esports program. Ames will direct the program, which will operate under campus recreation.

"After listening to requests from our current and prospective students, we are excited to bring esports to Upstate," says Donette Stewart, vice chancellor of enrollment services and director of admissions at USC Upstate. "Our new gaming center will feature the best Alienware computers on the market, so we are looking for competitive students to join us. We will offer students a chance to play the games they enjoy while they earn a top-notch degree that will prepare them for rewarding careers." 

Learn Where You Live

Students examine the dynamics of a city with walks through Spartanburg.

With all the changes that have transformed the city of Spartanburg over the last 15 years – new shops, restaurants, housing, neighborhood redevelopment – Colby King had the perfect case study for his urban sociology class.

King, an assistant professor of sociology, wanted his students to look at the ways a city's organization and structure shape the people who live there, and how residents in turn continually refashion the place where they live by the choices they make and the ways they describe it.

"The way the city is built, where the buildings are situated, how the neighborhoods are situated relative to downtown, whether there's public transportation, all those things shape an individual's experience as they navigate the city," King says.

At the same time, he adds, "the decisions that individuals make every day about how they go about their life in the city, changes the nature of the city every day," from the organizations they belong to, to the activities they participate in.

To give students an on-the-ground look at these issues, King organized a series of walking tours that took his students to different neighborhoods in Spartanburg and allowed them to interact with city and community leaders. Students learned about the city's trail system from Ned Barrett of Partners for Active Living; economic development from Katherine O'Neill of OneSpartanburg and city manager Chris Story; downtown history from librarian Brad Steinecke; and changes to the Northside from Tony Thomas of the Northside Development Group.

Kyla Stafford-Simmons, a senior majoring in psychology, says the class made her think about who affects decisions in a city. At a council meeting she attended virtually, she noticed most

of the people there in person were retired or older. Because the meetings are at 6 p.m., large groups of people can't be there, she says – people like her with evening jobs, or working parents running errands after they leave the office. That gives a minority of people an outsized voice, she notes.

"They're telling the council their ideas of what they want," Stafford-Simmons says. "It's majority rule for them, and it can't be that. You're implementing ideas that are not going to be fair for everyone else."


Stafford-Simmons' observation underscores the kind of discrepancies King wants his students to notice. "Every change that happens in a city benefits some people and doesn't benefit others," King says. "There's multiple processes happening at once."

For Natasha McDaniel, a sociology major and Spartanburg native, the class gave her a chance to quiz leaders about redevelopment's impact on residents. McDaniel, who grew up half her life on the Northside, and the other half in Highland, wanted to know what was being done to ensure an adequate supply of affordable housing in her old neighborhoods.

"My main concern is dislocation, and how are they going to make sure the residents of those communities still stay there," she says.

King says he was impressed to see his students asking thoughtful questions that demonstrated a genuine desire to see a city that lifts up all its residents. "They're eager to help work on the changes they want to see in the community," he says.

That's certainly the case for McDaniel, who would like to eventually open a clinic that provides a variety of support services to underserved residents, such as financial counseling and mental health.

As McDaniel notes about the people she met on the tours, "Everyone is really just trying to make Spartanburg better." 



Students in Colby King's urban sociology class, above, examined the dynamics that shape a city and its residents during a series of walking tours of Spartanburg. Below, Brad Steinecke, assistant director of local history at Spartanburg County Public Libraries, leads the group on a history tour of downtown Spartanburg.





Making Their Voices Heard

USC Upstate student voting in the 2020 presidential election increased nearly 10% over the previous election.

More than 68% of eligible students participated in the election, compared with nearly 59% in 2016, according to a report from the National Study of Learning, Voting and Engagement (NSLVE) at the Institute for Democracy and Higher Education at Tufts University. That exceeded the national student average by 2.4%.


Additionally, the campus registration rate rose from 78% in 2016 to more than 85% in 2020. The national registration rate rose to 83% in 2020 from 76% four years prior.

“We saw a significant increase in voter registration and participation on Upstate’s campus between 2016 and 2020,” said Allison Clark Ellis, a professor of political science and the civic engagement coordinator at USC

Upstate. “This indicates that students are learning the importance of being engaged in the community around them, which is part of the university’s mission.”

Ellis said that leading up to the 2020 election, multiple groups on campus worked together to try to reach students and give them as much information as possible.

“Giving students the opportunity to register to vote, providing them with information about candidates and issues, helping them request absentee ballots — all these items lower the cost of voting which increases the likelihood of participation,” she said.

NSLVE results were based on enrollment records submitted to the National Student Clearinghouse and publicly available voting files collected by L2 Political, one of the nation’s most widely used campaign data vendors. 

Audio Art Tour Launches

Anyone wanting to learn more about the sculptures around the campus now has a new guide.

Students in Lex Lancaster’s 20th Century art class have designed an audio tour that can be accessed by scanning a QR code positioned in front of each sculpture. Listeners learn about the work, things the artist may have said about it, and details about how it came to USC Upstate.

The class actually completed the work in fall of 2019, and the audio has been up online for more than a year, but the pandemic and other issues delayed the signs’ installation until recently, Lancaster says.

The tour was a chance for students to explore art beyond research papers, Lancaster says. “If there’s a way that I can get my students to do something that is unusual, or different, or something that allows them to engage with things that are more immediate or relevant, then that’s the ideal,” says Lancaster, who is also director of USC Upstate’s art galleries.

Each student was allowed to pick the sculpture they wanted to focus on, so there are currently 10 stops on the tour. Beyond giving students ownership in the campus environment, the tour also benefits the university community at large, Lancaster notes.

“It’s inviting the campus to not just engage with the visual art as a passive wallpaper, but to understand that it’s this dynamic thing that has a history and connects with our culture and our region.”

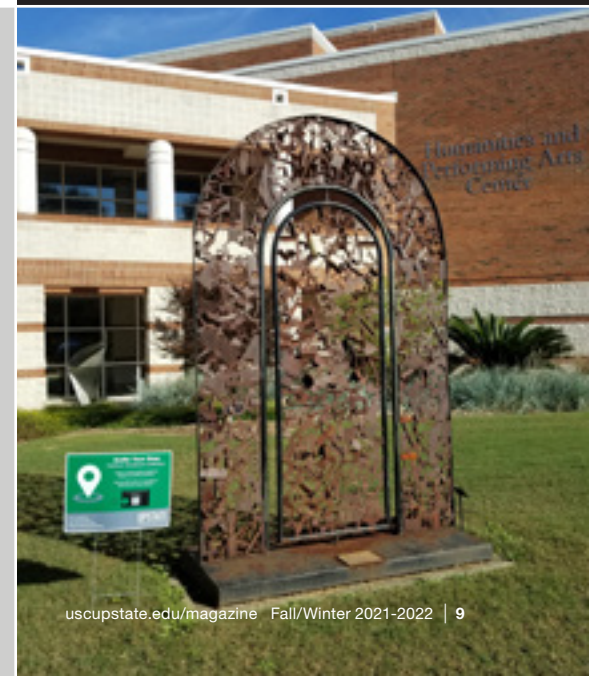
Nursing Alums Honored

When the nursing resource website Nurse.org honored Spartanburg Medical Center’s Pavilion 6 floor as Nursing Unit of the Month in September, alumni from the Mary Black School of Nursing were well represented.

Pavilion 6, a critical care respiratory unit, has cared for many of the sickest COVID patients. It includes alumni Jo Ann Allison, Autumn Bridwell, Amy Bunch, Mindy Murray, Peden Pack, Jessica Perez, Jazmine Smith, Elise Solis-Caron and Stacie “Alice”

Whitlock, as well as two current students – Gordon McKenzie and Nia Rice.

“They have stepped up to the plate to take care of those patients prior to going to a ventilator-type situation,” Mary Jane Jennings, vice president and chief nursing officer for Spartanburg Medical, told the Spartanburg Herald-Journal. “The goal is to keep the patient off the ventilator and our nurses work very hard. They have a team effort and that is what this award is about. Collaboration.”





Apartment Features

audenupstate.com/amenities

- Electronically Controlled Doors
- Granite Countertops
- Stainless Steel Kitchen Appliances
- Hardwood Style Flooring
- Central Air Conditioning
- Cable and WIFI Package
- In Unit Washer & Dryer
- Walk-in Closets
- Balcony
- Fully Furnished



Coveted Amenities

- Walking Distance to USC Upstate
- Resort Style Swimming Pool
- Sundeck
- Outdoor Lounge with Hammock Garden
- Outdoor Basketball Court
- Sand Beach Volleyball Court
- Pet Friendly
- Dog Park
- Pet Grooming Salon
- Health & Fitness Center
- Yoga & Multifunctional Studio
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Apply Now!



Fall 2021 Student Body



New Student Enrollment

New Freshmen	593
New Transfer/Readmit ...	820
Dual Enrollment	459
New Graduate	143
New Non-Degree Graduate	325
Total New Students	2,080

5,405

Classification

4,949 - Undergraduate • 456 - Graduate

Freshman Facts

Average GPA 3.98
Average SAT 1030 • Palmetto Fellows 22
• Life Scholars 218

Top Counties

Spartanburg • Greenville
York • Richland • Berkeley



Annual Applications



Applications Processed
5,040

Students Admitted
3,859

Top Majors

Nursing.....	817
Applied Learning & Instruction	313
Psychology	298
Criminal Justice	290
Exercise & Sport Science.....	254
Biology	238
Management	205

Gender



69%
Female



30%
Male

1% Not reported



Geographic

31 states
15 countries
46 of 46 counties in SC

Ethnicity

52% – White
30% - Black/African American
7% – Hispanic
3% – Asian
8% - Other/Unknown

Top 10 Schools

High Schools

- Boiling Springs High School
- Paul M. Dorman High School
- James F. Byrnes High School
- G.D. Broome High School
- Riverside High School

Transfer

- Greenville Technical College
- Spartanburg Community College
- Spartanburg Methodist College
- Midlands Technical College
- Tri-County Technical College

Financial Aid

\$53 million

- \$53 million awarded annually
- \$3.1 million Institutional Scholarships Awarded
- 2,005 SC Scholars (Palmetto Fellows, Life, Hope)

$$E=mc^2$$

Meet the Class of 2025



Loucas L'Elie

Hometown: I was originally born in Fort Knox, Kentucky, but my dad was in the U.S. Army so I was constantly moving. I came here from Camden, South Carolina.

Major: Political science

Hobbies and interests: Playing video games, watching movies, writing stories and working out. I am interested in politics (U.S. and world), learning about space and learning German.

What excites you most about college? Meeting new people and learning more about my major.

What goals do you hope to achieve during your time at Upstate? My goals include obviously getting my degree, meeting lifelong friends, and getting professional experience.

What's a tip you've learned in these first months of school that you would pass on to other new students? Don't change for anyone, stay true to yourself. Also, balance your friend time with study time, because studying is more important than you think.



Jalen A. Breazeale

Hometown: Greenville, South Carolina

Major: Business

Hobbies and interests: Basketball

What excites you most about college? Meeting new people and growing into an adult

What goals do you hope to achieve during your time at Upstate? Deans List, Conference Championship, March Madness

What's a tip you've learned in these first months of school that you would pass on to other new students? You'll make mistakes, just learn from it and try not to make the same mistake over and over.



Jeshurun Ohanuka

Hometown: Greenville, South Carolina

Major: Pre-med biology

Hobbies and interests: Soccer, snowboarding, and working out

What excites you most about college? The ability to take studies into my own hands, with more time and management freedoms.

What goals do you hope to achieve during your time at Upstate? I hope to graduate from USC Upstate in three years and get admitted to medical school.

What's a tip you've learned in these first months of school that you would pass on to other new students? Go to classes and rewrite notes.



Sanaa Listenbee

Hometown: Loganville, Georgia

Major: Business management

Hobbies and interests: Soccer, writing, music and photography. In fact, I play soccer for the university's program.

What excites you most about college? I am the most excited to see how much I develop as an individual and continue to impact the people I meet.

What goals do you hope to achieve during your time at Upstate? Some goals are bettering myself as an individual, progressing as much as I can as a player and leaving a positive impact on everyone I've encountered.

What's a tip you've learned in these first months of school that you would pass on to other new students? Remain focused on yourself and the things that mean the most to you. If you don't feel you're in the most beneficial environment for yourself or surrounding yourself with people who make you better in every aspect of living, don't be ashamed or fearful to make decisions for your well-being and progress as a person. You should be your priority, and in doing so, tough decisions may be made. Follow through and support yourself.



Maci Gibson

Hometown: Pacolet, South Carolina

Major: Early childhood education

Hobbies and interests: Journaling, spending time with my family, and teaching at my childhood dance studio

What excites you most about college? All the endless opportunities that are offered here at USC Upstate. Getting to meet so many fellow Spartans daily makes this journey so much better!

What goals do you hope to achieve during your time at Upstate? To expand my network of relationships, including friends and potentially people who will help me further my career in early childhood education. To learn techniques and ways to provide my future students with the best opportunities for success.

What's a tip you've learned in these first months of school that you would pass on to other new students? Always stay true to yourself and push towards your ending goal! No matter what happens, you can do anything you set your mind to.



Reika Shiraki

Hometown: Pacolet, South Carolina

Major: Nursing

Hobbies and interests:

Working out, volunteering in my community, and attending local musical entertainment in my free time.

What excites you most about college? I am most excited about the independence I have gained from being at college. I am in control of my life and my decisions now. I could not feel more free.

What goals do you hope to achieve during your time at Upstate? My goals are to become more involved on campus while also maintaining a high GPA and having fun while doing so.

What's a tip you've learned in these first months of school that you would pass on to other new students? GET INVOLVED. It helps you connect with your campus and peers, while also motivating you to be on top of your schoolwork.



Zachary T. McQueen

Hometown: Irmo, South Carolina

Major: Criminal justice

Hobbies and interests: I love student government and giving a voice to those who have never been heard. Additionally, I am

interested in organizations on campus that promote diversity and cultural education.

What excites you most about college? Meeting new people from all walks of life and experiencing different cultures is the most exciting thing about college.

What goals do you hope to achieve during your time at Upstate? I hope to achieve not only my bachelor's degree but also bring more people to the school that I love so much!

What's a tip you've learned in these first months of school that you would pass on to other new students? Take it all in. Get involved on campus and let whatever you're involved in on campus be something you have never done before. Don't know about Latinx and Hispanic heritage? Join an organization like LASO and learn. Educate yourself for not only your benefit, but also for the benefit of those around you.

*“Where I see the university in five years is being very confident about who we are, and having that value be clear in the community and in the region that we serve” -
Chancellor Bennie Harris*





Full Plate, Empty Cup

Dr. Bennie Harris lays out his vision for USC Upstate.

BY ELIZABETH ANDERSON

When Chancellor Bennie Harris is introducing himself to new people, he likes to share some advice from his mother.

She told him to live life with an empty cup, since if his cup was full, others wouldn't be able to contribute new ideas to it.

Given Harris' busy schedule since starting his term as USC Upstate's fifth chancellor on July 1, his cup would seem to be overflowing. He's attended faculty meetings, sat in on department meetings, spoken to educators in both Greenville and Spartanburg school districts, met with business leaders and General Assembly members, and talked to city leaders, among other activities. Yet, he insists, he's just getting started.

"What made USC Upstate so attractive to me is that it was an opportunity to take a comprehensive university that was in a region as diverse as any in this country, and help students realize their greatest aspirations through education," he says.

The ability of education to transform lives has been a theme throughout Harris' life. The sixth of eight children born to Henry and Charlie Mae Harris, Harris grew up on a farm in Deeson, Mississippi. His parents never made a big deal out of education, yet Harris says he and his siblings always understood it

was "something we were going to do." All of them, except for his oldest brother, Henry James, who died of cancer at 17, went to college.

Harris' parents instilled a strong work ethic in their children. The family grew cotton, soybeans and wheat on 60 acres that once belonged to Harris' grandfather, and every summer, starting at 5 in the morning, everyone pitched in to weed the cotton plants until 4 or 5 in the evening. Then there were chores to do at home. As young as 9, Harris would pick vegetables in the family's truck garden and sell them at the market to earn money to buy school clothes.

Faith was another cornerstone of family life. "We went to church a lot," Harris says. Twice a day on Sunday, then Wednesdays and Saturdays, the family attended the Church of Christ in Mount Bayou. The experience not only gave him a strong religious grounding, it taught him that "you can lead from whatever station you are in life." In a small rural church, he explains, anyone may be called on to preach, or sing, or any number of tasks, so you learn to do whatever may be required.

Harris says he was also fortunate to have outstanding teachers throughout his educational journey. There was Ms. Peacock, his third-grade teacher; Mr. Saddle, the first male teacher he ever

had, in sixth grade; and Mr. Jones, his ninth-grade science teacher.

And then there was Mrs. Hemphill, his high school algebra teacher. Harris was one of 10 students on a college track, so during the periods she wasn't teaching, Mrs. Hemphill would teach the group calculus and physics to prepare them for the ACT. She was also the adviser for the student council, of which Harris was president, and invited the students to her beach home, "just to show us that there was more than the two-lane highways and the dirt roads that we grew up on."

When it came time to choose a college, Mrs. Hemphill encouraged Harris to attend Mississippi State University. While he had originally intended to pursue pre-med at another school, his teacher, who was white, reminded him of the sacrifices many African Americans had made to integrate all-white colleges so they

would be accessible to all. "I think she wanted her students to participate in the fruits of that labor," Harris says.

Inspired by her support, Harris became an engineering major. He was part of the university's co-op program, in which students gained real-world work experience one semester, then focused full-time on their studies the next. Harris notes the jobs carried full responsibilities – in one, he was in charge of designing the machinery to produce seat belts and airbags for an automotive supplier, ensuring it met the manufacturer's exact specifications.

But his experiences also gave Harris second thoughts about his chosen path. He sympathized with the workers he met, and their efforts to improve their conditions, goals that were often at odds with management. Harris knew if he rose through the ranks as a manager, he would be expected to focus more on company profits than worker rights.

While he valued the skills and experience he gained through his internships, "it helped me to see that I really align with the values of empowered people, more so than just the financial benefit of a company," he says.

Harris had in fact starting thinking about becoming a math teacher like his mentor Mrs. Hemphill. But because switching to education that late in his college career would've meant additional time in school, he followed his father's advice and stuck with engineering, figuring he could always come back to education later.

Education found Harris anyway. While an undergraduate, he had gotten to know the assistant vice president for cultural diversity at Mississippi State, Ernestine Madison, who became another mentor. When she got a job at Washington State University, she invited Harris to come work for her after he graduated. By that time, Harris had met his wife-to-be, Frankie, who was pursuing her master's in public administration at Mississippi State. Harris moved to Washington first, then was joined by Frankie after the two were married in 1992.

Harris stayed at Washington State for seven years. He became director of the Center for Human Rights, which oversaw affirmative action, Title IX and



Since starting at Upstate, Chancellor Bennie Harris has had a busy schedule. Clockwise from above left, Harris spoke at the inaugural South Carolina Latinx Student Summit in October, met with Spartanburg Community College President Michael Mikota, and presided over his first December graduation. Opposite page, the Harris family, Bria, Chancellor Harris, Bennie II, first lady Frankie Harris, and Branden.

Equal Employment Opportunity issues for the university, then was recruited to work in the advancement office, where he helped develop a pipeline program to create more diversity in the staff. He also got his MBA, and became a dad when his daughter, Bria, was born.

Harris continued to work in education, fundraising for the school of education at the University of Alabama in Birmingham as part of the advancement team there, and he earned his doctorate. “I thought I wanted to be an academic dean in the school of education,” Harris says. “But every time I get a pathway back to education, it goes in a different direction.”

Instead of becoming a professor, Harris went to DePaul University to head up a \$250 million fundraising campaign there, then moved on to Lipscomb University in Nashville to become vice president for development. By this time the Harris family had grown to include

“My mission is to inspire and develop young people to change the world... I saw the power of education to transform lives, not just my life, but those around me.”

two sons, Bennie II and Branden.

David England, who worked in advancement at Lipscomb with Harris, says his friend’s leadership skills and genuineness as a person were major assets to the university. England recalls a trip to New York he arranged for a group of donors. England asked Harris if he would lead the group, betting that “his natural leadership and enthusiasm

would be just what that group needed.” His instincts not only proved correct, but when some problems arose on the trip, Harris’ “ability to adjust on the fly and make decisions actually added value to the experience instead of being a negative.”

From Lipscomb, Harris was recruited to become the senior vice president for advancement at the Morehouse School of Medicine in Atlanta. The school was relatively young, Harris says, and the goal when he arrived was to launch a \$100 million campaign. Instead, over a four and half year period, Harris and his team raised \$233 million.

With every fundraising success, Harris felt his purpose strengthen. “My mission is to inspire and develop young people to change the world,” he says. “That started coming together at Lipscomb University, and became even more cemented at Morehouse School of Medicine, because I saw the power of





education to transform lives, not just my life, but those around me.” As chancellor at USC Upstate, he saw an opportunity to do even more.

Christopher Taylor, who was tapped by Harris to be the vice chancellor for external affairs and chief of staff at USC Upstate, has known Harris for three decades, and says his friend has always been passionate about impacting the lives of young people.

“I think he has a unique ability to remain humble, yet be progressive and push people to give their best,” Taylor says. “All with the goal, within this higher education space, of making sure we’re creating the right opportunities for students to maximize their potential and to realize their dreams.”

One of Harris’ first actions after arriving at USC Upstate was to convene the university’s leadership team to develop a transformative value

statement for the school. The result – education for all that inspires a thriving and just society – is the guiding principle behind Harris’ plan of action for the months ahead. And by “all,” Harris says, he doesn’t just mean young people, but also adult learners and those who want to go back to school to develop new skills.

“Where I see the university in five years is being very confident about who we are, and having that value be clear in the community and in the region that we serve,” he says.

Like college all across the country, enrollment growth is the biggest challenge facing USC Upstate, Harris says. Recent data from the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center shows a nationwide 3.2% decline in undergraduate enrollment this fall, following a 3.4% decline the previous year. While the COVID-19 pandemic

made the drop more dramatic, the downward trend had already begun in 2012.

“There are so many different paths that folks can choose besides four-year degree attainment that in the short term will provide them the gratification they’re looking for, but in the long term, they’re losing out,” Harris notes.

He describes a recent conversation in which a male student told him it was hard for some men to justify going to college when there are high-paying manufacturing jobs available right now that will provide a good living, no degree required. For first-generation students and students of color in particular, it’s easy to see why this alternative would be tempting, Harris says.

“Because we have not had access to prosperity, we immediately see the now opportunity, and we find it hard to look at the long term,” he says. “But I still



think that degree attainment influences an individual's prosperity over his or her lifetime. So, part of what I like to talk to folks about is, if you give me four years and 40 hours a week, I guarantee you that you can enjoy the next 20 years benefiting from that investment."

One way to reverse the downward enrollment trend is to rethink the traditional education model, Harris says. That begins by giving students a clear pathway from college to a desired career. Students not only have to see that Upstate can get them the job they want, but they need to be supported until they get there. Harris sees potential to partner with regional employers on a paid co-op or internship program like the one he went through, so students get career-relevant experience while pursuing their education.


Universities also have to start meeting students where they are, Harris says. Student bodies are increasingly diverse – many students have families or full-time jobs, and need flexibility in their

class schedules. Online offerings and non-traditional class times will likely increase to meet those needs, Harris says.

"What we have to do is be able to have the foresight to say, how is the industry changing and how does higher education meet the industry where it is, how are customers changing," he says.

Harris has spent much of his first 100-plus days listening to what business and community leaders have to say about where their needs are. He wants USC Upstate to not just meet current workplace demands, but to anticipate what they might be in the future. "I believe that we are preparing young people for careers that don't exist today," he says.

Fresh off an all-campus enrollment summit to discuss ways to strengthen enrollment and retention at USC Upstate, Harris is already deep into another 100 days of activities. More follow-ups are planned from the summit, as well as an expanded Founders Day in February that will bring guests, faculty and staff together for a day of events on campus. Harris also will be meeting with more business and community leaders to hear new ideas on how USC Upstate can strengthen its partnerships and presence in the region.

His cup is ready to receive them all. 

At left, the chancellor addresses educators in Spartanburg District 2. Harris has made increasing educational attainment in Spartanburg County one of his priorities. Below, Harris chats with students.



Home Is Where the Art Is

Ludovic Nkoth, '18, explores themes of identity and belonging in his continent-spanning work.

Ludovic Nkoth, '18, was a student at Dorman High School when he visited his first art museum, the High Museum in Atlanta, on a class field trip.

Now one of his paintings will be joining the High's collection.

It still feels a little unreal to Nkoth, a Cameroon native who came to the United States as a teenager speaking no English but carrying with him a passion for art developed during his childhood. Although Nkoth didn't know any artists growing up, his environment was full of color and movement, providing plenty of inspiration for a child processing the world around him.

"Even though the art doesn't resemble what we have in this part of the world, I grew up around color and art and patterns," he says. "Especially in a tropical country, the plants are always colorful."

Nkoth says he's been drawing as far back as he can remember. He never had an art teacher, so he taught himself through regular practice. An anime fan, he would work on replicating the kinds of lines and motion he saw, and a sketchbook was a constant companion wherever he went.

"There was this hotel on a golf course, and I used to sketch that hotel almost every day," he recalls. "That kept growing into something, and I started sketching family members."

When he was 13, his father, who had settled in South Carolina, brought him to live in Spartanburg. The culture shock was huge. No one around Nkoth, apart from his father, spoke French, and for his first two years in America, Nkoth didn't attend school while he worked to learn English well enough to enroll. Drawing became his way to make sense of his new home, and remember the one

he had left.

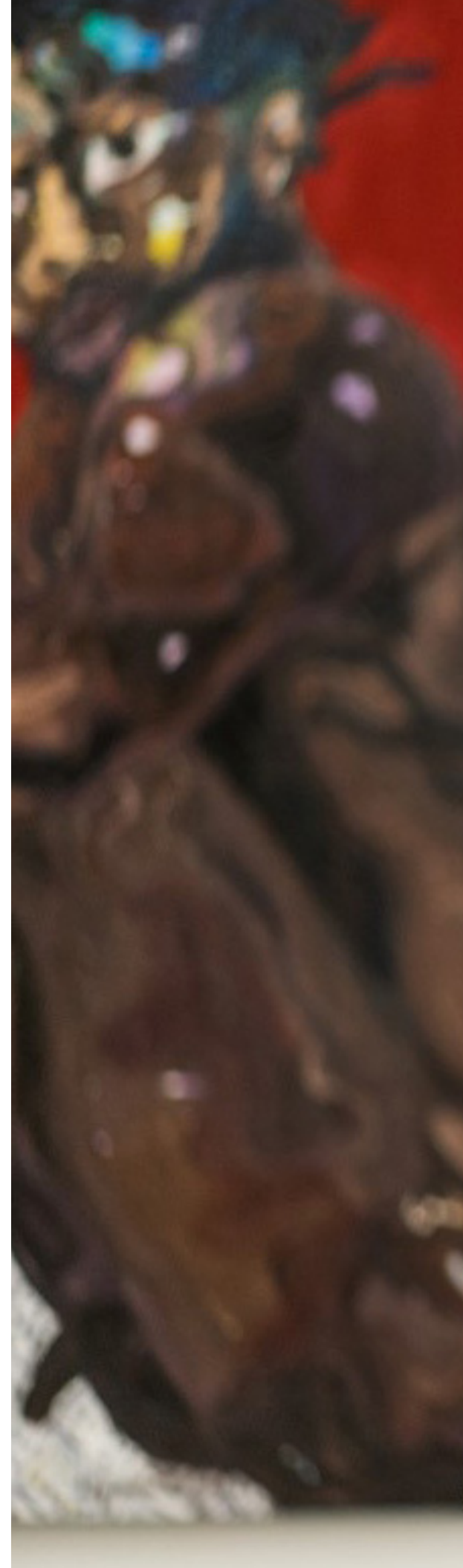
He also discovered hip hop, and would repeat the words he heard to practice his pronunciation. Even today, he notes, laughing, his English has a slightly lyrical inflection that his friends tease him about.

When he started at Dorman High School, he kept to himself at first, but other students quickly became curious about the kid with the sketchbook. "I felt like I belonged for once, and it was through this art that was already so embedded into my idea of self," he says. "I wanted to fit in with my peers, and art was the only thing they understood. So art was my first language at that moment."

Nkoth also found a studio space near downtown Spartanburg and would go there after school to paint. His preferred medium has always been acrylics, which dry quickly and capture the immediacy of his fast-moving thoughts. "The idea sticks when I want it to stick and I can move on to the next idea," he says.

When it came time to consider college, Nkoth faced a tough choice. He was accepted at some art schools, but the cost was beyond what he could afford. Rather than go without a college degree at all, he enrolled at USC Upstate (then USC Spartanburg), despite the lack of an art program.

Nkoth admits it was a little tough to find the right fit, given his desire to be an artist. He began as a graphic arts major, thinking that could be a backup career path. While he enjoyed the work, he wanted to do something that was more about satisfying his own vision rather than a client's. He switched to art education, but that, too, wasn't right, even though he loved sharing his enthusiasm with others.





He finally settled on interdisciplinary studies, which allowed him to take courses in a wide range of subjects that interested him, particularly art history.

Along the way, Nkoth found support from several professors, including Mark Flowers and Jane Nodine, both of whom encouraged him and gave him creative freedom on his projects. As in high school, Nkoth would go to his studio after classes to work on his paintings. Art, he explains, is like a sport, requiring constant practice and discipline, and going to the studio every day was his training. “I believe practice makes better, that’s the only way to master a skill,” he says.

By the time he was a senior, Nkoth decided to try for graduate school. He was offered a full scholarship and a stipend from Clemson University’s College of Architecture, but decided instead to attend Hunter College in New York. The offer was not quite as generous, he says, but the chance to live and work in an art mecca was too good to pass up.

From the moment he arrived in New York, Nkoth felt more at home than he had in awhile. The energy and vibrancy of the city reminded him immediately of Cameroon.

“When I’m walking around the market

in Cameroon, everyone is trying to grab you to sell something, the streets have a stall on every corner, everyone is always trying to get somewhere to do something,” he says. “That ecosystem is what really gets my blood pumping.”

At Hunter, Nkoth was surrounded by other artists for the first time, many of them graduates of undergraduate art programs, and he realized they knew a lot more than he did about how to negotiate the art world. Undaunted, and determined to make a career, Nkoth began hustling to get his name out.

“I was at every art show, every talk, I was sending messages to every gallery around, to every curator,” he says. “I was trying to get everyone that was anyone to come to my studio to see what I was making.”

He also began doing shows, both solo and as part of groups. The vibrant colors and imagery of Cameroon are central to his paintings – families shopping at the marketplace, a group of soldiers, animal masks. His works also include portraits of family members and people he’s met in New York. Some are painted directly from memory, others are inspired by childhood memories, Nkoth says.

For Nkoth, painting is not a passive activity but rather a full-body experience that engages all the senses. When he

goes to the studio, he says, he always has roasted peanuts and a good bottle of red wine on hand. Then he turns on some hip hop – “at the loudest setting on my speaker” – and proceeds to dance and sing while working. “I have to feel all the elements,” he says.

Generally, Nkoth says, he works on several paintings at the same time. He compares the process to cooking a meal (which he also loves to do), where he’s adjusting the elements of each dish so they’re all distinct but complementary. Something he tries on one painting might not work, but he’ll see where it can work on another.

Painting is also how Nkoth continues to explore his identity as someone who both belongs to and is estranged from two different places. The first and only time he’s been back to Cameroon, in 2018, Nkoth said it was like stepping into the house you grew up in and finding it had been completely remodeled. “My work speaks a lot on the displacement of the body – my body – during childhood, and what that does to the brain as an adult,” he says.

In some of Nkoth’s more recent paintings, past and present are never far apart. An exhibit of his works in Italy earlier this year depicted the harrowing journey African migrants take across the



Reparations



Above, Mask No. 3
Right, Don't Take This

Mediterranean to get to Europe. Images of migrants crowded into inflatable rafts surrounded by bodies being swallowed by waves allude to African lives lost on slave-trading journeys. It's a reminder, Nkoth says, of how the conditions that drive migrants to flee their homes today can be traced back to the lasting impact of slavery and colonialism.

Between painting and gallery shows, Nkoth keeps up a busy schedule. He is represented by two galleries, the Luce Gallery in Turin, Italy, and François Ghebaly in Los Angeles, and has had shows at both this year, despite the challenges of the pandemic. He completed his master's degree. Painting and the business of running a studio fill his days.

Sometimes, with everything going on, it can be easy to forget he's done things he thought would take another decade or two to accomplish, Nkoth says. But he's trying to take the time to be more present, and to keep creating work he's proud of. "Everything that is meant to come will come," he says. ■



Hannah Terpack, director of Career Management,
leads a session with students on proper dining
etiquette for business meals.

Ready for Work

Campus initiative helps prepare students for career success now and in the future.

BY TREVOR ANDERSON, '04

USC Upstate has produced talent for employers and communities across the region and beyond since its inception in 1967.

For the first time in nearly 55 years, however, the university is being intentional about its efforts to ensure all its students are prepared for their future careers.

USC Upstate is in the pilot year of its new five-year Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), an initiative aptly named “Moving UP,” which seeks to help every student, regardless of major or academic year, connect their skills, strengths, knowledge, and experiences with professional opportunities.

“USC Upstate provides students with transferable skills, knowledge, and experiences that enable them to maximize their potential, both personally and professionally,” says USC Upstate Chancellor Bennie Harris. “We are very excited about this QEP, as we see the potential it has to further enhance not only our already strong impact on social mobility, but to create a culture of success that will make USC Upstate a destination of choice.”

The QEP is an essential piece of USC Upstate’s reaccreditation with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), which takes place every 10 years. The plan reflects and affirms the university’s commitment to enhancing its quality and effectiveness

by focusing on an issue that’s important to improving student learning outcomes and success.

The steering committee for Moving UP was formed in late 2019. Its members include QEP Director Kim Purdy, who serves as dean of University College; Celena Kusch, professor and executive director of the Center for Academic Innovation and Faculty Support; Pam Steinke, interim provost; Hannah Terpack, director of Career Management; and Justin Travis, assistant professor of psychology. Amanda Karls, director of Institutional Effectiveness and Compliance, is the newest member.

USC Upstate’s previous QEP, entitled “Stepping UP,” was a campus-wide technology enrichment program that university leaders say had a significant impact, especially when the COVID-19 pandemic forced a transition from face-to-face to virtual instruction in March 2020.

“I heard from several professors who said that the work they did during the last QEP really helped them through that difficult time,” Purdy says. “During Stepping UP, we encouraged faculty to try new things even if they were worried they might fail. We also encouraged them to work with their students to find solutions. In the end, I think it turned out to be very useful. And I’m really excited because this (QEP) promises to be even more impactful.”



“One thing that has always stood out to me is how even the most visible, recognizable, prestigious companies have shared that they would rather hire a USC Upstate student”
- Hannah Terpack



"Moving UP is intended to leverage current work and broad-based interest to infuse career readiness throughout students' academic experience by developing career-ready core competencies," she adds.

Purdy says the focus for Moving UP emerged during the input stage of USC Upstate's strategic planning cycle, when focus groups were being conducted with a wide variety of constituents.

"One of the themes that came from that analysis was that career readiness was on the minds of people in every constituency group," Purdy says. "We learned that a critical mass of people was doing this work in isolation, and that as an institution we were proud of engaging in that work."

The committee found the need for professional and career development was supported by national surveys of employers that reported very few new hires were proficient in career skills.

Anecdotal communication from several regional employers showed the same concern. Meanwhile, surveys of USC Upstate graduates showed a majority believed they were proficient in career readiness, Purdy says.

Increased traffic at the university's Office of Career Management and interest among faculty in developing career readiness learning opportunities for their students provided further evidence of the need.

"We spent a year examining our strategic plan, scorecards and blueprints, internal and external data, and feedback from various community partners regarding the success of our graduates," Purdy says. "Our goal was to identify a topic that was central to the work we are doing; a topic that could make a significant impact on student

"We want to make sure every USC Upstate student is an employer's first choice" - Kim Purdy

learning and engagement if the entire institution were to focus on that one topic for the next five years."

"We want to make sure every USC Upstate student is an employer's first choice," she adds. "Our students know how to solve problems. They know how to work. Through this QEP, the community will start to know that our students are career-ready as a result of the competencies woven into the classroom experience."

SACSCOC will visit campus in March. At that time, the accrediting body will conduct an onsite review of the QEP. The committee is also waiting for an offsite peer group to complete its review of the plan.

The plan includes beefing up the Office of Career Management and the

Center for Academic Innovation and Faculty Support. It supports a renewed commitment to professional advisors who see students early in their collegiate career, and the implementation of the Upstate GROW program, which focuses on enhancing the professionalism of student employees by working with their supervisors to rethink student employment as a high-impact practice.

Another part of the plan includes the adoption of an e-portfolio system that will allow students to document and reflect on their professional and career growth during their years in college. Leaders will also look to integrate career exploration into introductory college courses and develop a new career-centered course to enhance student success in their current and future jobs.

"One thing that has always stood out to me is how even the most visible, recognizable, prestigious companies have shared that they would rather hire a USC Upstate student," Terpack says. "They always laud the refreshing humility and grit of our students, as well as their ability to work with little mentorship or training. Our students are rock-solid, wonderfully capable human beings. This is so exciting."



Faculty and staff take part in a workshop with Harvard career adviser Gorick Ng.




MOVING UP

CAREER READINESS

more intentional career preparation. In many cases, faculty have already begun creating these experiences, but they will be formalized through the QEP.

A series of professional development workshops will provide advisors with the skills to better guide students through their exploration of skills and abilities, discovery of career options, and development of career maps to guide their progress through the major and successful placement after graduation.

"I'm especially excited about the career mapping," says Terpack. "We're helping students understand and articulate their strengths and how that might transfer to a role that maybe they've never even thought about." 

The projected outcomes of the plan are:

- Students will be able to identify and articulate their knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics as relevant to their desired career goals.
- Students will be able to explore, identify and address areas necessary for professional growth and success.
- Students will be able to navigate and explore career options, including further educational and experiential options.
- Students will be able to articulate how their academic program and co-curricular experiences have prepared them for their post-graduation life.
- Students will be able to develop a career plan that includes the steps prior to and beyond graduation that will facilitate achievement of their career goals.

Faculty from each major will be invited to participate in summer workshops to redesign their program to incorporate

Above, Kim Purdy, QEP director and dean of University College, is guiding the initiative to connect all students with professional opportunities that match their skills, knowledge and experience. That also involves teaching soft skills, such as Hannah Terpack's business meal etiquette session, below.



First Class

Three education alums embark on their teaching careers.

BY ELIZABETH ANDERSON

Most people can tell you about that one special teacher.

For Todd Whittaker, it was Mrs. Lewis, who came to all his basketball games when she learned he had no one to cheer him on.

For Ramonte Smith, it was Mr. White, who wouldn't give up on him when he had almost given up on school.

For Haley Davis, there were two, Ms. Cash and Ms. Kimbell, whose passion for teaching and enthusiasm for math matched her own.

This fall, the three 2021 USC Upstate education graduates began their own classroom journeys, inspired by the educators who nurtured their love of learning and hoping to do likewise for their students. All three were hired at McCracken Middle School in Spartanburg, which like other Spartanburg County schools was welcoming students back for the first full in-person year in two years.

Ready ... or not

Todd Whittaker smooths down a magnetic coordinate plane near the center of a whiteboard, then takes a step back to assess.

His classroom is starting to take shape. At one end of the board, five sheets of colored paper display his "strong start" guidelines. Near the corner of a long bookcase between the doors is a mailbox, where students will be invited to leave him a note, signed or unsigned, if they need help with anything.

Still to come are the Mario Uno cards Whitaker plans to tape to each student's desk to assist with grouping activities during the semester. "Kids also love video games, so it gives them something to

connect with me about," says Whittaker, a Mario fan.

The day of preparations belies the time Whittaker has actually spent planning for this moment. At 35, he's starting his education career later than his two Upstate colleagues, but he's dreamed about being a teacher since growing up in a children's home in Greenwood. In large part, that's because of a teacher who made a difference to him.

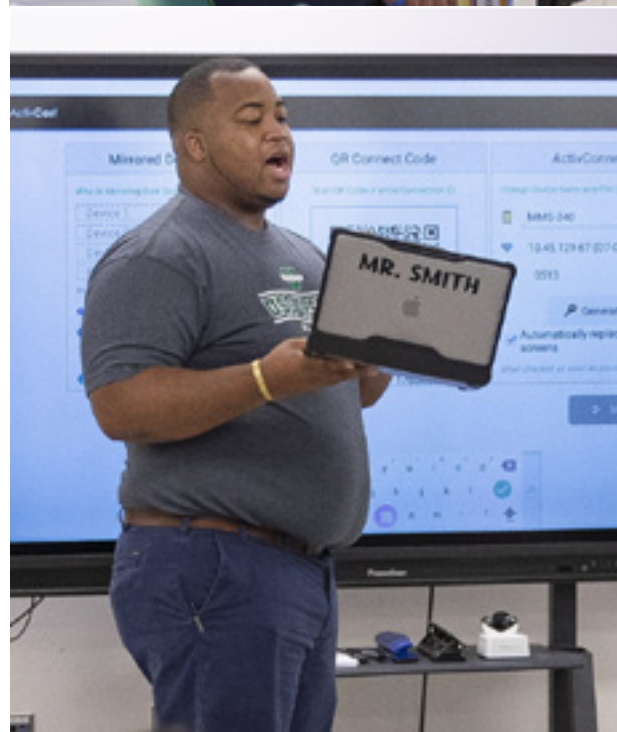
During his basketball games in seventh grade, he became keenly aware of the absence of anyone in the bleachers to support him. He mentioned this to his English-language arts teacher one day, and from then on, she came to every one of his games in both seventh and eighth grade. "She was my hero," Whittaker says.

He knows middle school has a reputation for being difficult to teach. Students are often awkward and self-conscious as they try to figure out who they are. Yet it's a time when many kids can really use an adult's support, Whitaker notes, as his own experiences show.

"Middle school was what stuck out to me, because that's when I needed a hero the most," he says.

What he wants his students to see is that while his path to becoming a teacher may not have been traditional, he nevertheless ended up exactly where he

Among the new teachers at McCracken Middle School in Spartanburg this year are three Upstate alums from the class of 2021. From top, Haley Davis with an eighth-grade science class; Todd Whittaker helps students in his sixth-grade math class; Ramonte Smith gives a lesson in seventh-grade geography.







wanted to be.

“I can show them there’s more than one way to go through life, that not everyone’s the same,” Whittaker says. “I want them to come out with confidence in themselves and to believe that they’re capable.”

Down the hall in the seventh-grade wing, Ramonte Smith looks a little overwhelmed as he examines the small wall of plastic bins filled with supplies that his retired predecessor bequeathed to him. A map of the world covered by a tattered sheet of plastic hangs behind the teacher’s desk, also left behind, but Smith is ready to make the space his own.

He picks up some posters he’s brought with quotes from famous figures – Martin Luther King Jr., Gandhi, Maya Angelou. Those will be going next to his desk, along with his Upstate pennant and Pittsburgh Steelers poster. As with Whittaker, Smith has chosen items he hopes will help his students connect with him.

Finding a way to relate to his students – and for them to relate to him – is important to Smith, who will be teaching geography. While he loves sharing content with students, “I really like to

understand students’ backgrounds, where they’re from, their family life,” he explains.

Smith knows from experience that sometimes a teacher needs to know a student’s struggles before they can help them learn. In middle school, Smith was far behind his grade level in reading and was placed in a resource class. He dreaded the idea of taking remedial classes in high school. But Mr. White was determined not to let that happen, and worked with him until he was at or above grade level.

The experience not only changed Smith’s life, it charted the course for his career.

“From middle school on, I always said I wanted to be a teacher,” he says. “I felt like some of my friends at the time missed out on a lot, and I didn’t want other students to go through that.”

He also recognizes how being an African American male teacher can have an impact. During his clinicals, Smith says he noticed how many African American boys gravitated to him, wanting to talk to him about their lives and show him their completed homework. They also were curious about him, and eager to hear his story. Each encounter, Smith says, left him thinking, “I have to meet the next

Teaching is a long-held dream for Smith, Davis and Whittaker. All three had influential teachers in their lives who shaped their desire to become educators.

kid, I have to change the next kid’s life, I have to be that inspiration.”

A South Carolina history buff, Smith is looking forward to getting his students excited about geography. More than that, though, he wants to help them grow as people. “That’s why I like geography, you have to talk about different backgrounds, you have to talk about different religions, you have to talk about where people are from and their culture,” he says.

Upstairs in the eighth-grade wing, Haley Davis is facing the opposite problem of Smith. No one used her room last year, and it’s almost entirely empty, except for what Davis has brought in so far. Davis looks ruefully at the signs she hung up the day before, almost all of them now lying face down on the counters or floor, the double-sided tape no match for the humidity. “I was in here yesterday for four hours and that’s what I got done,” she says.

Davis is starting the new year as a stranger to McCracken. While Smith and Whittaker both taught at the school for clinicals and feel at home there, Davis is still learning her way around with help from her Upstate colleagues. She’s also teaching an unfamiliar topic, science, which means more preparation.

“I can show them there’s more than one way to go through life, that not everyone’s the same... I want them to come out with confidence in themselves and to believe that they’re capable” - Todd Whittaker

But Davis is used to adapting quickly to new circumstances. A Navy kid, she moved around a lot growing up. School was her “comfort place,” she says. “I put everything I had in me into my education.”

Math was something she was really good at, and at every new school, students would come to her for tutoring. At one point, Davis even looked into the requirements for working for NASA – a model astronaut sticking out of a box on a classroom desk and a large NASA sticker on her laptop testify to her enthusiasm.

But while she ruled that career path out, Davis realized she enjoyed helping others learn math, and decided teaching was a natural fit. She also gravitated to middle school right away, which she admits some people find hard to understand.

“I’ve always felt like I connected with middle schoolers better,” she says. “Around certain people, I’m very shy, but when I’m around that type of energy in the classroom, I match with them better. They’re at the phase where half of them want to be grown, and half of them are still children.”

Still, experienced teachers have advised her to be strict with her students starting off, lest they take advantage of her, Davis says. She notes she also looks young, adding to the challenge of appearing authoritative. “I was told not to smile until December,” Davis says.

She says she prefers getting to know her students. At Upstate, she took all the core classes offered in child advocacy studies, and wants to support students through whatever challenges they’re facing. Some of the things kids told her when she was student teaching were heartbreaking, she says. “I never knew kids could mentally be going through situations like that.”

Her goal for the year, she says, is “more than just teaching them science in a classroom, it’s helping them be people and teaching them life lessons and listening to them.”

Lessons learned

By the end of November, with finals just a few weeks away, the teachers have established a rhythm with their classes and with the school routine at large. Each sees areas for personal improvement, but they are proud of their successes, too.

Smith says the semester turned out a

little differently than he’d thought, though not in a bad way. If anything, he identified opportunities to do better.

“One thing I expected was a first-year teacher to be almost coddled,” he says. While he says he has definitely gotten a lot of support and assistance, “they do allow you to learn on your own.”

That’s meant spending more time than he initially anticipated on developing his own tests and materials. “One thing I know I need to improve on is understanding what I’m doing ahead of time,” he says. “Being able to pace myself to be a month ahead or so would be great.”

For Whittaker, the biggest challenge has been dealing with the academic fallout from the pandemic. He quickly realized just how far behind a lot of his students were after a year and half of not being in a classroom regularly. “While they have the body of a sixth-grader, academically they’re at a third-grade level, and many of my students are at a second-grade level,” he says.

Whittaker is also troubled by some of the inequities the pandemic has laid bare. While many of his honors students have tutors, the majority of his students don’t have access to those kinds of resources to keep them on track academically. That’s made him work even harder to catch everyone up, and seek out advice from other teachers and administrators.

And he’s had some success. “My students have gained confidence in math,” he notes, particularly the girls, many of whom assumed they’d be bad at the subject. “They’re starting to see that math ability isn’t catered toward one

gender,” Whittaker says.


Both Whittaker and Davis have noticed another impact from the pandemic – students need to relearn social norms. Like Whittaker, Davis says she’s encountered some behavioral challenges from students, compounded in her classes by adolescent hormones. “They’re here for play and social interaction,” she says. “The last time they were in school was sixth grade, so being around all their friends, they’re more focused on each other.”

Despite the challenges, all three teachers feel good about the connections they’ve established with their students. “I get along very well with this age group in terms of personality,” Davis says.

Smith, too, says he loves that his students are enjoying him as teacher. “These students look up to me as a mentor or want to come talk to me about whatever might be happening in their lives,” Smith says. “A lot of times I forget this is a paying career that I do as a job, because I just love being here in this space.”

Toward the end of the semester, Whittaker attended the school band concert to support his sixth-graders who were playing. When it was over, one of them greeted him with a huge hug – the student didn’t have any parents there to watch and was thrilled to see the teacher there.

“That’s why I got into teaching,” Whittaker says. “Moments like that.”

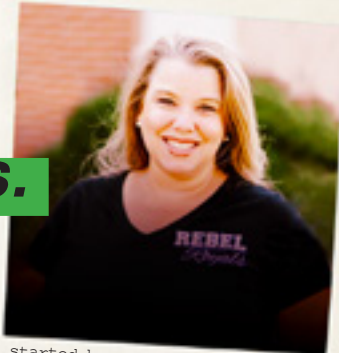
His middle school teacher Mrs. Lewis would certainly agree. 

A student works in Davis’ math class.



USC Upstate celebrates six alumni named 2021 Teacher of the Year in Spartanburg County schools.

Jeri Hollis Class of '00



Jeri started her career in publishing before returning to her home state to teach. She's currently teaching English II and English IV at James F. Byrnes High School, where she's taught for the last 20 years.

Joanna Vaughn Class of '01



Joanna began her career in education as a kindergarten teaching assistant, then returned to USC Upstate in 2001 to obtain her master's in early childhood education. Joanna has since spent 20 years teaching kindergarten in Spartanburg D1.

Michelle Monroe Class of '11



Michelle has taught several subjects in Upstate elementary schools and served as a reading interventionist and 4th grade teacher at East North Street Academy in Greenville. Now she teaches at Cooley Springs-Fingerville Elem. in Spartanburg.

Leslie Borton, M.Ed Class of '19



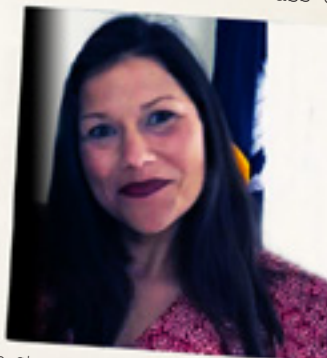
Leslie recently decided to get back into teaching, and has already made a huge impact. With her degree from the visual impairment program, she's currently the lead teacher at the South Carolina School for the Blind.

Tiffany Anderson Class of '93



Tiffany is in her 28th year with Spartanburg District 7. She began at Mary H. Wright Elementary teaching K-4, and now teaches second grade at Pine Street Elementary.

Tara Williamson, M.Ed Class of '02



Tara started her career in Spartanburg District 1 volunteering in her daughter's classroom at Spartanburg Prep in 2014. She got recertified in 2017 and has since taught 1st, 2nd, and 5th grades.



Birds of a Feather

While not the official mascot of USC Upstate, the Canada goose might well be considered its unofficial one.

The campus' resident flock is known and (mostly) loved by students, faculty, and staff, who look forward every spring to seeing the fluffy goslings floating behind their parents on the Rotary Peace Park pond.

If you've ever wondered about the habits of these feathered denizens, perhaps while stopped in your car as the flock ambles across University Way, here are a few things to know, with the caveat that banding and tracking the birds would be necessary to know some details definitively.

The Upstate flock likely has other nearby hangouts. Professor Vincent Connors, who teaches a birding class every spring at Upstate, says the flock is probably the same one you've seen at the pond in front of Milliken & Co. and even on the greens at local golf courses. Connors says the birds often spend the day eating on manicured lawns near small watering holes, then head to a lake for the evening, where there's more protection from predators.

The geese are probably non-migratory. In the past 15 to 30 years, goose migration has changed, Connors says. While there are still some large flocks that migrate to feed on field

stubble, many just stay put, especially if they are in an area where food is plentiful year round, as it is in the South. "We've also lost a lot of the major predators that would drive geese to migrate out of an area," Connors notes. Bears, wolves and foxes now pose little threat. Connors says one other possible reason for the change is that some geese may no longer know how to migrate. At one time, geese had dwindled so dramatically that captive breeding flocks were formed to boost the population. The effort was successful, but because migration is a learned behavior, the young released into the wild lacked the knowledge to pass on to future generations.

Bread isn't good for geese. It may seem like harmless fun to toss bread to the geese, but it's actually bad for them, Connors says. Bread fills the geese with empty calories, and prevents them from getting the energy they need from their main natural food source, grass. Fortunately, it's unlikely the Upstate geese are relying on bread as a dietary staple, given how plentiful lawns and golf courses are in the area.

Geese aren't faithful partners. Genetic tests of nestlings have found multiple parents, Connors says. Geese pairs do share child-rearing duties, however, if not always equitably. A



goose will sometimes dump its eggs into another mother's nest, "which is why you might see a female with 15 goslings," he says.

Coyotes are the main threat to geese. Geese are ground-nesting birds, which makes them vulnerable to the opportunistic coyote. Goslings can also be picked off by snapping turtles that live in the ponds. Connors, whose class conducts a count every spring, says, "We typically have anywhere from 14 to 20 goslings at any one time, but at the end of May, we might be down to only seven or eight."

That V formation is intentional. Flying in a V is aerodynamically efficient, Connors explains. Each bird creates an uplift for the bird directly behind as it flaps its wings. The lead bird expends the most energy, since it has no assistance, but when it gets tired, it falls back in the formation to allow a new goose to lead. [UP](#)



Going Forward Together

Program provides Latinx students with tools for success during and after college.

BY JOHN C. STEVENSON, '90

When she began her college career at USC Upstate, Miriam Elizalde faced many uncertainties. Today, she credits the Avanzando Through College program with helping her find the guidance and support to successfully navigate her way through school.

Avanzando (from the Spanish for going forward) Through College is focused on helping ensure that Latinx students have the support they need for a successful college career. For Elizalde, who went through the program as a sophomore, that meant help exploring a world to which she had received little substantive exposure through her previous life experiences.

"At the time, I was a nursing major, and I was really dedicated to my nursing classes," Elizalde recalls. "But Avanzando really helped me know what I wanted to do. When I was a sophomore, I really didn't know a lot about the services and things that they have here at Upstate, so I was basically

like a freshman. Since I'm a first-generation (college) student also, it was hard to go from high school to college – it was so complicated. It was the first time I was living it; no one in my family had ever gone to college."

Avanzando provides a wide array of benefits to each participating group of up to 30 students, ranging from weekly group meetings to one-on-one mentoring, and even including up to \$500 cash stipends for students who participate fully. The one-year (two-semester) program was created through a \$25,000 grant from UnidosUS and focuses on freshmen and sophomores from Latinx backgrounds or who come from low-income households, are first-generation college students or are English-language learners.

The program debuted at USC Upstate in 2019.

Elizalde credits Avanzando Through College with helping her be successful

at USC Upstate.

"It was hard for me to understand the dynamics in college and how to manage my time," she says. "It really helped me build connections, and not only at Upstate, but in the community. One of the biggest things that helped me is they have a time-management class where they taught us different styles of managing your time and different study strategies. I learned things like how to have a planner, how to plan things, and how to focus not only on college stuff, but to have fun at the same time."

Elizalde says she also discovered a different path, thanks to her experiences and the guidance she received via Avanzando. She's currently majoring in interdisciplinary studies with an emphasis on biology and psychology, and wants to pursue a career as an occupational therapist.

But while Avanzando helped prepare the USC Upstate student for a promising future, she says one of the most important benefits of the program was being a part of the group.

"The thing I think I enjoyed the most was the community amongst the different people that were there," she says. "I've never seen so many people like me in one room."

That sense of community is central to Avanzando Through College, according to Susannah Waldrop, executive director of the Student Success Center at USC Upstate.

"It's all about success in college," Waldrop explains. "Some of it is about study skills and how to build relationships on campus – whether it's with your instructors or your classmates. Some of it's about mental-health check-ins, and some of it's

Jane Addison, a program mentor and retired instructor, speaks to the group.





about financial stuff,” ranging from organizing one’s personal finances and how to budget, to financial-aid options at USC Upstate.

But another dimension of the program gives Latinx students the opportunity to “celebrate their identity,” Waldrop says. “It’s about who they are and what they bring to the table.


“We try to cover a wide gamut of stuff that focuses on success, but the other thing is the sense of community amongst themselves,” she continues. “Frequently here, students talk about ‘how nice it is to be in a classroom with

people who look like me.’ Just about everyone in there has roots in the Latinx community.”

Araceli Hernandez-Laroche, associate professor of modern languages at USC Upstate, has worked with the program since its inception in 2019. She said *Avanzando Through College* benefits not only the participating students, but the entire university.

“I feel that this program really shifts the culture of the institution to really think about serving Hispanic/Latinx

students,” she says. “And when we gather students with specific resources for them, where we provide culturally responsive support services, guidance and mentorship, that’s going to go a long way for these students to develop a sense of belonging.”

And, she adds, while students may still be self-conscious about being the only Hispanic/Latino person in some of their classes, “with this, we anchor them, hopefully, with self-confidence, with the know-how to navigate their college career.” 

Above, Susannah Waldrop, executive director of the Student Success Center, oversees the *Avanzando Through College* program. For the final gathering of the year, students shared items that represented their family, culture or background. Clockwise from above right, Laisha Labra displays a rock one of her family members brought to the U.S. from the mines of Mexico; Sofia Villegas holds a family photo; Layla Delgado listens to the presentations.



Community of Scholars

Students gain research experience and career skills through a new summer program.

BY JOHN C. STEVENSON, '90

Car shoppers are known to “kick the tires” before buying a car. But imagine if you could test drive a career path before making a critical career decision. Twelve USC Upstate science students received such a chance over the summer through the Er(UP)t program.

Coleman Walker, a senior majoring in chemistry, is one of the students. Walker learned about the Er(UP)t program – a part of the S.C. IDeA Networks of Biomedical Research Excellence (SC INBRE) – through his USC Upstate advisor, Alaina Gunn.

“She knew (graduate school) was one

of my career options that I was heavily leaning toward, so she thought it would be a good experience, not only to have on my resume, but also give me lab experience that would show me a little bit of what graduate school would entail,” Walker says.

Walker says it was especially helpful that Er(UP)t provides participating students with a stipend during the eight-week summer program.

“Working in the lab was a great experience; being able to be financially compensated while also doing the research was one of the big perks of the

program,” he says. “In terms of day-to-day operations and what we did in the lab – the assignments and working with Dr. (Joshua) Ruppel and the other professors – it was just an overall great experience.”

Walker says that, because of the stipend, he was able to be involved in full-time research at the university rather than work the two summer jobs he had lined up. Without the promised stipend, “it would have been a much harder decision to make,” he adds.

All participants in the program were eligible to receive a stipend, according to Ruppel, a professor of chemistry at USC Upstate and the Er(UP)t program director.

“It was set up in an hourly system, and every student who completed the program would be paid,” Ruppel explains.

The 12 participants were chosen from among 42 applicants. “We felt like it was a pretty good competition,” Ruppel says of the application process. “Of course, we’d love to be able to fund all 42, but there’s just not enough money there.”

At least partially because of his involvement in Er(UP)t, Walker says he is currently applying to several graduate school programs. “It was a pretty heavily defining moment,” Walker says of his summer experience.

Another student who took part in the program is Gaeriel Nagorite, a junior who worked with Anselm Omoike, associate professor of chemistry, on a project to remove allergens from two varieties of peanuts.

“I wasn’t expecting to be chosen by Dr. Omoike, considering I’m a biology major, and he mostly does things with environmental chemistry,” Nagorite recounts. “But I was really happy to be part of his group.”

Nagorite says, “Going into the program, I didn’t really know much. Because of COVID-19, we hadn’t been to the labs. My classes had been virtual,



The summer Er(UP)t program, held for the first time this year, gave students paid research experience under the guidance of a faculty member. Top, Josh Ruppel, professor of chemistry and Er(UP)t director, offers guidance to student Coleman Walker. Middle and opposite page, Gaerielle Nagorite conducts allergen research with professor Anselm Omoike. Below, Tigré Pressley and Walker prepare an experiment.

and the labs as well. So I was very new to the environment. But I started getting comfortable. At first, it was Dr. Omoike guiding us in the program, but afterward, it was mostly me and my research partner being independent.”

Because of her experiences, Nagorite says she has decided to change her major, from biology to chemistry, and is now leaning toward a career in conservation biology.

The students weren’t the only ones who benefited from Er(UP)t. Ruppel said the program helped foster a sense of community among all the participants. Besides the research, faculty would meet with students once a week, sometimes more, “to work with the students on some of the career-readiness things, doing activities not just one-on-one, but in a group setting as well, to help build the community aspect of it,” he notes.

“So students could see their peers also doing the same thing. They could work together and learn together, and also the faculty could start communicating and collaborating and building their own networks as well.”

Ruppel said research can be an isolating experience, and “we wanted to break down those silos.”

Another benefit, according to Ruppel, is to “build that research capacity in that pipeline that is going from (primarily) undergraduate institutions like USC Upstate into graduate programs, into industry, into professional schools, and just increase the capacity for the whole state to do biomedical research and biomedical science.”

SC INBRE is an \$18.2 million renewable grant funded by the National Institutes of Health’s National Institute of General Medical Sciences. Grant funds are administered through the University of South Carolina and support biomedical research throughout South Carolina at SC INBRE’s network institutions and outreach institutions, including USC Upstate. [UP](#)



Faculty Achievements

Darlene Amendolair (Nursing) was accepted to the Education Committee for the International Association of Human Caring.

Brian Brady (Business) was one of 75 delegates selected to participate in the four-day Entrepreneurship Experiential Classroom XXI held at the University of Notre Dame and presented by the university in partnership with the University of Tampa and the University of Florida.

Logan Camp-Spivey (Nursing) successfully defended her dissertation, “Barriers and Facilitators Regarding Awareness, Selection, and Implementation of School-Based Interventions Addressing Physical Activity and Healthy Eating Behaviors: Perspectives of South Carolina Public School Administration and Personnel” and earned her Ph.D. With **Tamara Cook**, she co-authored “Innovative Teaching Strategies Using Simulation for Pediatric Nursing Clinical Education during the Pandemic: A Case Study” in the journal *Academic Medicine*.

Christa Christ (Psychology) and student Chakieria Allen produced a poster on “Producing Stress through Hostile Conversations: Stimuli Validation” for the SC Upstate Research Symposium in April.

Vince Connors (Natural Sciences) co-authored “Lateralization at the individual and population level of the European green lizard in Slovak Karst” in the journal *Acta Ethologica*.

Tamara Cook (Nursing) and **Kimberly Green** (Nursing) have had their abstract “Simulating a Culture of Safety Through an Interactive Escape Room” accepted to the AACN’s Transform 2021 nursing conference.

Ryan Crawford (Nursing) received the Pi Gamma Chapter STTI 2021 Outstanding Dissertation award.

Heather Dewitz (Nursing) completed her DNP at Anderson University.

Ona Egbue (Informatics and Engineering Systems) received the 2021 William Daughton World Headquarters Service Award from the American Society for Engineering Management for her efforts to improve

the operation of ASEM. She was also named chair of the engineering economy division for the American Society for Engineering Education for 2021-22.

Jennifer Gray (Psychology) co-presented “A Case Examination of Factors Impacting Charges in Vehicular Heatstroke” at the SC Upstate Research Symposium in April. With **Kenneth Barideaux Jr.** (Psychology) and student Alice Biganzoli, Gray co-presented “How Does the Parent’s Sex and Perceived Moral Character Affect Perceptions of Blame and Responsibility Following Child Vehicular Heatstroke.” Gray and Barideaux also co-presented with student Morgan Kaltwang on “Blame and Responsibility in Vehicular Heatstroke Deaths: Examining the Role of a Parent’s Perceived Moral Character.”

Araceli Hernández-Laroche (Modern Languages) was invited to speak about S.C. Centro Latino and its efforts to support Latinx students for the S.C. Technical College System; the Partnership Among South Carolina Academic Libraries (PASCAL); and for the Humanities for All webinar series “Starting Points: Higher Ed Perspectives on How to Begin a Publicly Engaged Humanities Practice.” She also graduated from the 2021 Grassroots Leadership Development Institute (an initiative of the Spartanburg County Foundation).

Polinapapilinho Katina (Advanced Manufacturing Management) contributed “Governance in CPS” to the Encyclopedia of Cryptography, Security and Privacy, and co-authored “Complex system governance as a framework for asset management” in the journal *Sustainability*.

Kristi Miller (Nursing) presented a poster at the SCURS symposium in April on “Assessing Safety Culture in Schools of Nursing.” She also became a certified nurse educator after passing the examination.

Maria Montesó (Spanish Translation & Interpreting) was invited to speak on “Building Community Trust and Impact with Language Justice” for the


Nonprofit Alliance and Greenville Partnership for Philanthropy.

Bernard Omolo (Mathematics & Statistics) co-authored “A stacking ensemble deep learning approach to cancer type classification based on TCGA data” in the journal *Scientific Reports*. He also served as guest associate editor for the journal *Frontiers in Public Health* on the topic “Application of biostatistics and epidemiological methods for cancer research in sub-Saharan Africa.”

Susan Richardson (Informatics and Engineering Systems) is president-elect of the South Carolina Health Information Management Association for 2021-22, and state delegate to the American Health Information Management Association for 2021-22.

Victor Summers (Mathematics) co-authored “Torsion in thin regions of Khovanov homology” in the Canadian Journal of Mathematics.

Refika Turgut (Education) received a nearly \$1 million National Science Foundation award to develop integrated computer science curricula using educational robotics for third-through fifth-grade students in linguistically diverse classrooms.

Ginny Webb (Microbiology), **Scott Harris** (Political Science), **Justin Travis** (Psychology) and student Tina Fadel co-authored “Identifying the determinants of COVID-19 preventative behaviors and vaccine intentions among South Carolina residents” in the journal *Plos One* and “The roles of experiences and risk perception in the practice of preventative behaviors of COVID-19” in the journal *Pathogens and Global Health*. Webb also co-authored, with student Mahek Momin, “The Environmental Effects on Virulence Factors and the Antifungal Susceptibility of *Cryptococcus neoformans*” in the *International Journal of Molecular Sciences*. Webb also received the American College Health Association Campus COVID-19 Vaccine Initiative Grant, and is president-elect for the South Carolina branch of the American Society for Microbiology. 

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Sports Standouts

Women's Soccer

Sharif Saber ① was named head coach of the program on Dec. 9. He succeeds Tyson John as the sixth head coach in the program's history.

Saber joins the Spartans after four seasons as head coach at the University of Mount Olive in North Carolina, where he led the program to two NCAA Division II Tournament appearances, two Conference Carolinas regular season championships, and two Conference Carolinas Tournament Championships.

In 2017, Saber served as an assistant at Kutztown University in Pennsylvania. He helped guide the program to a NCAA Division II National Tournament appearance. Prior to Kutztown, Saber led the creation of the women's

program at Penn State Brandywine, serving as head coach in 2015 and 2016. He was an assistant at Immaculata University in Malvern, Pennsylvania, in 2014. Before joining the collegiate ranks, Saber was the varsity coach at Kutztown High School and coached for North Carolina Football Club, Penn Fusion Soccer Academy, and Boyertown Area Soccer Club. Saber boasts a .747 career winning percentage as a coach. He earned a Bachelor of Arts in history from Bloomsburg University and a Master of Education in social studies from Kutztown University.

Volleyball

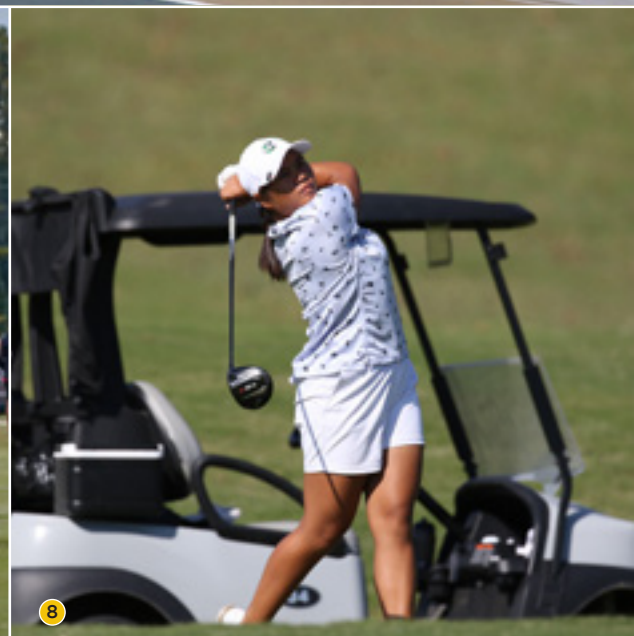
The Spartans recorded 10 conference victories during the 2021 season, which was a record for the program during the NCAA Division I era.

Senior libero **Mackenzie Marcum** ② joined the program's 1,000-Dig Club and finished her career at No. 15 on the program's all-time dig list.

Kelly Wiedemann ③, a senior outside hitter, was named to the College Sports Information Directors of America Academic All-District Team for the 2021-22 academic year, a first for the program since the start of the Division I era.

Men's Soccer

Junior forward **Mario Arrocha** ④ earned a spot on the College Sports



Information Directors of America Academic All-District Team for the 2021-22 academic year.

Arrocha is the fifth player in the history of the program to garner the award since the start of the NCAA Division I era.

On the field, he was a First Team All-Big South selection after leading the Spartans in scoring in 2021 with seven goals and adding four assists. Arrocha ranked fourth in the Big South in total goals and total points while tying for the league lead in penalty kick conversion, converting all three of his attempts. He also became the first player in program history to win multiple Big South weekly awards after claiming a pair of Big South Offensive Player of the

Week nods during the 2021 season.

Women's Basketball

Guard **Rachael Rose** 5 became the first Spartan in program history to earn multiple conference weekly awards since USC Upstate joined the Big South. Rose received two Freshman of the Week awards at the start of the 2021-22 season.

XC, Track & Field

The Spartans opened the 2021-22 indoor season with two school-record performances, an event victory, 16 program top-10 performances, and 26 student-athlete personal bests at the Visit Winston-Salem College Kickoff. In the 600m races, the Spartans saw

school-best performances in both the women's and men's races as **Arianna Krcik** 6 and Andrew Aun ran record times. Tony Auguste placed first in the men's weight throw.

The men's cross country team 7 finished 23rd overall at the 2021 NCAA Southeast Regional in November. It was the third-best finish in the program's history.

Women's Golf

Sophomore **Preaw Nontarux** 8 was named to the All-Tournament Team and finished runner-up at the French Broad Collegiate Invite. Nontarux earned All-Tournament honors in all five of the tournaments the team competed in this fall.



Nehemiah Chandler



May Phonsongkham



Alycea Graham



Shelby Melton



Jarred Bradley



Madison Jacobi



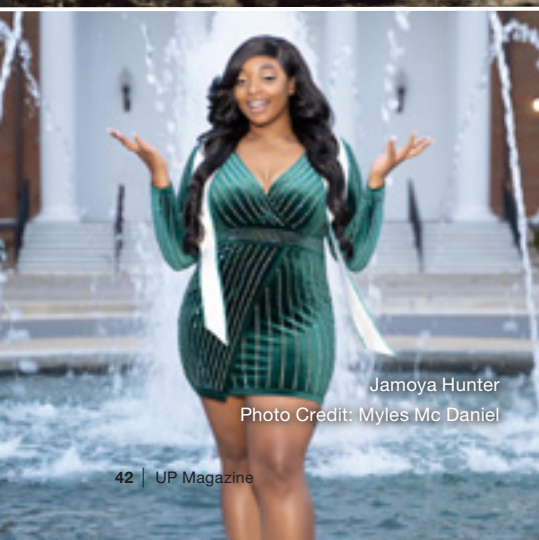
Deanna Calvert



Sofia Villegas, Antonio Tanner



Kaitlyn Massengill and Jeff Key



Jamoya Hunter
Photo Credit: Myles Mc Daniel



Scout Hoffmeier



Keajia Smith



Hannah Roberts



Antonio Tanner



Jada Young



Kelly McLauren
Photo Credit: Myles Mc Daniel



Kristen Lester



Aline Chavez, Melanie Reyes-Cruz,
Jamie Mejia, Daniela Isaza



Makayla Dawkins
Photo Credit: Myles Mc Daniel



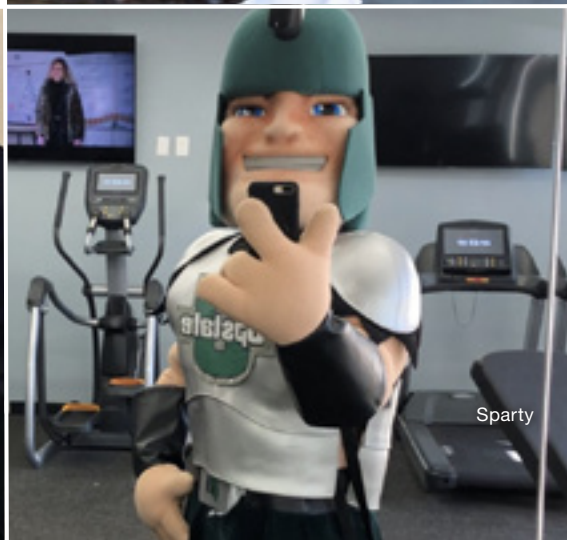
Emonie Harris
Photo Credit: Myles Mc Daniel



Kaley Thomas



Wade Lewis, Diego Ortiz, Spencer Henkle



Sparty



Jada Logan

Endowment Carries on Young's Legacy of Giving

BY CHAUNTE'L POWELL



Family and friends of the late Thomas R. “Tommy” Young III are ensuring his legacy of helping Upstate students continues with the Pamela Gray Heath Scholarship Endowment.

Before his death at age 69 on July 27, 2021, Young had committed to establishing a scholarship to honor his family friend and retired company employee.

Pamela Heath, an avid supporter of Upstate herself, was a longtime employee at Young Office. She was actively involved in design services during her tenure at Young Office, and was committed to the enhancement of leadership environments for students on the Upstate campus. After 25 years of service, she retired in 2019, and Young wanted to recognize her efforts and leadership by creating a scholarship for students, particularly marketing majors in the George Dean Johnson, Jr. College of Business and Economics.

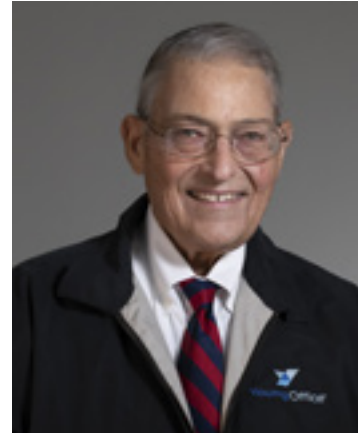
With the help of Thomas Young IV,

Pamela Heath and her husband, Scott, decided to continue the endowment to honor Young's memory and legacy.

Young III was no stranger to service to USC Upstate. He served as chair of the Spartanburg County Commission for Higher Education from 2011 to 2020, and was a member of the USC Upstate Foundation Board from 1999 to 2009. He was a staunch advocate for the university, contributing his time and finances to support many initiatives throughout the years, including campus master planning, USC Upstate's annual Founders Day celebrations and Commencement. He was also a season ticket holder for Spartans basketball.

Young IV says honoring his father's philanthropic efforts on behalf of USC Upstate is important, and he's pleased a family friend will be recognized in the process.

“Pamela Heath was an extremely valuable part of our team at Young Office for many years. Pamela took on




Thomas Young III

Pamela and Scott Heath are carrying on the legacy of their friend Thomas Young III, above, by supporting an endowment in Pamela Heath's name that Young had committed to establishing.

several roles with our company, but found design and helping clients fulfill their vision for new spaces was her passion,” he says. “Pamela supported many different industries, but education was her true passion and she thrived in helping schools create better environments for learning, as well as giving her time to improve education in Spartanburg. We are so glad to be a part of a scholarship in her name and the students it will support in the future.”

For Pamela Heath, her hope is the scholarship helps prepare the next generation of leaders with a quality education from USC Upstate.

“It is indeed an honor for me to be the recipient of the Pamela Gray Heath Scholarship Endowment Gift from Thomas R. Young, III,” she says. “Together, Scott and I will continue to make financial gifts to the USC Upstate Foundation to further the education of students who will be pursuing their dreams to empower and change the world. May these students be reminded that the gift of life and the opportunity of education can enable them to be the best person they can be every day. Tommy would be happy and proud.” 

Welcome New Board Members



Jeffery Brown is a marketing and advertising professional for the Greenville Drive with more than 10 years of experience working with global advertising agencies.



Timothy Bush is the chief tourism development officer at OneSpartanburg, Inc. He previously was the award-winning president and CEO of Louisiana's Cajun Bayou Tourism.



Judy Bynum is a nonprofit professional and sponsor of the Judy & Brant Bynum Fine Art Award.



Claudia Ruffin is the communications director for Johnson Management and Johnson Development Associates, Inc.

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Alum Returns to Lead Alumni Relations



Alumna Charlianne Nestlen, '90, will return to serve the university she feels has given so much to her when she begins her second tenure as USC Upstate's director of alumni relations in January.

Nestlen arrives with a wealth of experience that includes being a Realtor with Coldwell Banker Caine; director of strategic partnerships for the Boy Scouts of America; and a previous stint as director of alumni relations.

As a student, she was an active member of several campus organizations. Nestlen notes it was the guidance and care she experienced at Upstate that helped mold her into a leader and give her the confidence to succeed in her career.

"Like most of our student population, I was a first-generation college student," she says. "I had no idea how any of the things worked – the financial aid, the enrollment process, anything."

Yet, she says, she not only joined a sorority, she became its president. "I just think there's so many more opportunities that Upstate gives that you're not going to find on other campuses," Nestlen says. "And it's not even because of the size. I really think it's because of the engagement piece."

Nestlen feels now is a perfect time to return to Upstate, and is inspired by Chancellor Bennie Harris' vision for the university.

"I love Dr. Harris' theme of Reimagine," she says. "Coming back in a post-COVID society, what does alumni relations look like? What does being engaged at a college and university look like? I think we're going to see a lot of things change about colleges."

"Because of COVID, I feel like we can kind of get rid of the things that were never working to begin with but that we were doing because you felt like it was something you had to do," she adds.

Her immediate focus will be looking into what really appeals to alumni and acting based on their wants and needs. She also wants to connect with current students, as they will be the alumni of tomorrow.

"I'm excited about that because there are endless opportunities to engage in ways that you wouldn't even know," she says.

In turn, Nestlen hopes the engagement will entice more legacy students to enroll and help Upstate build pride in its traditions. Many of her Upstate friends have children in high school who are getting ready to apply for college, she notes, which is the perfect time to get alums engaged.

"Encourage your child to go to your alma mater," she says. "I can tell you right now someone who went to Harvard would lose their mind if their child didn't go to Harvard. So how do we change that narrative where we have that pride? And it's already started. I think there's some good work already in place and I think we're right there on the cusp."

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Gerald Knight, Melanie Knight, Jerome Rice, Shay Rice, Frankie Harris, Chancellor Bennie Harris



Jackie Hodge, '80, Chancellor Bennie Harris, Frankie Harris, Charlie Hodge



From left, Cynthia Lister, Roger L. Couch, Toney Lister, Joy Couch

CHANCELLOR HOLIDAY PARTY

Chancellor Bennie Harris and First Lady Frankie Harris held a holiday reception in December for friends and supporters of USC Upstate. The event was held at the Piedmont Club in Spartanburg.



Cathy H. McCabe, Karen J. Calhoun, Olin B. Sansbury, Jr.



Patrena Mims, Donald Mims, Russell Booker, Sheryl Booker



Susan Hodge Irwin and Shirleatha Lee

G.B. HODGE, MD PERIOPERATIVE SUITE

The USC Upstate Foundation celebrated the dedication in November of the G.B. Hodge, MD Perioperative Suite at the Mary Black School of Nursing. The dedication, made possible by a \$25,000 gift from Susan Hodge Irwin, honors the memory of Irwin's father, the founder of USC Upstate. The suite is part of the nursing school's simulation center, where students gain practice in nursing skills using manikins programmed to replicate real-life clinical situations.



David L. Church, '92



Bennie L. Harris, Frankie A. Harris, Susan Hodge Irwin, Shirleatha Lee and Kim Jolley

ARBOR DAY CELEBRATION

USC Upstate marked Arbor Day on Dec. 3 at the Dr. Lawrence E. Roël Garden Pavilion with a fireside chat by Ricky McAbee, owner of Roebuck Wholesale Nursery and Landscaping, and moderated by horticulturist Stewart Winslow. Anne Flynn, a commissioner with the Spartanburg County Commission for Higher Education, gave an introduction to the history of Arbor Day. The event also celebrated Upstate's accreditation as a Tree Campus USA, one of only six universities in the state to achieve the designation.



Stewart Winslow and Ricky McAbee

Take 10 with Dean of Students

Nick Kehrwald

Where were you born?

I was born in Cherokee, Iowa. Cherokee is a small town of about 6,000 people in northwest Iowa (an hour east from Nebraska/South Dakota, and an hour south of Minnesota).

Who was your favorite teacher, and why?

I have had several great teachers and professors in my life.

I remember my first-grade teacher, Mrs. Radke. She didn't send me to the principal's office when I got into a fight with my best friend on the playground. My high school economics teacher, Mr. Woods, provided a great lesson on the value of graduating from college in four years instead of five (e.g. the cost of a fifth year of college + your lost earnings). My high school teacher, Mr. Andringa, was thought-provoking in ways other high school teachers were not. Mr. Jolly, the high school shop teacher, assistant football coach, and weightlifting coach, taught every student athlete how to train and mentally push yourself. The enjoyment I have for weightlifting and working out is directly linked to Mr. Jolly.

My undergraduate thesis advisor and psychology professor, Dr. Michael Gill, challenged me and developed my love for research. Dr. Bickhard, the chair of cognitive science at Lehigh, introduced me to the power of interdisciplinary work and interdisciplinary thinking. At the University of Missouri, my assistantship director, Dr. Kristi Clevenger, believed in my leadership abilities when I had self-doubt. Dr. Norm Gysbers, one of my clinical supervisors, provided wisdom that I use to this day. At the University of Iowa, my clinical supervisor Len Sandler taught me how to write, and how the law can be harnessed to improve people's lives.

Each of these individuals, and several other teachers not listed, provided lessons and a foundation for my love of learning that I carry with me every day.



What was your first job?

Like most kids in Iowa, my first job was detasseling corn. It involves pulling the tassels (yellow pollen-producing, flower-like object) from the top of the plant. The purpose is to create better hybrid versions of seed corn. For young teenagers, it involves walking through muddy, wet rows of corn at sunrise and continuing until the heat of midday. It is the worst parts of being wet and cool in the morning, and too hot and sticky in the afternoon.

What's your favorite way to unwind?

I love being outside and nature. I really enjoy hiking in wooded areas because I find the sounds and the fresh air to be invigorating. If I can't hike, going to a park and walking outside is second best. I am a big believer in physical exercise and its impact on my mental focus and clarity.

I also really enjoy cooking and eating good food.

What three albums would you want with you on a desert island?

1. AC/DC - Back in Black.
 2. Green Day - Dookie
 3. Led Zeppelin- Remasters
- Honorable Mention: Foo Fighters -

Colour and the Shape

*This is slightly cheating, since Led Zeppelin's Remasters is a compilation and multiple albums.

What's your favorite vacation place?

The beach is my absolute favorite place to be. I have been to Australia multiple times, Mexico, Fiji, Hawaii, San Diego, Florida, and the Gulf. I love waves and the power of the ocean. I find the beach to be the place where I can relax and gain clarity.

What or who inspires you?

I have always had an appreciation for architecture and design. Someone like Frank Lloyd Wright, whose building designs take advantage of the natural landscape, sunlight, etc., always inspires my creativity. Having been a student and a staff member at seven different institutions, I think about how universities use the natural topography and space to create great physical workplaces and support wellness.

Favorite TV or streaming show?

I like forensic psychology, so I love a show like Mindhunter.

What's your favorite thing about USC Upstate?

I love the well-intentional, collaborative culture at Upstate. I think people genuinely care about students, the institution, and the impact the institution has in the region.

What's something most people don't know about you?

I had delayed language development as a child where I didn't talk until around 4 and did not read very well. I went to an in-home babysitter that was run by a retired couple, Helen and Ray Struck. Ray would help me read and work through my assignments during my preschool and elementary years. In addition to all of the formal teachers and professors that I had, I also had a very caring babysitter. 📖

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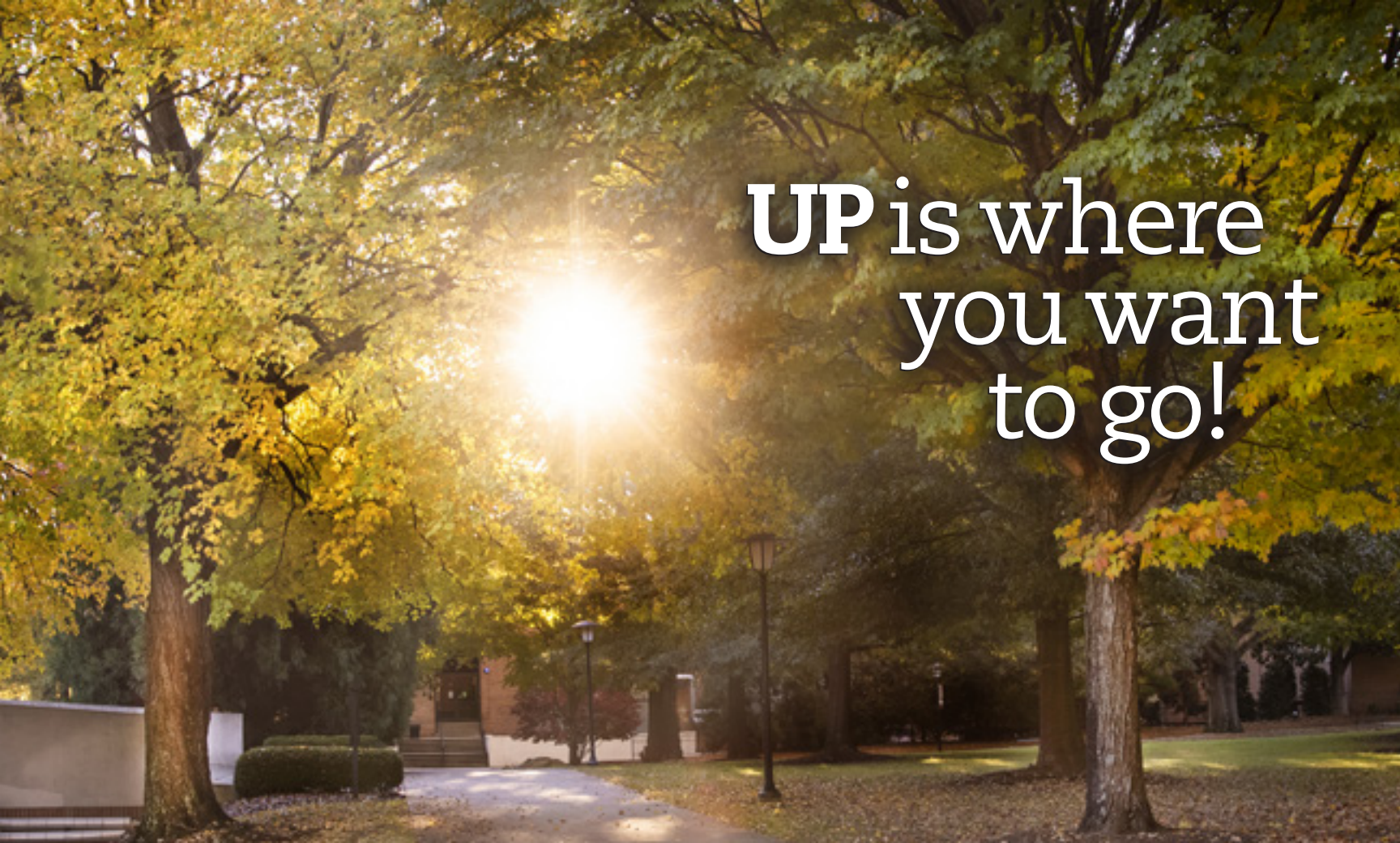
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A photograph of a campus scene featuring a paved path leading through a large, leafy tree with vibrant yellow autumn foliage. The sun is shining brightly through the branches, creating a warm, golden glow. In the background, other trees and a building are visible under a clear sky.

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you want
to go!