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SPRING 2024



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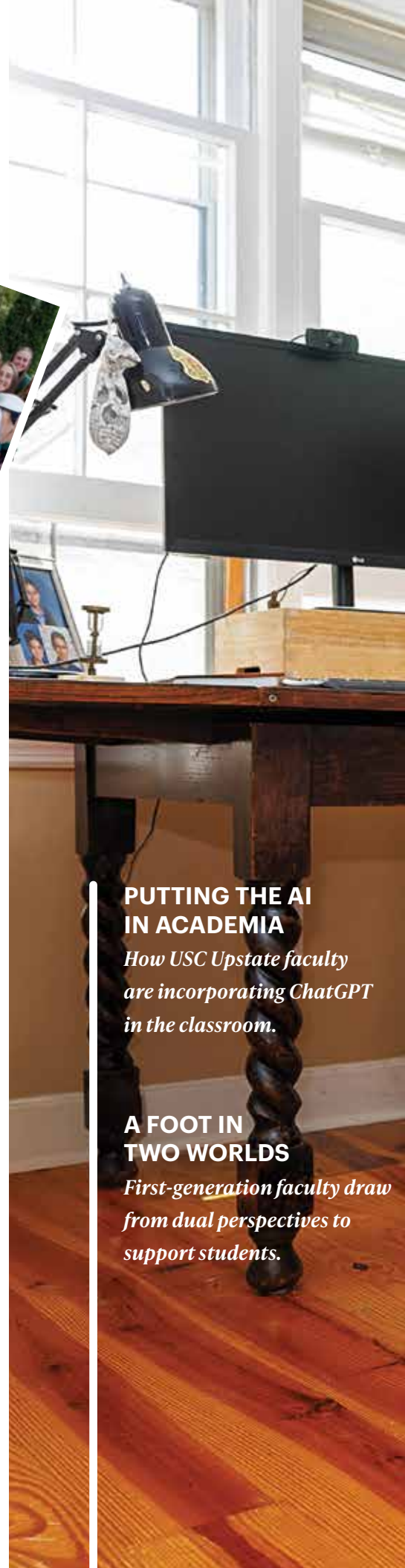
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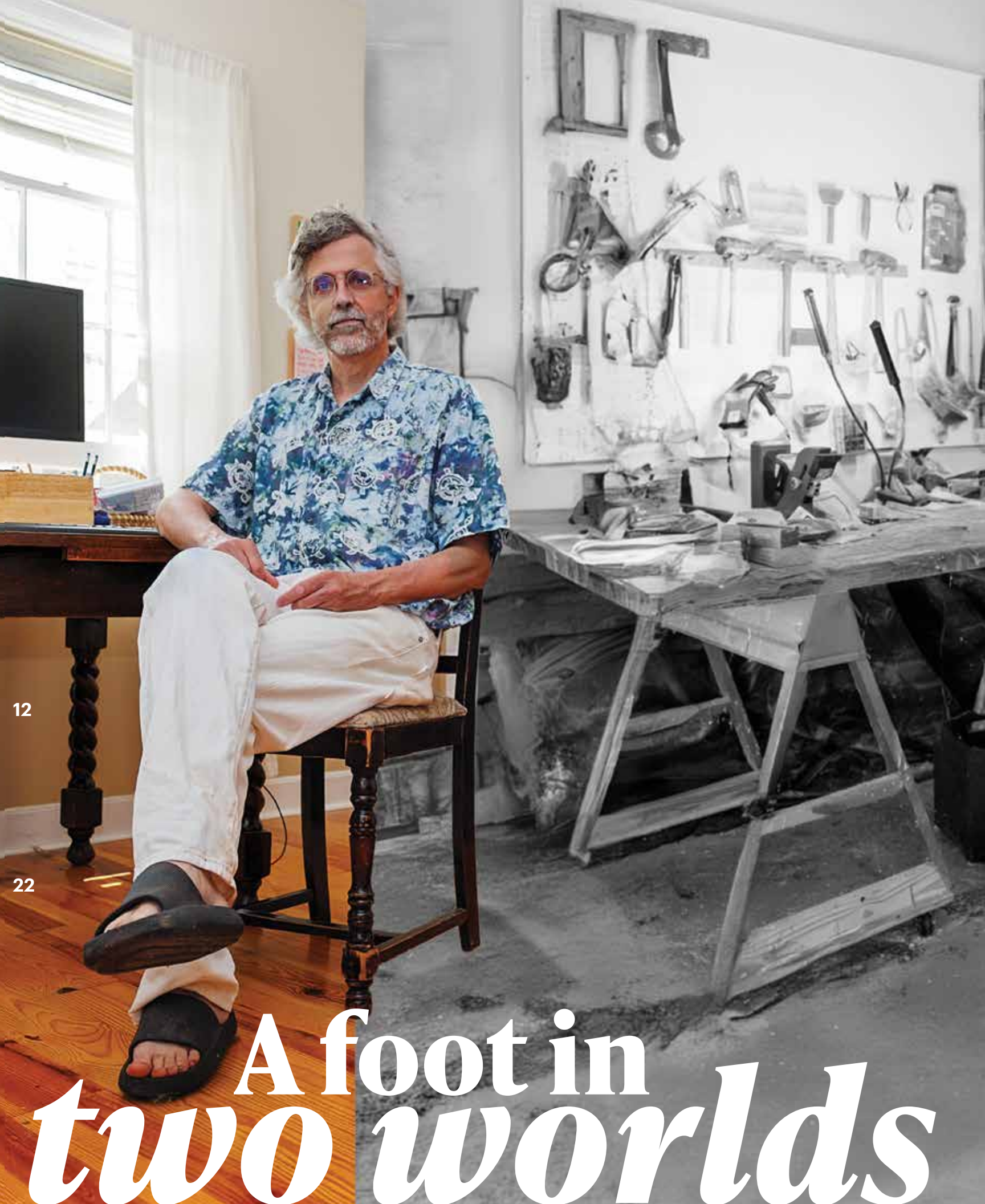


PUTTING THE AI IN ACADEMIA

How USC Upstate faculty are incorporating ChatGPT in the classroom.

A FOOT IN TWO WORLDS

First-generation faculty draw from dual perspectives to support students.



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A foot in *two worlds*





Message from the Chancellor

As the temperature climbs and summer is upon us at the University of South Carolina Upstate, I find myself thinking about beginnings and endings. We have experienced both, many times over, during the past academic year. We even call our graduation ceremony a commencement, because though it is an ending, it is truly a beginning.

Some of the endings we've experienced have been challenging, emotional, victorious, and perhaps even heartbreaking. Behind the scenes, the administrators, faculty, staff, students and other leaders at USC Upstate experienced an ending and beginning of their own: the debut of the Greater 2030 Strategic Plan.

We will talk more about this plan in the pages of this magazine. But, in short, this in-depth report — which came together after many hours of hard work by our leaders, administrators, students, faculty, and staff — dives into our mission and vision and looks at ways to grow, expand, and Reach Greater Heights in the current economic and employment climate.

With five cornerstone programs — Spartan Distinct, Spartan Recruit, Spartan Success, Spartan Partners, and Spartan Future — the Strategic Plan provides a framework for how we can reach our true potential.

The year also saw the ending of planning, discussions, and legwork, and the beginning of construction on a 22,000-square-foot, state-of-the-art expansion of our library.

This project represents not only physical growth. With \$21 million in funding from our state lawmakers, it's also a significant investment in the intellectual and academic growth of our students and the broader community. Indeed, this is the first time since 2009 that we have received such substantial funding to improve a building.

The library has long been the heart of our campus, serving as a center for knowledge, collaboration, and discovery. Now that we have broken ground on the expansion, we can embark on a journey that will enhance the educational experience for generations to come.

Another expansion, one that will also enrich the educational experience at USC Upstate, is in the works. We are adding new degree programs that reflect the evolving needs of our society and economy. These programs will equip our graduates with the skills and knowledge required to thrive in today's competitive job market and make meaningful contributions to their communities.

USC Upstate also is reenergizing international programs to foster cross-cultural understanding among our students. By expanding opportunities for international exchange and collaboration, we are preparing our graduates to succeed in an increasingly interconnected world.

As we reflect on our past achievements and look ahead to the future, I am confident that the University of South Carolina Upstate will continue to Reach Greater Heights. We will continue to experience beginnings and endings, and begin again. And that's how it should be. As the author John Irving once said, "You only grow by coming to the end of something and by beginning something else."



Go Spartans!

Bennie L. Harris, Ph.D.

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ASSOCIATE VICE CHANCELLOR FOR STRATEGIC
MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS

Kesha Boyce Williams

MANAGING EDITOR

Elizabeth Anderson

DESIGN

Jonathan Hooks

Hannah Jordan '18

PHOTOGRAPHY

Terry E. Manning

Justin Myrick

Tim Kinzey

Jonathan Hooks

WEB MANAGEMENT

Eric Swearingin

Christina Cleveland

CONTRIBUTORS

Christine Fennesy

Susan Grotenhuis

Salleah Brown-Massey '24



CONTACT US

UMC@uscupstate.edu

MAILING ADDRESS

ATTN: UPSTATE Magazine

University Marketing and Communications

800 University Way

Spartanburg, South Carolina 29303

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Following the Threads

USC Upstate students help Milliken & Co. identify potential products to pursue.

As a leader and innovator in textiles, flooring and health care products, Spartanburg-based Milliken & Co. is always exploring new ideas. This past fall, some USC Upstate students had the opportunity to help the company with that process.

Six business majors and one computer science major were selected to be part of a student consulting group. Brian Brady, director of the Center for Entrepreneurship and Innovation, and associate professor Yin-Chi Liao worked with the team in class, while the innovation scout team at Milliken, led by Allice Ballenger, director of strategy in the textile division, provided outside guidance.

The students were tasked with pre-qualifying and assessing a list of potential ideas for innovative products and market opportunities for the textile division. Their work included analyzing data and consulting with executives on the Milliken team. At the end of the project, the students presented their findings and recommendations to members of executive management.

"It reinforced the importance of interdisciplinary thinking and collaboration, which are essential skills in today's dynamic business environment," says Svetlana Semenuk, a marketing and communications major.

Students also learned important soft skills, such as observing dress codes, developing resiliency, and approaching challenges with a fresh perspective. Not every industry expert wanted to talk to the team, so getting used to rejection was part of the process "You will hear 'no,' or absolutely nothing, a lot," says accounting major Eleazar Morales.

Sometimes the team's research showed an idea wasn't feasible. That not only meant explaining the reasons why, but also offering Milliken executives some alternatives. "For a company, being told that something isn't viable before starting can save millions of dollars of R&D, and they appreciate that," says Morales. "A 'no' is just as useful as a 'yes.'"

Ballenger agrees, and says the Milliken team valued the students' thorough assessments. "They delivered high-quality work that exceeded our expectations," she says. "They were not afraid to question our assumptions and propose new solutions."

For their part, the students appreciated the chance to grow professionally. "My time with Milliken taught me the importance of approaching things differently, embracing new experiences, and continuously seeking opportunities for growth and innovation," says Semenuk.

— Susan Grotenhuis

A Season of Firsts

The women's basketball team capped a historic season with its first-ever WNIT appearance. While the Spartans fell to the College of Charleston in the first round, the team celebrated several other achievements along the way, including advancing to the Big South Women's Basketball semifinals for the first time in program history.

"Our team has grown tremendously from where we started to where we are today," said head coach Jason Williams. "I'm very proud of who they are, not just as basketball players, but as people."

Williams expressed confidence the team would have more post-season appearances in the future.





Gospel Truth

Alphaeus Anderson celebrates 10 years with Upstate's storied choir.

Alphaeus Anderson caught a glimpse of his future with the USC Upstate Gospel Choir when he was a student at Dorman High School. Dorman's choir was invited to perform at the Gospel Choir's concert, and Anderson was inspired by what he saw. "I'm looking at Dr. Warren Carson directing over 150 students on stage, overflowing on the sides," Anderson recalls. "I'm watching this not even knowing years later, I would be asked to direct the same choir."

Anderson recently celebrated his 10-year anniversary as the director of the USC Upstate Gospel Choir. Founded by students in the 1979-80 academic year, the choir has a rich legacy and strong alumni base that Anderson seeks to support and grow. He credits his positive experiences with the choir to his students and their passion for uplifting each other with gospel.

— Salleah Brown-Massey '24



Command Performance

Theatre celebrates multiple awards from Kennedy Center college festival.

USC Upstate Theatre earned eight Kennedy Center American College Theater Festival (KCACTF) awards for its production of "Gruesome Playground Injuries." The play was directed by associate professor of theatre Laura Rikard and starred students Noah Deal and Lyric Dukes.

Upstate Theatre performed "Gruesome Playground Injuries" in London last summer as part of the FUSE International Festival. The group then was invited to perform the play in February at the KCACTF Region IV Festival. Upstate was one of only four finalists to be selected from a group of 14 semifinalists. The honor qualified Upstate for national recognition.

"The many accolades bestowed on us by the Kennedy Center is a testament to the great work our faculty is doing with students and the wonderful growth we are experiencing," said Lee Neibert, professor and director of theatre at USC Upstate.

< Photo: Noah Deal and Lyric Dukes received Distinguished Achievement in Performance awards.

Making Strides

Business student launches app to improve sneaker resale experience.

A shoe trade gone wrong convinced D'Alexander Zegarra the sneaker resale market needed a reboot.

Zegarra had arranged an exchange with a seller in Oregon, someone he assumed was trustworthy because of their large Instagram following. But when he sent the sneakers, along with some additional cash, he never received anything in return. The post office was able to retrieve the sneakers before they were picked up, but Zegarra was out the cash.

"That taught me a huge lesson about how hard it is to trust people online," he says.

It also taught the economics and finance major that there was a need for a platform where people could buy, sell and trade sneakers without fear

of getting scammed. His solution was Instaheat, an app that partners with sneaker resale shops in South Carolina to facilitate safe transactions.

Now in its third iteration, the app allows sellers to get their product authenticated by a brick-and-mortar store, and have it shipped out the same or next day to the buyer. The stores can also serve as a safe public meeting place for in-person trades.

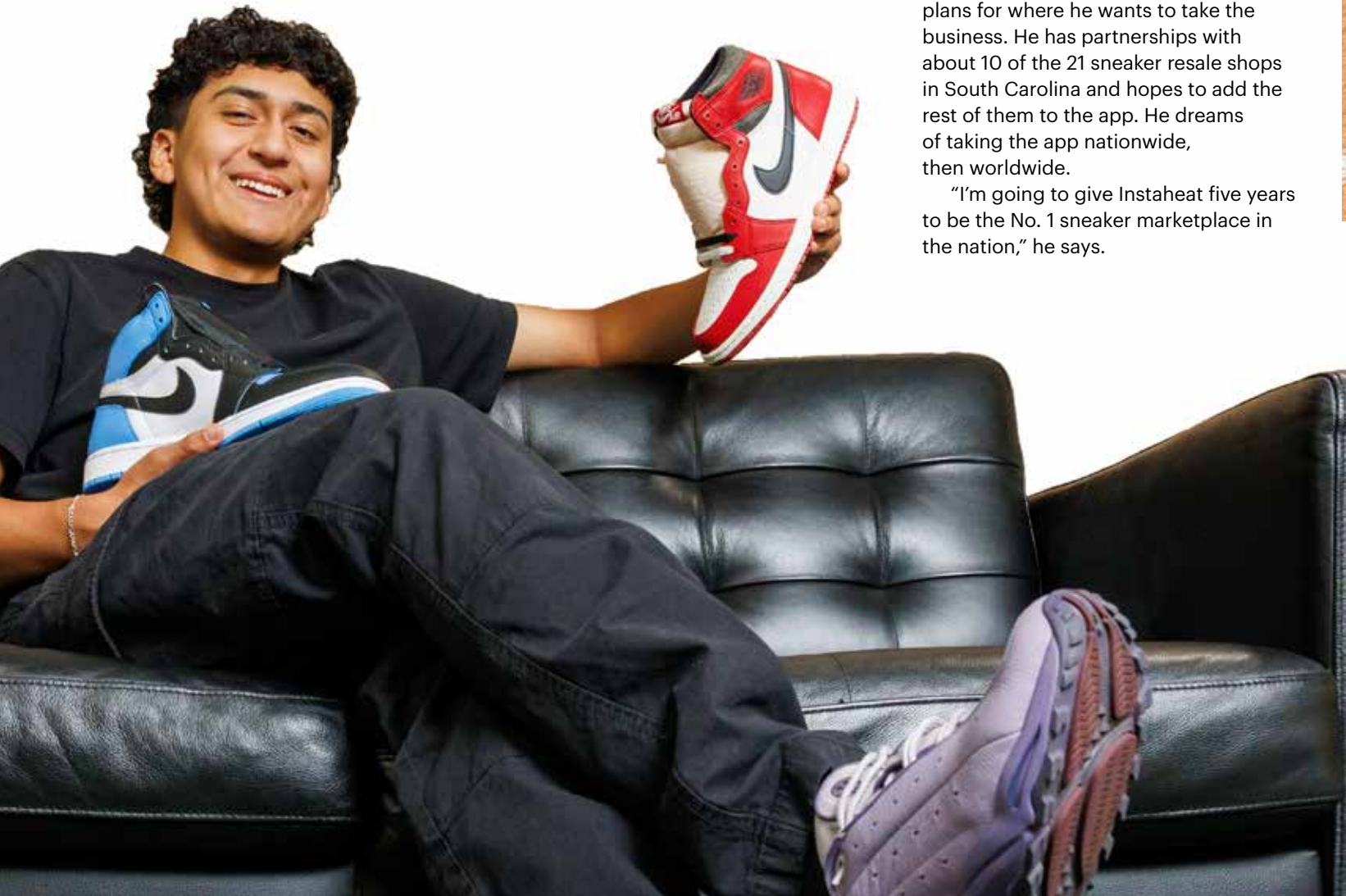
Zegarra says other websites, such as StockX, offer authentication services, but the process takes much longer, since the seller has to ship the product to an evaluation center first before it can be mailed to the buyer. The whole process can take up to four weeks. Plus, the commission and fees can be up to 12% on each transaction, while Zegarra says Instaheat only takes an 8% commission.

Small resale shops also benefit from the app, he says. A person coming to the store for authentication or to do a trade might notice other sneakers they want to buy. And the shops are paid a percentage of every pair of sneakers they authenticate.

Zegarra has poured much of his own resources into the project. He has a second company, NestMate Marketing, that provides software services to contractors, but Instaheat is his first love. A self-professed sneaker-head since childhood, Zegarra sold his own collection to fund the development of the app. He also worked at Walgreen's for a year to save up enough money to build a prototype of the app, which ended up not working.

But together with his partners, one a student at Emory University and the other at Georgia Tech, Zegarra has big plans for where he wants to take the business. He has partnerships with about 10 of the 21 sneaker resale shops in South Carolina and hopes to add the rest of them to the app. He dreams of taking the app nationwide, then worldwide.

"I'm going to give Instaheat five years to be the No. 1 sneaker marketplace in the nation," he says.





Spartan Drive



Softball makes history with tournament win

The Spartans became the first USC Upstate team in any sport to win a Big South Tournament Championship. Following their May 12 victory over the Winthrop Eagles, the team went to the NCAA Regionals for the first time since 2017, and its first appearance since joining the Big South. The program made five previous NCAA Regional appearances (2013-17) while a member of the Atlantic Sun Conference.

Though the team was knocked out of the Regionals after a loss to Clemson, head coach Chris Hawkins '89 praised his players for their hard work and support of each other.

"I'm really proud of the way we battled over the last three weeks," Hawkins said. "Our growth was tremendous. For us to get a taste of regionals will hopefully get the returners hungry."



Student Tanya Johnson '24 printed photos on glass for her project.

Snapshot in Time

Associate professors Bridget Kirkland and Colby King were chatting at a reception one evening about the decline of iron mill towns in their home state of Pennsylvania, when they had an idea: Why not develop a collaborative class looking at how urban areas change over time?

Each professor brought a different perspective to the project. Kirkland teaches graphic design and photography, while King teaches sociology. They also enlisted the help of Mo Kessler, a visiting artist whose work centers on the social and environmental landscape of Appalachia and the South.

The classes came together once a week for shared discussions, then met separately the rest of the time. Working in small groups, students developed ideas for written and visual projects that explored Spartanburg's history, cultures and neighborhoods at a time of ongoing change.

The interdisciplinary approach helped push her students outside their comfort zone, Kirkland notes. "It forced them to talk and have to design what the group wanted, not just what they saw as a solution," she says.

At the end of the semester, the class hosted Threading Spartanburg, an exhibit featuring photos by Kirkland's students accompanied by essays by King's students.

Tanya Johnson '24 and her group focused on places of community. What she realized while exploring the city's communal spaces was that "the uniqueness is not that unique. You can go into neighborhoods and find people supporting people, no matter what city or town you're in."

King says the final projects reflected the new perspectives students had gained. "Not only did they learn more about the city of Spartanburg, and their local community, but they were also able to see the city from the vantage points of their neighbors and fellow community members."



Golfers Par Excellence

The women's golf team achieved a major milestone by securing their first-ever postseason bid, to Golfweek's National Golf Invitational.

"To say the opportunity to play postseason golf is exciting would not do our emotions justice," said head coach Todd Lawton. "A golf season lasts a long time over an academic year, and there are so many demands on our players to perform well every week. These ladies have done it from last August until now, and being recognized for their efforts and accomplishments is incredible."

The Spartans were runner-up finishers at the Big South Conference Championship in early April.



Right Track

The men's track and field made program history this spring with their first-ever second place finish at the Big South Outdoor Championship. The Spartans clinched four individual titles from both the men's and women's teams and combined had 21 podium appearances.

Carson Blackwelder also was named men's outdoor track and field coach of the year.

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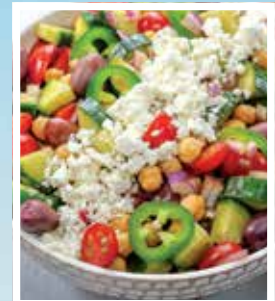
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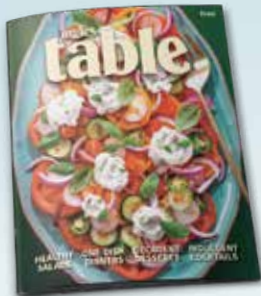
GABRIEL'S CREEK FISH SANDWICH



GREEK SPAGHETTI



CHICKPEA SALAD



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Putting the AI in Academia

USC Upstate faculty are exploring ways to responsibly incorporate artificial intelligence in the classroom.

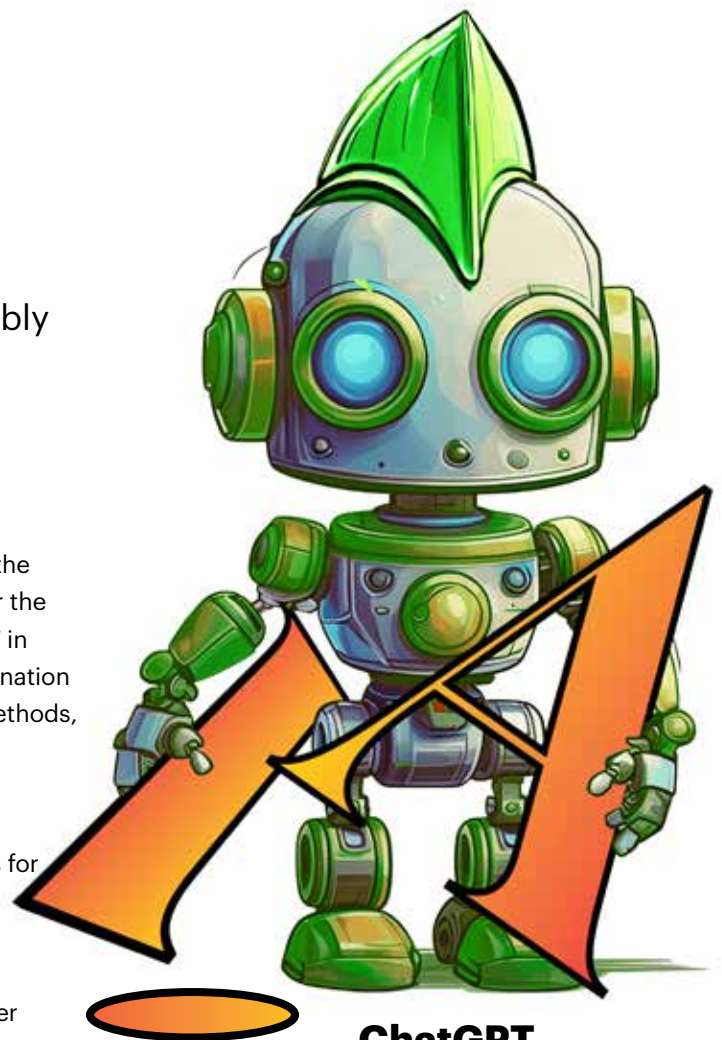
By Elizabeth Anderson

Since breaking into the public consciousness a little over a year ago, generative AI has been impossible to ignore. AI has powered many forms of technology for some time, but the release of ChatGPT – a type of generative AI that allows users to interact with a chatbot – put a powerful tool into the hands of anyone who was interested in using it.

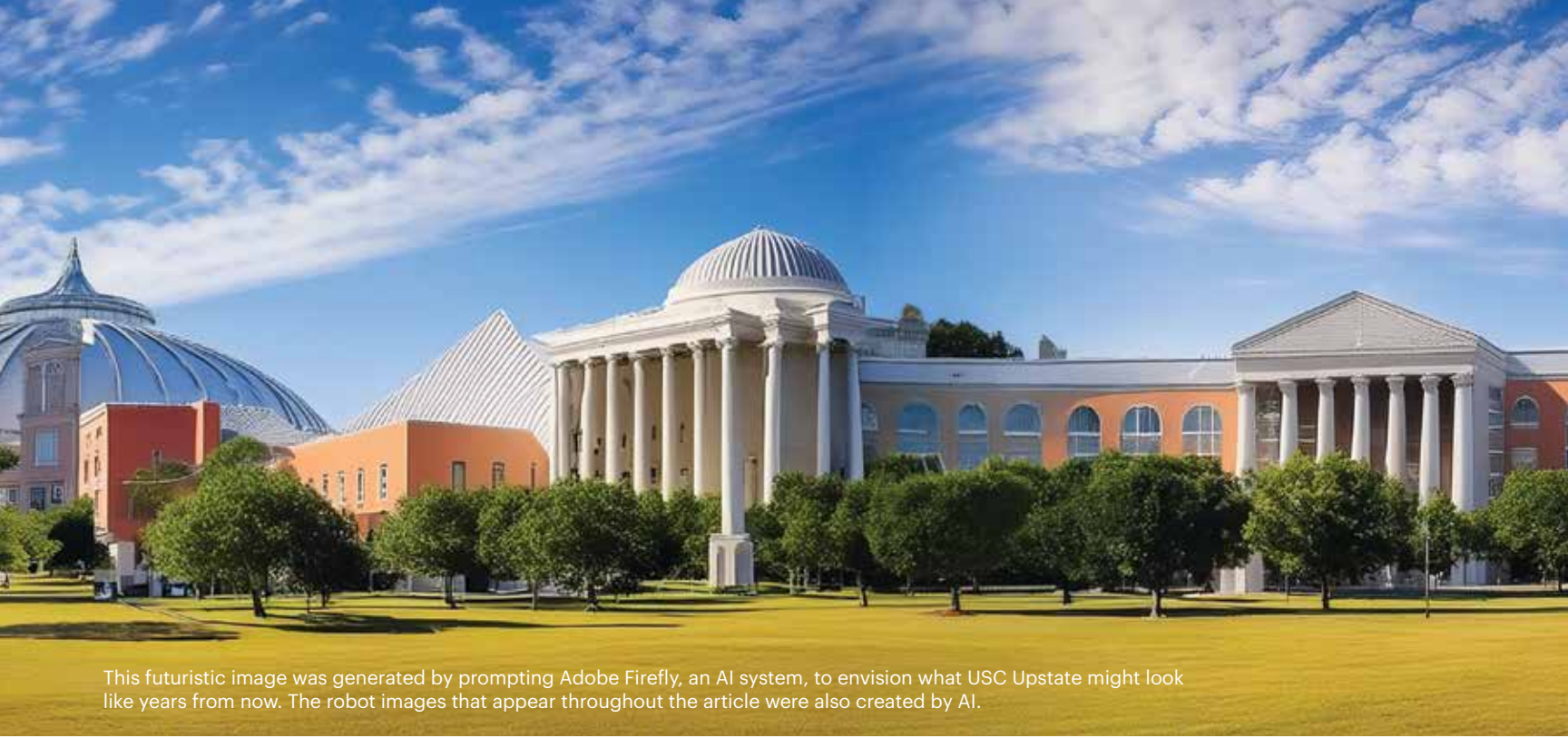
USC Upstate is among the universities that are now grappling with AI's potential to transform the

workplace, and by extension, the schools preparing students for the careers of the future. ChatGPT in particular is driving a re-examination of curriculum and teaching methods, to ensure graduates develop competency in a fast-evolving technology.

“We are preparing students for a very vibrant, cutting-edge, forward-facing technological economy,” says Celena Kusch, executive director of the Center



ChatGPT
Explains Itself



This futuristic image was generated by prompting Adobe Firefly, an AI system, to envision what USC Upstate might look like years from now. The robot images that appear throughout the article were also created by AI.

for Academic Innovation and Faculty Support at USC Upstate. “We know that the places that our students are going to get careers need us to stay on top of these things.”

AI on college campuses is not new. Chatbots, for example, are embedded on many university websites to answer admission questions. Plagiarism detection sites, virtual test proctoring, and early alert systems for academic underperformance are other types of commonly used systems that include AI.

Now educators are looking for ways to extend the technology into the classroom. Because many students are already experimenting with ChatGPT on

their own, several faculty members have begun incorporating lessons into their classes to help students learn how to use the technology effectively and ethically.

TALKING HEADS

AI has been part of the training process at the Mary Black College of Nursing for a few years already. The simulation lab uses AI-powered software that can be programmed to produce specific symptoms. When nursing students are checking vital signs, the simulators can produce different heart rates, blood pressures, or respiratory rates, says Logan Camp-Spivey, director

of simulation. Or if students are learning to recognize signs of a heart attack or breathing problems, the program can be changed to show those symptoms.

“We can really adapt all of our simulators based on what content is being covered in the course,” Camp-Spivey says.

The simulators can also provide simple responses to questions posed by students. While the technology is fairly basic right now, Camp-Spivey says she’s already seen news about models that will allow for in-depth conversations between student and simulator.

AI technology has improved virtual simulations as well. Based on the action

What is Generative AI?

It’s like having a very clever assistant that can imagine and create things on its own.

Generative AI can make new things based on patterns it learns. It learns from a lot of examples, like images or text, and then it can generate new ones that look or sound similar. For example, it could create new paintings, write stories, or even compose music, all without direct human input.

What is ChatGPT?

ChatGPT is an AI designed to have conversations with people!

It’s trained on a vast amount of text from the internet, so it knows a lot about many topics. You can ask it questions, chat about your day, or even play games—it’s like having a knowledgeable friend to talk to anytime.

According to a September 2023 study by Tyton Partners sponsored by Turnitin, which included 1,600 students and 1,000 faculty at more than 600 institutions:

49%

of students are using generative AI tools

22%

of faculty are using generative AI tools

35%

used AI to teach students how to use AI writing tools effectively

29%

used AI tools to create more engaging class activities

55%

of students who use AI believe GenAI tools will be needed for work

a student takes, a program will adapt to produce the outcomes that would follow. That helps the student learn, rather than just following one path that automatically provides the right outcome, Camp-Spivey says.

Since simulation is an important training tool for future nurses, providing a safe way to make mistakes and learn from them before going into a clinical setting, Camp-Spivey is excited about AI's potential to make the experience even more realistic.

"I think AI is something we need to embrace," she says. "It's learning how we as educators can use it in a positive way for our students to enhance their learning and make it more meaningful."

BEYOND THE BEDSIDE

Assistant professor Kristi Miller, who teaches nursing informatics, makes sure her students gain an understanding of how AI can be used to improve patient care. Because AI is capable of collecting and analyzing huge amounts of data, it can identify areas for improvement and assess the effectiveness of any changes. For example, AI could analyze data to determine whether changing the way nurses take temperatures helps reduce infection rates at hospitals, Miller says.

AI also has the potential to help nurses provide very individualized care. If you're working in a hospital that specializes in cancer treatment, you could use AI to analyze years of patient records to see which kinds of treatment have worked best for people of specific ages, races and genders – a task so vast no human would have time to do it, Miller explains. With that information, medical professionals could improve care and make it more equitable.

"So to me, what we really need the future nurse to be is someone who has a dual degree in computer science and nursing," she says. "Because what we have right now is people who know nothing about health care designing our electronic health records and data collection. Nurses need to be involved in designing the interface."

Miller is also teaching students how to use AI to analyze scans, so they can explain the benefits to patients. One advantage is improved diagnostic accuracy, since AI can sometimes catch something a technician may have missed.

"Everyone thinks the main role of nurses is giving medication and wiping butts, but our main role is actually assessing and educating the patient," Miller says. "So we're trying to teach the public what AI is and how it can help them."

Miller notes that as with any technology, AI is a tool that can be used to improve how nurses do their job and care for their patients. It's not a replacement for nurses. "The thing we really have to emphasize to people is that there's always got to be a human involved," she says. "AI isn't taking over the world."

THINK ABOUT IT

Associate professor Wei Zhong, who teaches computer science, agrees with the sentiment. "Right now, people think AI can think, but that's memorization," he says. "It's just learning from patterns. I tell students, creative thinking, that's where we excel."





AI at Work

Research conducted by Upstate faculty highlights some of the ways AI can impact the workplace of the future. Justin Travis '08, assistant professor of psychology, has been examining how AI technologies are being used in the hiring process and the ethical implications of that.

Some companies, for example, have used AI models to assess candidates and predict whether they would be a good fit for the job. In this scenario, applicants record themselves answering interview questions. An AI model uses a randomly selected subset from the applicant pool and a portion of their videos to train itself to look for specific behaviors or data points that the company has indicated it wants to see. From there, the model is applied to the entire candidate pool to identify top applicants.

This raises some obvious concerns, especially because there's no transparency about what factors a company used to create its model, Travis explains. Bias could potentially be introduced in any number of ways, which is why it's important for models to regularly be reviewed and assessed. For example, is the model making predictions that apply to both men and women, and to people of different ages and races?

Travis notes that industrial and organizational psychologists have long used AI to help companies analyze workplace productivity and employee satisfaction. But this more sophisticated application of AI is still relatively new and in limited use. Without any current legislation that specifically addresses how to use AI in personnel decisions, it's important to develop some guidelines, Travis says.

"People need to be aware that while it might not be against the law right now, it could be, in the blink of an eye," he says. "And there are ethical and maybe even moral considerations that should be made when you're using these tools, because it's a phenomenal amount of power that could be harnessed here."



"I think AI is something we need to embrace. It's learning how we as educators can use it in a positive way for our students to enhance their learning and make it more meaningful." — Logan Camp-Spivey



Zhong offers one-hour labs in his AI courses that allow students to experiment with AI and become familiar with such technologies as facial recognition and object detection (such as the alert systems used in cars). Students also work on projects using ChatGPT API, which allows developers to integrate ChatGPT into a product or service, such as ordering food.

"It's very application based," Zhong says. "I'm not going to teach them theory. The goal is to get them interested."

He also wants students to understand the limitations of AI. While ChatGPT might be able to write code better and faster than a human, Zhong says it's not perfect. "Every code has a reasoning behind it," he tells his students. "Always think about the why." His assignments incorporate that critical thinking element, so students analyze why a code works, or doesn't, or if there's a better way than what ChatGPT has generated.

While coding is an area that likely will see job losses in the future because of AI, Zhong believes there will be a growing demand for workers with ChatGPT API knowledge. With so many new online services constantly in development, knowing how to incorporate API into software will likely be an important skill, Zhong says. "You don't need to understand the theory behind it, but you can know how to use it to make software smarter," he says.

TESTING THE WATERS

Other faculty at Upstate are learning how to use AI alongside their students. When Uma Gupta, associate

professor of business analytics, decided to start teaching about AI this past fall, she reached out to Kusch to find out if there were others on campus already using AI in their classes. A small group formed so faculty could learn from each other and trade ideas, and identify areas for professional development.

Gupta admits that teaching generative AI has been a "sobering experience." The amount of information available is overwhelming and requires a different approach than what faculty are used to, she notes. "In other disciplines, you can say, OK, here is the foundation, here are the fundamentals, and build on it," she says. "But with AI, the fundamentals are shifting every day."

One of her students had to go back and revise their research paper two days after completing it to incorporate new information that had just emerged. Gupta says she advises her students to be fearless, because the technology isn't going away and they have to learn how to use it.

Just as AI stands to transform the health care industry, it has major potential for business as well. The ability to analyze big data and look for patterns that can improve operational efficiency, or the transportation of goods, or product safety, makes AI an extremely valuable tool for industry, Gupta notes. "So we're talking about machine learning, where the machine is learning how to do things far better than what humans can do," she says.

That means the traditional role of a data analyst is likely to change. Gupta wants her students to be able to evaluate their

skills as the technology continues to evolve, so they can add value above what AI can do. “You won’t be able to keep your job unless you do,” she says.

To help her students explore AI, Gupta has her class research chatbots – what they are, how they can be used, how they might be applied in their careers. One student, for instance, looked at how chatbots can be incorporated into music therapy to improve a child’s well-being. Another looked at applications in manufacturing. “They could not have done that if I went into class and said, let me teach you about chatbots,” she says.

BALANCING ACT

When ChatGPT became widely available, many initial conversations in academia focused on the potential for cheating – students asking AI to write their papers for them, for example. But discussions have gradually pivoted to how AI can be incorporated into class assignments so students understand its limitations as a shortcut for classwork.

Kusch, who also teaches English, says one assignment she likes to do is have students prompt ChatGPT to write a poem in the style of someone they’re reading in class. The results are always laughably bad, but that’s a perfect opportunity to employ critical thinking skills, Kusch says. “Why is AI so terrible at writing poetry? What makes the real poetry so much better?”

She and other professors in the department also have students use ChatGPT to do background research for a paper. Then the students have to analyze the results ChatGPT has provided, and compare it to the research they’ve done on their own. “So it eliminates the temptation to use the process in

unauthorized ways, and it prompts them to think about, what time savings did you get out of this?” she says.

Kusch also sees AI as a tool to provide feedback. Ideally when writing, “it’s so good for students to do peer review, or have a conference with a faculty member to talk about a draft of their paper,” she says. But some students aren’t comfortable with that, or don’t have time during the day to do it. With ChatGPT, however, they can easily ask, “What do you think about this draft? What suggestions do you have? And they can do that in the middle of the night, with no shame,” Kusch says.

TEACHING THE TEACHERS

Like Kusch, Stephen Bismarck, chair of the department of education, wants his students to learn both the capabilities and shortcomings of AI. In his case, however, the skills he’s teaching students are not only for their personal benefit, but also to pass along to their future students.

The first part of the process is helping his students understand how to effectively use the technology. One strategy Bismarck has found helpful is to have students use AI to develop a teaching unit. For many of them, getting started is the biggest hurdle. “They want to teach a unit on, say, linear functions. And they can look to their textbook and see what’s in there, but I want them to go beyond that,” he says.

Instead, Bismarck has students prompt ChatGPT about a specific topic to see what kind of lessons it comes up with. The students quickly realize ChatGPT is not the perfect solution – the results are usually pretty basic, with instructions such as “find three problems related to this topic.” “But it’s a good starting point,” Bismarck says. “So now that you have

“Why is AI so terrible at writing poetry?”

What makes the real poetry so much better?”

— Celena Kusch



Fighting Fire With Fire

Xudong Zhang, assistant professor of computer science, has explored how to apply AI models to cybersecurity. Typically a company or organization uses firewalls or intrusion detection systems that rely on a predefined pattern – a signature – that alerts them to potential criminal activity. But as attack techniques evolve to include AI, those systems may not be as effective.

For instance, AI could be used to automate aspects of an attack, such as creating phishing emails, developing malware or spam that can evade traditional defenses, or finding and quickly exploiting weaknesses in a system, Zhang says.

But AI can also be deployed to fight these more sophisticated attacks. By training AI models to know what normal behavior looks like, cybersecurity experts can use AI algorithms to monitor network traffic, user behavior and system activity to detect any anomalies. The more the models learn about what an AI-generated attack looks like, and the patterns associated with it, the better security systems will be at responding to threats in real time, Zhang says.

The only issue is having a powerful enough machine that can process all the data needed to train the AI model, something likely not too far off. “When you create an AI model, it’s like a baby, and the parents teach the baby,” he says. “If we train this model with a large amount of data, then this model will be very powerful.”



that starting point, your next step is to use your expertise to analyze that and make it better.”

As students progress through the semester and learn different methods of teaching math, they return to ChatGPT to get ideas on how to apply each method to hands-on class activities. “So that’s really what I’m utilizing it for – a jumping-off point, a way for students to analyze versus just getting stuck on creating,” he says.

Beyond developing their own AI proficiency, education students also are learning how to teach their own students how to use it. Bismarck notes that when he taught his class last semester and asked how many people had used ChatGPT before, about half of them had. This semester when he asked the question, every hand went up. That means the students his students are teaching are likely using it, too. By having his classes take a critical look at what ChatGPT produces, Bismarck hopes they will do the same in the classroom. “It’s sort of a trickle-down effect, where the emphasis is on analysis,” he says.

SOMETHING FOR EVERYONE

AI isn’t just valuable for teaching core subjects, either. In specialized areas, such as teaching multilingual classrooms, the technology provides opportunities to create resources for future teachers that are currently limited or nonexistent.

Refika Turgut, assistant professor of literacy and language education, works with graduate students who teach English as a second language and undergraduates who plan to teach in multilingual classrooms. Because her students represent different majors, Turgut says a “one size fits all” approach isn’t helpful for them.

Physical education can be a particularly challenging subject to find material for, since there aren’t many resources for teaching multilingual PE classes. With ChatGPT, Turgut can enter in some prompts to get recommendations of research-based strategies her physical education majors can use. The result is an article framework she can develop herself. And she can do the same for every major in her class, so every student has something to read that’s specific to their subject area.

And the customization doesn’t end there. Turgut can create specific scenarios that her students might encounter – a sophomore math class with Russian-speaking students who are new to the country, for example – and see what kind of strategies ChatGPT suggests in those situations.

“I’ve heard from teachers who say, ‘I can’t differentiate my teaching based on all these different types of learners,’ so they might give up or say it’s too hard,” Turgut says. “But now, if they know how to use AI as a tool, it will make it

easier for them to design activities or to get suggestions for instructional practices they can institute in their classroom.”

Turgut was quick to explore AI’s possibilities in the classroom after the release of ChatGPT. She realized immediately it was something faculty would have to incorporate into the classroom, and by extension, something future teachers would need to know how to use.

“As a teacher-educator, I’m really excited about using AI, and changing my courses, making them better and making them more relevant for my students and for teachers,” Turgut says.

BEING HUMAN

Faculty across most disciplines agree that the curriculum of the future is likely to look very different from what it does now. That raises multiple issues that universities across the nation are beginning to grapple with, from what types of policies to put in place to govern the use of AI to who will help develop the policies. Without any federal regulations yet on ethical use of AI, institutions are mostly on their own in setting up guidelines.

Also in the background is the recognition that some entry-level jobs in fields students are preparing for will likely be replaced or greatly reduced through use of AI. White-collar

jobs that are typically a starting point for graduates, such as computer programming, medical records coding, customer service, and legal research, are among those expected to see an impact from increased use of AI. The result will be a higher bar to meet for entry-level work, says Jess Stahl, vice president of data science and analytics with the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities.

“Part of preparing students for this is going to be your own deep understanding, and you staying current on how AI is impacting your discipline and its various career pathways,” Stahl told faculty during a recent virtual presentation.

Kusch says this doesn’t mean every faculty member needs to be an expert on AI. More important is ensuring there are enough faculty within each department who are excited and engaged with the technology who can help students learn how to use it.

And while some jobs are likely to disappear because of AI, Kusch sees definite limits to that. Nurses provide a level of personal care that cannot be replicated by a machine, and ChatGPT will never be invested in a student’s success the way a teacher is. Nor are virtual experiences of the arts the same as sharing them in community with others. As Kusch sees it, “What we can do better than the most advanced technology is to be human.”







Library Breaks New Ground

The earth has been turned, the fences are up, and work is underway. This summer the \$21 million library expansion will begin to take shape on the USC Upstate campus. The 22,000-square-foot addition will add space for classrooms, study areas, and conference rooms, among other uses. The second floor of the library will also be renovated.

The exterior of the addition, designed by Moseley Architects, will look similar to the existing library, but will utilize glass and wood to bring light and warmth to the façade. The interior will allow for ample natural light and include warm wood tones and organic shapes.



A Foot in Two Worlds

First-generation faculty draw from dual perspectives to support students.

“I think what first-generation/working-class faculty bring is a real understanding of our students’ lives ...

and what they’re bringing into the classroom, why they’re coming to class.” – Colby King

Colby King recalls the moment when he realized his education granted him access to a world vastly different from his working-class upbringing.

He was invited to a graduation party for a student who, like him, had just completed a master’s degree. The student’s parents hosted the catered celebration at their home, a large brick mansion on a lake near Columbia. While marveling at the opulence of the setting, King wondered how he had been invited to such a fancy event.

“And I just had the realization that oh, if you go to graduate school, you get access to other social circles that you never would have gotten invited into otherwise,” he recalls. “But I didn’t really feel comfortable.”

Being both an insider and an outsider is an unsettling feeling that many first-generation faculty at USC Upstate say never leaves them, even after they’ve achieved career success. But understanding that many students share that same discomfort helps first-generation faculty provide support and encouragement that they themselves often did not receive.

King says having faculty who come from working-class backgrounds is a strong asset for the university. “I think what first-generation/working-class faculty bring is a real understanding of our students’ lives and what they’re bringing into the classroom, why they’re coming to class,” he says.

A HELPING HAND

Tyrone Toland ’90, chair and professor of informatics and engineering systems, recalls that when he was an undergraduate at USC Upstate (then USC Spartanburg), going to graduate school never crossed his mind. “In our family, it was understood that if you went to college, you got a job,” Toland says.

He drove a school bus to help pay the bills while he was in college, where he majored in computers and applied mathematics. He also got involved in a new organization on campus, United Students, a mentorship program that paired first-generation freshmen with upperclassmen.

Through the group, Toland met Warren Carson, who, in addition to directing the Gospel Choir, also was an English professor. Carson seemed to have a fun job traveling and publishing, so Toland asked him what it would take to get a position like that. Carson told him he’d need at least a master’s, but to really advance, he’d need a doctorate.

That conversation started Toland on a path to graduate school and helped him get serious about his classes. “From Dr. Carson, I learned about faculty teaching, but he also was kind of like my adopted daddy. He was a mentor to other people as well, but I’m known as son No. 1,” he says, laughing.

Mentorship played a key role in Araceli Hernández-Laroche’s academic journey as well. Hernández-Laroche, who is USC Upstate’s first tenured Mexican-American professor, feels fortunate to have had many resources available to her at the University of California Los Angeles when she arrived as an undergraduate. Though not specifically for first-generation students, the tutoring and support services that were offered served many students who, like her, were trying to navigate college alone.

She also found a robust Hispanic/Latino student network, with upperclassmen committed to helping new arrivals stay in college and graduate. But it was a study abroad trip to France her junior year that changed Hernández-Laroche’s career goals.

“I thought I was going to be an immigration attorney, because when you’re an immigrant family, you want an immigration attorney in the family,” she says. “But once I came back from France, that was such an intellectual pivot in my life.”

Hernández-Laroche was fascinated by France’s relationship with North Africa and wanted to dig deeper into the history. That interest coincided with her participation in a pilot teaching program that placed UCLA students in underserved Los Angeles public schools. Hernández-Laroche taught at three high schools, all predominantly Hispanic/Latino.

The experience was transformative. “The first time I was in a classroom in front of students, I thought, oh my god, this is



Sharda Jackson-Smith

“I think for a lot of first-generation students, you don’t have the option of failing, really.

If you make a mistake and lose your scholarship, you are done.”

— Sharda Jackson-Smith

so much fun, trying to speak to them in an engaging way,” she recalls. “I realized that law was too dry, and that I needed more literature, intellectual history, the humanities.”

Encouraged by two law school students who were her mentors, Hernández-Laroche decided to pursue a doctorate at the University of California Berkeley. “That experience teaching prepared me to see myself as an educator,” she says.

GOING IT ALONE

For those without support or mentors, getting to graduate school can be a matter of luck or persistence. Sharda Jackson-Smith, associate dean and associate professor of elementary education, spent her first year at the University of Florida “trying to find myself” on the large campus. She was part of an inaugural group who received a scholarship specifically for talented first-generation college students, but at the time, additional support resources had not been set up on campus. To make connections, Jackson-Smith joined the competitive cheerleading team.

While she had fun, she was also aware most of her teammates didn’t look or sound like her. During her sophomore year, she joined a historically Black sorority and found the friendships she’d been looking for. “It was like a light turned on in my college experience,” she says. “Had I not done that, it would’ve been very easy for me to say, this is not for me, and just gone back home.”

Jackson-Smith was fully focused on preparing for her career as a teacher, when, toward the end of the semester, one of her professors asked the class, “Who’s ready to go to grad school?” Jackson-Smith was intrigued, so after class she approached her professor, who invited her to come by her office to talk more.

“That was my first time going to office hours,” Jackson-Smith says. “I did not know what office hours were.” Her professor also was African-American, which made an impression on Jackson-Smith. But once she’d made the decision to attend graduate school, Jackson-Smith realized she was back to square one in navigating a program without any idea of what to do next. “Each time there was a whole new learning curve on understanding what this is,” she says.

Things got even tougher when she began her doctorate. By then she was working full-time as a first-grade teacher, had gotten married, and was expecting a baby. Though she was still at University of Florida, she did not have mentors or faculty she felt she could turn to for support. On the first day of her doctoral research class, the professor who would become her dissertation advisor issued a blunt assessment.

“I remember he comes in with his briefcase, drops it down and says, ‘Most of you won’t be here in two years,’” she recalls.

Though he had encouraged his students to send in their first chapter for his review, the professor never responded after Jackson-Smith submitted hers. After several months had passed, during which she completed another chapter, Jackson-Smith decided she was done waiting. “I got to a point where I was like, you know what, I’m gonna just write this whole thing so he thinks I’m serious,” she says. “That is when he turned on his interest and started giving me rapid-fire feedback.”

LONG AND WINDING ROAD

When Jackson-Smith looks back at her journey to graduate school, she notes she never had a specific goal in mind. “At every step, I had no plans to do it until it happened,” she says. Wren Bareiss, professor of communication, understands that experience well.

Bareiss wasn’t even thinking of a four-year degree, let alone graduate school, when he finished high school. He enrolled in community college with a “vague idea” of going into radio production. But his first year didn’t go well. “I had no clue really what I was doing in college,” he says. “I dropped out after freshman year and worked in a factory.”

It didn’t take Bareiss long to realize he didn’t want to make gaskets for the rest of his life. He returned to school, and, inspired by a class he took, discovered a love for anthropology. By then he understood he’d need a four-year degree to get anywhere in the field, so he transferred to the University of New Mexico to complete his studies.

“I never thought far ahead,” he admits. “I always thought in terms of the degree. Which is not the best idea, because you need to be thinking about the next thing after that.”

While working on his bachelor’s, he got interested in radio after taking a class from an instructor with a campus radio show. Bareiss continued to work part-time at the campus station for a few years after graduation, unsure of what to do next.

“I thought, well, maybe I should get a master’s degree,” he says. “I didn’t really have a clue about how to make all this work, and that’s the curse of a first-generation college student.”

A scholarship to the University of Pennsylvania, where Bareiss studied communication and anthropology for his master’s, led to another detour, this time into arts administration. But after a one-year internship, Bareiss felt no more purposeful than he had before. “I thought, well, now

“The first time I was in a classroom in front of students, I thought, oh my god, this is so much fun.”

— Araceli Hernández-Laroche



Araceli Hernández-Laroche

“I used to be considered the hardest professor in class, but I’m not hard. I require you to do a lot of work. Not hard work – I take a big problem and break it down into pieces. But I expect you to do the pieces.”

— Tyrone Toland



Tyrone Toland

what do I do?” he says. “I couldn’t figure out how to get into the business.”

He again went back to school, this time at Indiana University, and got his doctorate. “I was always in this loop of getting more education,” he says. “I was good at this stuff, but I never really understood what to do. Even when I was in a Ph.D. program, I didn’t know how to find a good job.”

A NON-TRADITIONAL ROUTE

Tracey Woodard, associate professor of criminal justice, had a great job and a well-established career in IT management when she decided to seek a graduate degree in her 30s. Woodard had attended Syracuse University as an undergraduate, and though aware of how different she was from her peers as a first-generation student from a very small town, she loved the diversity of people and ideas she encountered.

She didn’t end up in a job related to her major, but the school name opened career doors for her. She eventually landed at a Fortune 500 company, where she worked her way up and earned a good salary. But, she says, “I was miserable, because I was working six or seven days a week, 12 hours a day.” She often worked during her vacations, and her unhappiness took a toll on her family life.

Woodard was ready for a change. She had always been

interested in true crime and decided to pursue a master’s in criminal justice. Though still juggling her job and raising two young daughters, Woodard discovered she loved teaching. She did some adjunct work after graduating, then was offered a visiting position.

The job paid less than half of what she earned in management, but Woodard’s second husband fully supported her career change. Encouraged, Woodard asked the department chair how she could get a full-time teaching position. He told her she’d need a Ph.D., which at first seemed overwhelming to her. “I’m like, are you crazy? I have kids, I can’t go back and get a Ph.D.,” she recalls.

But she took the leap, and began a doctoral program at Florida State University. Woodard admits it was “brutal” getting to the finish line. The university was nearly three hours away from her home, and after trying to commute, she finally ended up staying in Tallahassee during the week and coming home on weekends. “There were times I wanted to quit, when I was like, I’m not going back, and my husband would say, see how you feel in a couple of days,” she says. “Between him and my kids, I had so much support, it was incredible.”

But like many other first-generation faculty, she had to figure out how to negotiate graduate school on her own. “I went into it thinking, this is just like getting my master’s, I can just show up to class, go home, do my schoolwork,” she



says. "That's not how it was."

Because Woodard was older than the other people in the program, she didn't feel comfortable turning to them for advice or help. It wasn't until she began working with her dissertation chair, two years into the program, that she finally found someone she could talk to.

ALONE IN A CROWD

Race and gender can also compound feelings of isolation during graduate school and after. When Toland began his master's program at USC, he was one of only three African-American students in the computer science program. While they all became friends, and one of them graduated with Toland, he was the only one to enter the doctoral program. He became the first African-American to receive a doctorate in computer science from USC.

After he was granted a fellowship, he asked the program director if there were any additional funds available for African-American graduate students that he could apply for. "And he said, you know, no one's ever asked me that question," Toland recalls. "He said, if you find out any information, let me know so I can write it down!"

Hernández-Laroche says being a woman from an immigrant group can make it hard for others, even other women, to see you as a leader. "When you're an ultra minority, you know that sometimes what you're doing is changing things," she says. "And people don't always like change."

But seeing progress always gives her hope. Five years ago, she and others on campus established Avanzando Through College, a program to help first-generation Hispanic/Latino students navigate college. Two years from now, a student who was part of that first cohort will complete her doctoral program.

“Working class/first-generation college students have these skills where they’re really strong and resilient and clever.

They can make something work out of very little because they’ve had to do that their whole life.” – Wren Bareiss



Wren Bareiss

MAKING ENDS MEET

Because first-generation students tend to come from working-class homes, paying for the years of schooling needed to get a doctorate can pose a substantial obstacle. When Toland graduated from Upstate, he enrolled in classes at Clemson to fulfill prerequisites for graduate school while also working at MetLife in Greenville. He’d get up at 7 a.m., drive from his home in Spartanburg to his job in Greenville, put in an hour or two of work, drive to Clemson for classes, then return to work to finish out the day before heading home. “I can’t

believe I did that,” Toland says now.

Realizing he couldn’t keep that up, Toland applied for on-campus jobs at Clemson and at USC, and decided he would apply for a master’s at whichever one offered him a job. USC came through.

Toland worked as a programmer throughout his master’s program, taking one course per semester. It took him four and a half years to finish. “It was very challenging, because people behind me were getting a master’s,” he says.

Still, by the time he graduated, he was fully vested in the state retirement system. And, having done well in the program, he was offered a fellowship for students underrepresented in their fields. That allowed him to pursue a doctorate without having to work.

King opted for a quicker, but riskier, approach to paying for graduate school. He took out all the loans he’d need to pay for school without having to work, gambling on getting a teaching position quickly after graduation. He was able to complete his master’s in two years and his doctorate in another four, but also was saddled with debt he continues to pay.

“I was really naïve to how much it would cost and to how daunting the job market would be,” he says. “But in some ways things worked out because I was naïve enough to take the chance.”

He notes not everyone is so lucky – he’s had friends and colleagues who have had to adjunct teach for years, sometimes at three or four schools to make ends meet. “I’ve been fortunate not to have to do that, but at the same time, the remuneration has not been enough to pay off the student loan debt.”

Coming from a working-class family also means there are no financial resources you can draw on from home, Jackson-Smith says. “I think for a lot of first-generation students, you don’t have the option of failing, really,” she says. “If you make a mistake and lose your scholarship, you are done. Daddy’s not coming to help.”

DRAWING ON STRENGTHS

The struggles many first-generation/working class faculty

“I want to teach where students are lauded as first-gen ...

We can really connect with the students and identify with them, and hopefully they can connect with us and feel safer with us.” – Tracey Woodard

have experienced on their way to career success are only part of the story, however. Bareiss notes that focusing too much on deficiencies misses the strengths these faculty – and students – have.

“One of their strengths is that they’re really resilient in ways others are not, and they’re resourceful,” he says. “The problem is that first-generation college students don’t realize that they have these skills because no one’s ever told them, hey, you’re good at that.”

Hernández-Laroche tries to show her students the “competitive edge” they have. For many first-generation Hispanic/Latino students, that may seem paradoxical, she says. Being the first to attend college can feel very lonely and bewildering, especially if your family can’t share in your experience. “But what you bring to the table is the sense of collectivity,” she says.

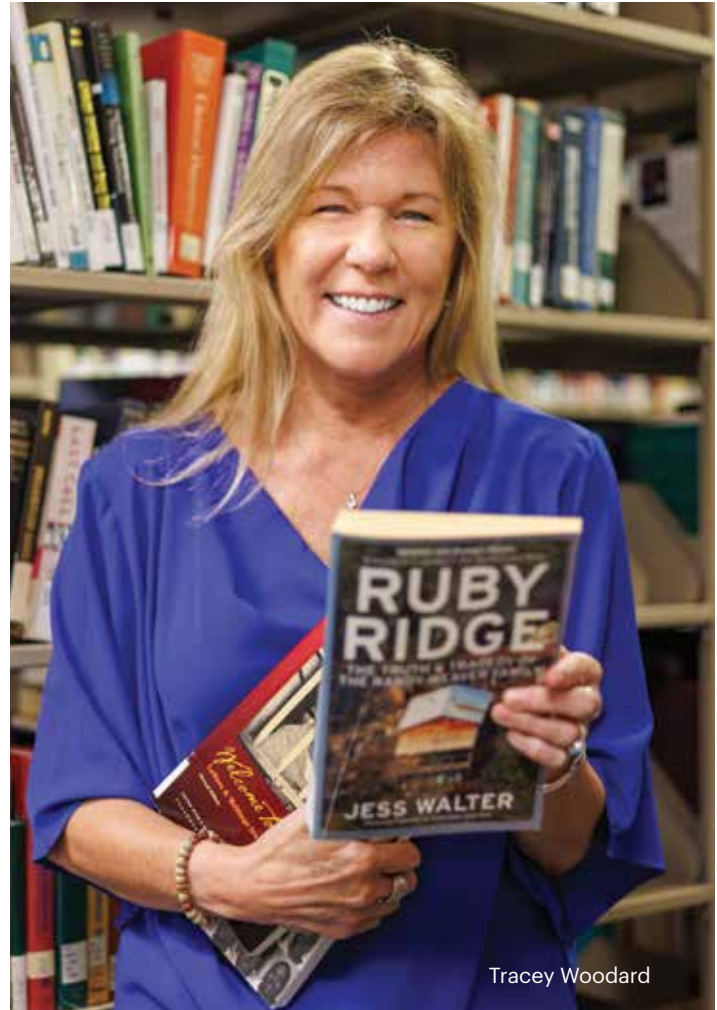
For example, Hernández-Laroche sits on many boards that are trying to reach diverse communities. “The strength I bring is that they don’t have access to the networks I have, and in these networks are representatives of the communities they want to serve,” she says. “So what I tell students is, you have this magnificent network, and you have a greater idea of what talent is, those people in your own families who are just going to make things happen.”

SHARED EXPERIENCE

First-generation faculty also use their lived experiences to help them guide students in similar circumstances. While many say “imposter syndrome” – the feeling that they don’t really belong in academia – never goes away, they encourage their students to seek out activities that will foster a sense of belonging.

“Everyone always says get involved, and you think they’re just saying that,” says Jackson-Smith. “But for that person who already feels out of place, that this isn’t really for them, you really should, so that you can meet other people who are also second-guessing themselves, and help each other to the very end.”

One of the reasons Hernández-Laroche and her colleague Maria Montesó created the South Carolina Centro Latino



Tracey Woodard

on campus was to give students just such a place to come together and find support. Not only is the space used as a meeting place for clubs, but it’s also a popular study area for students. “That’s why we call El Centro a hub, because we want students to invite each other to the space,” Hernández-Laroche says.

Empathy also informs how first-generation faculty approach their classes. King often shares stories with his students about his experiences growing up in a working-class home in Pennsylvania, where his dad worked night shifts. Several of his students have done that, too, going straight to

class from their job. “It helps me understand how much work my students are putting in just to get to class,” King says.

But being understanding doesn’t mean lowering expectations. Toland says he expects students to put in a full effort in his classes. Like his own teachers, however, he’ll try to break down big problems into smaller, more manageable pieces. If he sees students who still aren’t understanding the assignment, he invites them to come to his office to work, where he keeps a supply of snacks handy – a practice he started when a student who had come by for help hadn’t been able to eat due to back-to-back classes.

Both Woodard and Jackson-Smith try to quickly offer assistance if they sense a student is struggling. Remembering her own introversion, Woodard encourages students to ask for help. “Your advisor is your lifeline, and you should go to them with any questions,” she tells her students. “And if you don’t want to go to them, come to me.” Some days, she says, she’ll just close the classroom door and ask, “OK, tell me what’s going on here, why are you all so stressed?” It’s an opportunity for her to offer students academic advice and suggestions on how to effectively advocate for themselves.

One of the first things Jackson-Smith says she’ll do when she enters a classroom is do a quick scan to read students’ body language and expressions. “And there are plenty of times where I just pull out a chair and sit down at a table where I’m eye level with them, and I say, ‘What’s going on, how are we doing?’”

Rarely do students’ concerns involve class, she says. The stress is usually a combination of things – their home life, trying to balance all their classes, uncertainty about the future. “So every couple of classes or couple of weeks, I’ll try to do a temperature check, and give them some advice based on that,” she says.

Bareiss says it’s also important to remind students that it’s OK to fail. Getting a bad grade can seem especially overwhelming when you’re a first-generation student who may not have been prepared for college as well as your peers. To keep students motivated, Bareiss offers points for

improvement as students go along. That applies to everyone in the class, but first-generation students find it particularly helpful. “It shows them I have confidence in them,” he says.

FINDING A HOME

One of USC Upstate’s strengths as a regional comprehensive university is that it welcomes people from all backgrounds, particularly those who are from first-generation/working-class homes, King says. “There are so many of us, and it’s such a part of the institutional culture, that it’s normalized,” he says. “You don’t have to be quiet about it.”

Woodard says that’s one reason she loves teaching at Upstate. “I want to teach where students are lauded as first gen,” she says. “Especially at our university, where our student-to-teacher ratio is small, we can really connect with the students and identify with them, and hopefully they can connect with us and feel safer with us.”

First-generation faculty at Upstate also support many student groups that help foster a sense of belonging. In addition to Avanzando, which gives students the tools to navigate college, there are also Tri Alpha, the first-generation honor society; the Latin American Student Organization; and TRiO, which helps first-generation students succeed in college.

As the cost of a college education rises, and the job market for faculty tightens further, convincing more students from lower-income households to pursue an advanced degree could become a bigger challenge. Losing those perspectives would be unfortunate, King says, not just for universities, but for all students, who benefit from those experiences and receiving mentorship.

Just as they themselves encourage and guide their students, first-generation faculty hope their students will do the same for others. “We tell them all the time, this is such a transformative experience for you and your families,” Hernández-Laroche says. “But at the same time, transform this university. Make it yours. Build community beyond these years.”



“We tell them all the time, this is such a transformative experience for you and your families ... Make it yours. Build community beyond these years.”

— Araceli Hernández-Laroche



Focus on the Future

USC Upstate launches a new strategic plan to guide its development in the coming years.

A culmination and a catalyst — those are two of the ways to describe the University of South Carolina Upstate's Greater 2030 Strategic Plan, a new and in-depth report that looks at priorities, goals, and plans for the institution.

The report — which debuted at the University of South Carolina board of trustees meeting in March — took shape during a leadership retreat, where Upstate officials explored new ways to serve students and create opportunities to improve recruitment and partnerships. Central to these goals was highlighting what makes USC Upstate special. The team strategized about the role of higher education and looked at ways it should evolve to meet the needs of students and the demands of the workplace.

"The plan was born from many conversations, debates, and examinations with the leadership, faculty, staff, students, and community of the University of South Carolina Upstate," said Chancellor Bennie L. Harris. "It's also a blueprint for how the University can become a more powerful and impactful institution in the future."

All of this takes place against the backdrop of rapid changes in business investment, employment growth, and demographic shifts in South Carolina. Business investment is up, while employment growth is down. Indeed, the number of people aged 20 to 64 in the state went from 60% in 2000 to a projected 56% by 2030. The percentage of the state's population under the age of 20, meanwhile, was just 28% in 2000 and is expected to decrease to less than 23% by 2030.

"We don't just study these numbers at our institution," Harris said. "We look at how we can create a valuable learning experience while meeting the needs of our workforce.

"So we mix high-impact experiential learning with cutting-edge research, deeply connected community engagement, and course-to-career pathways. We take a close look at our degree offerings, examine and expand our partnerships with employers, and use innovation and technology to adapt and meet demand."

The Greater 2030 Strategic Plan serves as a guide to put into practice USC Upstate's commitment to provide education for all that inspires a thriving and just society. It blends innovative academic learning with practical yet exciting course-to-career pathways.

This kind of tactical thinking is increasingly important as USC Upstate, like most other universities, faces two simultaneous challenges: a decline in the number of traditional college-age students (known as the enrollment cliff) and retaining students as education costs rise. Surveys show students nationwide also are pondering the value of — and considering alternatives to — a traditional college education.

In Greater 2030, USC Upstate unveils five new Spartan Cornerstone programs that are designed to further the University's strategic priorities and address the needs of students and the workforce.

Spartan Distinct will provide flexible and accessible educational programs — including degrees, high-end credentials, research opportunities, internships, and study-abroad programs — that improve students' intellectual, creative, personal, and social development and prepare them for their careers.

This initiative will:

- Ensure degree offerings include at least three doctoral and three engineering programs;
- Implement local-to-global community engagement in 100% of academic programs over a five-year period;
- Create innovative pathways to degree completion for students who transfer into the institution, or between majors, in 100% of programs over a five-year period;
- Integrate cutting-edge technology and evolving instructional strategies, modalities, and approaches into 100% of academic programs over a five-year period.



Expert Advice

Don Bent, former chief operating officer for Oshkosh Defense, joined USC Upstate in March to support the development of a new undergraduate engineering program and to help foster strategic partnerships with regional manufacturers.

As executive in residence and distinguished professor of practice for industry partnerships and engineering programs, Bent will be advising USC Upstate faculty in the George Dean Johnson, Jr. College of Business and Economics and the College of Science and Technology on creating courses that are relevant to industry needs and standards.



Conversation Starter

Last fall USC Upstate convened the Upstate Talent Forum, a gathering of business, academic and legislative leaders focused on ways to build robust workforce pipelines and to close the talent gap in South Carolina. Strategies included increasing employment and internship opportunities for students, and ensuring students are learning the real-world skills they need to succeed in the workforce.

Spartan Recruit aims to attract, enroll, and retain a diverse and highly qualified student body that brings academic and cultural value to the university. By expanding the student body, the institution's reputation and brand will be enhanced, revenue will increase, and a more dynamic learning community will develop.

- This program will allow USC Upstate to increase enrollment headcount to 7,000 by 2030 and new direct transfer student enrollment by 5% annually.

Spartan Success will provide academic and personal support — via advising, mentoring, career readiness programs, and student wellness programs — to help students succeed.

This program includes:

- The development of a comprehensive First-Year Experience to improve students' sense of belonging and engagement;
- Creating and implementing a comprehensive student educational plan that advances and improves advising and career development;
- Engaging faculty in the improvement of instruction; and
- Developing opportunities for students to connect with faculty and each other in meaningful ways.

Spartan Partners will actively engage with the local and regional community to establish sustainable partnerships that contribute to positive social, economic, and environmental outcomes.

The goal is to inspire a thriving and just society by:

- Advocating for education;
- Increasing state and federal funding; and
- Collaborating with partners in education, industry, athletics, humanities, arts, and culture.

Spartan Future will help USC Upstate be agile, anticipatory, and responsive to the evolving needs of students, technology, and the workforce.

- This will be achieved by fostering a culture of excellence, service, connection, flexibility, and innovation while using generative AI-powered learning to achieve the institution's goals.

"USC Upstate is on an exciting journey, as we work to achieve the aspirations outlined in this Greater 2030 Strategic Plan," Harris said. "Together we will pioneer excellence, inspire impact, and make an even greater difference in the lives of those we serve."



A second forum will be held Oct. 8-9 to continue the conversation.





Leading by Example

“Mentoring made personal”— these words are more than just part of USC Upstate’s branding campaign. They describe the experience of students like rising senior Zach McQueen, vice president of the Student Government Association. He has been mentored by Chancellor Bennie L. Harris ever since they met in a hallway on campus during what was, for each of them, their first year on campus.

This interview has been edited for content, length, and clarity. Read the full version online.

Q: When did you first meet Chancellor Harris?

A: His first day was my orientation day. We have sort of grown in this institution together. He stopped me and just asked me how I was doing. That led to more hallway conversations.

This relationship allowed me to find out who I really am. When I came here, I was a nursing major for two days. I did not know what I wanted to do. I just knew I wanted to go to college. Dr. Harris helped me identify my strengths, gave me the opportunity to think about them, and let me decide what to do next.

Q: Why did you choose to get involved with student government at USC Upstate?

A: I kept hearing about “finding your avenue,” and as a commuter student I knew that was important. It worked out well for me. Student government was not something that I was

involved in before coming to USC Upstate. I got involved and found my avenue.

Now I know that when I get out of undergrad, I’m going to get a graduate degree and then go into higher education administration. I’ll make that my career.

Q: How has Upstate transformed you as a leader?

A: It’s put me in the right place at the right time. If I were a student at an institution of 30,000 or 40,000 folks, that would not have happened. Because I was able to find my niche here, and because of Chancellor Harris, I was able to be around wonderful leaders, and they led me to other wonderful leaders who all really inspired me and developed me.

I imagine someday I might be the president of an institution. I like small schools. It’s important to find the right place for you. That’s something Dr. Harris has taught me — the piece of paper doesn’t mean anything if you don’t have the skills to use it.



Faculty Achievements

Stephen Bismarck (Education) authored “Concrete-Representational-Abstract (CRA) Instructional Approach in an Algebra I Inclusion Class: Knowledge Retention Versus Students’ Perception” in the journal *Educational Sciences*. He also authored “Analyzing Unexpected Data After a Novel Mathematics Lesson Using the Critical Friend Process” in the journal *Educational Research Quarterly*.

Logan Camp-Spivey,

Vera Bratnichenko and **Ryan Crawford ‘06** (Nursing) presented the poster “Bringing Next Generation NCLEX Case Studies to Life Through Simulation: Enhancing Students’ Clinical Judgment” at the National League for Nursing education summit at National Harbor, Maryland.

Vincent Connors (Biology, emeritus) co-published a paper on “Epibiosis and parasitism of *coquina* clam *Donax* spp.: location, location, location!” in the journal *Invertebrate Biology*.

Kara Davis (Community Health) presented her research on the impacts of a medical-legal partnership on health care utilization and costs at the 2023 American Public Health Association annual meeting. She will also lead part of the evaluation of food access and equity in Greenville County as part of a five-year REACH grant awarded by the CDC to LiveWell Greenville.

Bridget Ford (Nursing) is the author of a new book, “The Blind Judge: The Discrimination of African Americans Continues.”

Brooke Hardin (Education) co-authored the book chapter “Increasing the Impact of Professional Development in Writing: Application of a Constructivist Apprenticeship Model” in “Instructional Leadership Efforts and Evidence-Based Practices to Improve Writing Instruction.” She also presented “The ‘Art’ of Language Arts: Using Multimodal Writing to Create Digital Reader/Writer Notebooks” at the 2023 Conference of the Association of Literacy Educators & Researchers in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

Teri Harmon and **Kristi Miller** (Nursing) received the 2023 Lectureship Award for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Sustainability in Nursing Education for public colleges/universities from the American Association of Colleges of Nursing. In addition to presenting their diversity

work to the Mary Black College of Nursing and the wider community, they also spoke at the Diversity Symposium in New Orleans.

Araceli Hernández-Laroche (Modern Languages) was recognized by SC Biz News as one of its 2024 Women of Influence — Greenville Award Winners. She also co-presented a three-hour professional development workshop, “Using Social Media to Advocate for Your Programs,” at the Modern Language Association meeting in Philadelphia in January.

Tina Herzberg (Visual Impairment) presented two breakout sessions and a poster that focused on literacy options for individuals who are blind or visually impaired during the Getting in Touch for Literacy Conference in St. Pete Beach, Florida. She also co-published four articles in the *Journal of Visual*



WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP

Tammy Pike ‘05 (History), above left, invited notable women in South Carolina to speak to her *Unruly Women in the 20th Century* class. Guest speakers included Lt. Gov. Pamela Evette, above right, state Sen. Mia McLeod, civil rights activist Dr. Millicent Brown, and others. She also spoke about the class on the WSPA show “Your Carolina,” hosted by Megan Heidelberg.

Impairment & Blindness, including “Experiences of Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments in Learning and Teaching a New Braille Code for Mathematics and Science.”

Lisa Johnson (Women’s and Gender Studies) presented the paper “Emotions Matter in Higher Ed: Making Borderline Personality Disorder a Feminist Public Health Issue” as part of a panel at the National Women’s Studies Association in October 2023. She also concluded a two-year term on the board of the nonprofit organization Emotions Matter.

Polinpapilinho Katina (Informatics and Engineering Systems) published the article “Systems Theory as a Conceptual Foundation for Advanced Manufacturing Management” in the journal *Advanced Manufacturing*. He also co-authored the textbook “Gamification for Resilience: Theory, Application, and Research Directions.”

Colby King (Sociology) recently published a brief essay in the *Everyday Sociology* blog on the power and benefits of USC Upstate’s sociology program with its Community Development Studies focus.

Bridget Kirkland (Graphic Design) presented “The Creative Process: Designing Infographics for Community Awareness” at the 2024 Southeastern Immigration Studies Association conference at Wofford College.

Walter Lee (Education) was an opening speaker at the TEDx Unity Park event in Greenville, South Carolina, in February.

Benjamin McCraw (Philosophy) published “Social Epistemology and Epidemiology” in the journal *Acta Analytica*, and has another paper forthcoming for publication: “Quasi-Doxastic Propositional Faith” in the journal *Faith and Philosophy*.

Ann Merryman (Library) was co-recipient of the David B. Gracy II Award for the best article this year to appear in the journal *Provenance*. The article stemmed from a previous presentation given at the Society of

RESEARCH INITIATIVE FOR SUMMER ENGAGEMENT GRANTS

Thirteen USC Upstate faculty received Research Initiative for Summer Engagement (RISE) grants from the University of South Carolina. The grants support summer research projects for faculty across the USC system. The following faculty received funding:

- Daniel J. Davis (Management)
- Kara Davis (Community Health)
- Ona Egbue (Informatics & Engineering Systems)
- Araceli Hernández-Laroche (Modern Languages)
- Rob McCormick (History)
- Benjamin McCraw (Philosophy)
- Calvin Odhiambo (Sociology)
- Matthew Placek (Political Science)
- Patrick G. Saracino (Exercise Science)
- Monika Shehi Herr (English)
- Nolan Stolz (Music)
- Julie Wade (Management)
- Wei Zhong (Computer Science)

Georgia Archivists annual conference titled “You’ve Never Had It So(lo) Good: Managing Sustainability and Scalability with Successful Archival Collaborations.”

Rebecca Mueller (Education) co-authored the article “Zoom in, Focus, and Take the Shot: Reflections on Teaching Inquiry,” published in the journal *Social Education* and included in the book “Revolution of Ideas: A Decade of C3 Inquiry.”

Matthew Placek (Political Science) published the article “Social Media, Quality of Democracy, and Citizen Satisfaction with Democracy in Central and Eastern Europe” in a special edition of the *Journal of Information Technology and Politics*. The articles in the special edition are slated to be republished as an edited book volume.

Refika Turgut and **Rebecca Mueller** (Education) co-presented their research study “Transforming Mainstream Classrooms: Exploring the Impact of a Graduate-Level Course on Teachers’ Understanding and Implementation of Translanguaging Pedagogy” at the Eastern Educational Research Association conference in Clearwater, Florida.

Laura Rikard (Theatre) spoke at the Berlin Film Festival on intimacy coordination. She was the first individual to speak on this topic at the festival.

Ginny Webb (Microbiology) and **Justin Travis ‘08** (Psychology) co-published “Knowledge and Identity Antecedents of COVID-19 Vaccine Status: A Study of South Carolina Residents” in the *Journal of Preventive Medicine and Hygiene*.



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Alumni

For many USC Upstate students, financial support is critical to their ability to stay in school and complete their degrees. Four recent endowments seek to provide that funding. Whether alums or longtime friends of USC Upstate, these donors know what a difference it makes to receive help when you need it most. Their commitment will benefit students — and their families — for years to come.

Profiles by Susan Grotenhuis



TODD AND STEPHANIE HORNE ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP FUND

Todd Horne '05, and
Stephanie Horne '06

When Todd and Stephanie Horne visit the beautiful USC Upstate campus with their two young children, Harper and Holton, they feel immensely proud of their university. Originally planning to leave after their freshman year, they're both grateful they chose to remain at Upstate.

"For us, this gave us our education, our foundation. It brought us together as a couple, and we are very indebted for that," says Todd Horne. "We owe a lot to this university, which is why we've decided to endow the scholarship."

Horne, president of Clayton Construction Co., has been active in many Spartanburg and USC Upstate organizations, including OneSpartanburg, the Spartanburg County Commission for Higher Education, and the USC Upstate Foundation board. "It's a great time to be in Spartanburg and a great time to be part of the Upstate," he says.

Stephanie Horne, an elementary school teacher at Spartanburg Christian Academy, shares her husband's commitment to giving back. "Paying it forward where there is a need is something we are passionate about," she says. "We don't want to hold back or hinder anyone who may continue to move forward in their career or their education and be a future leader."

The scholarship will be awarded to students who meet the eligibility criteria for need-based financial aid.



**J. ROBERT AND DORIS ANN MAANEY
ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP FUND**

Doris Ann Maaney '75

In 1973, when Doris Ann Maaney enrolled in the nursing program at USC Upstate (then USC Spartanburg), a three-year associate's degree was all that was offered. And there were only two buildings on campus. Maaney recalls, "The Hodge Center was brand-new. I was in the first nursing class to be in the Hodge Center."

While much has changed since then, the need for student aid has not. "I was given scholarships to come to nursing school, and I would really like to give back," Maaney says. "If students are going into nursing, it's almost like a calling to go into health care." She and her husband, Bob, a wealth management consultant for Merrill Lynch, talked it over and decided to split their gift between their respective alma maters, USC Upstate and Clemson. The gift has additional meaning because their oldest daughter is also a USC Upstate alumna.

"I'm very impressed with how far (the program) has come. They even have the doctorate program now," Maaney says. Her husband adds, "We were also really impressed that there were about a thousand nursing students at the present time, which is amazing."

The scholarship will be awarded to students majoring in nursing. Preference will be given to a Spartanburg County resident.



**VICTOR AND JACQUELYN AUSTIN
ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP FUND**

Victor Austin '90

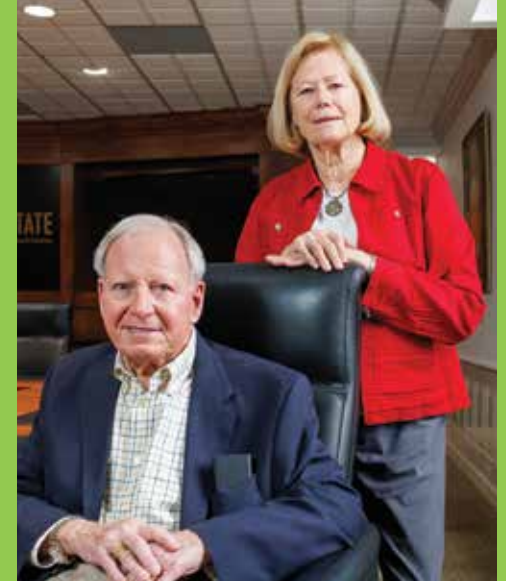
Victor Austin recalls the summer day when he made a commitment to support USC Upstate. "I remember walking across the quad as a student and I said to myself, 'This university has been so good to me.' In the future, I just made a promise that I would always try to do whatever I could to help the university."

Austin, president and CEO of Palmetto Home Care Upstate, has been faithful to that promise. He began by giving his time and serving on boards: first the Alumni Association, then the Foundation Board, and now the Spartanburg County Commission for Higher Education.

He also started contributing financially, starting with the Spartans basketball program and increasing his support from there. He's motivated by recalling the people who were behind him as a student, pulling for him to succeed. With the endowment, he hopes to help students who are trying to help themselves.

"This endowment could be a determining factor for why someone stays in school," Austin says. Quoting his godmother, he adds, "Sometimes the wagon just needs a little help getting up the hill."

The scholarship(s) will be awarded to students who meet the eligibility criteria for Aspire Scholarships. Additionally, the support fund will benefit student programming that helps students achieve success.



**TONEY AND CYNTHIA LISTER
ENDOWED SCHOLARSHIP FUND**

Toney Lister's association with USC Upstate began before there was even a campus. As a Boiling Springs teenager, Lister would regularly drive to the Smith Dairy Farm and nearby peach orchards, where the university is now located.

Roughly five years after the university was founded, Lister was elected to the South Carolina General Assembly. He was a staunch advocate for state support of the fledgling university, and continued to advance USC Upstate's mission as a member of the USC board of trustees for 29 years.

Lister also practiced law for 40 years, and knows how important it is to obtain an education. As someone who benefited from help himself, "I'm very sympathetic to local students who are needing a little financial aid," he says.

But the endowment reflects an even deeper commitment to the institution itself. "You actually have the campus become a part of your life if you stay involved," Lister says. "It's the personal involvement associated with this campus, and the pleasure that it has provided over the years."

His wife, Cynthia, agrees, adding, "The local people got this university started, so there was a real buy-in from the community."

The scholarship(s) will be awarded to students who meet the eligibility criteria for need-based financial aid.



2023 Alumni Awards

Celebrating great examples of a true Spartan

Each year, the USC Upstate Alumni Association presents three alumni awards to recognize the outstanding achievements of graduates who have earned distinction in their chosen field. Honorees are nominated by fellow alumni and selected by the Alumni Association board. This year's winners were celebrated during Homecoming week in February.

Profiles by Susan Grotenhuis



Distinguished Alumni Award Donette Stewart '86

Donette Stewart knew immediately as an undergraduate that USC Upstate (then USC Spartanburg) was a special place.

She had originally planned to transfer to the main USC campus in Columbia, but changed her mind after recognizing the qualities that have made Upstate special to generations of students. "I got very involved in the campus, had faculty members who cared that I was in class every day and knew you by name, and I liked that," Stewart recalls. "It felt like the right place to be from the beginning."

And it's continued to be the right place for 30 years. As vice chancellor for Enrollment Services and director of Admissions, Stewart has been the face of Upstate for many prospective and current students. She knows many by name, provides a warm welcome to campus, and answers innumerable questions from families and students. On graduation day, Stewart offers hugs and congratulations as she mingles with the graduates.

Stewart knows that many of Upstate's students were drawn here by the same things she was. The familial environment of the campus was reassuring to her when she arrived as a

student, and it's an asset she often highlights when talking to prospective students about Upstate.

Stewart didn't initially see herself in admissions. After completing her undergraduate degree in business marketing and management, she pursued a career in health care. "I knew I wanted to do something around helping people, or maybe some kind of public relations and communications," she says. Then she saw an opening for an admissions counselor at USC Upstate, and the job description appealed to her.

Thirty years later, she is still working in admissions, and has witnessed major growth and change at her alma mater. Not only did the campus expand its physical presence, but also its vision. Stewart has served under five different chancellors, and each one has provided invigorating new directions to go in.

"Upstate is a very fast-changing and evolving campus, and some people stay here a long time and keep the base of the campus, the history of the campus, strong," she says. "And then we have this infusion of new people coming in with new ideas and helping to keep things fresh."

Most importantly, everyone at Upstate has a shared purpose that they care deeply about, Stewart says. "The people who work here really want to invest in students. That's my favorite part of the job. They want to see students succeed, they want to remove all the barriers, help them have a more successful life through attending college. It's something that most of us who work here have in common. The best part are the students who are here."



**Outstanding Alumni Award
Jason Land '98**

Jason Land's professional journey began with the simple goal of earning a degree. He was the first college graduate in his family, and parlayed his business degree into positions of increasing responsibility.

"Some of the computer skills and things that I learned in school really positioned me to be able to get opportunities early on in my career," says Land, vice president of marketing at Security Finance.

Throughout his career, Land has remained connected to USC Upstate. His wife, Kim, is a senior instructor at the business school, while he has served on the JCBE alumni board and been involved in the Upstate Regional Spelling Bee for all the area middle schools.

Land also implemented an internship program at work that has engaged many Upstate students. It's another way he enjoys giving back. "Having been in Spartanburg since before I was in college, it's really neat to see how the university has changed and grown," he says.



**Young Alumni Award
Chloé Thomas '13**

As the dean of student life at the Singapore American School, Chloé Thomas has traveled far. Not only in miles, but in every aspect of who she is. "Without this lens or the people who helped me stretch my imagination, I would not be where I am today," she says.

As a college student, she was inspired by faculty and staff who supported her, broadened her understanding of the world, and gave her opportunities to learn and apply her knowledge outside the classroom. "I was open-minded, leaned into opportunities, jumped courageously into the unknown, taking risks I didn't know I would thrive from," Thomas says.

The Center for Women's and Gender Studies was particularly critical to her maturation and development of a holistic worldview, and she enjoys opportunities to support it, such as appearing as a panelist at a recent event. "I am excited about the opportunities that exist to continue to connect to USC Upstate through the Alumni Association," Thomas says.



**Outstanding Alumni Award
Georgia McClintock '08, M.S. '23**

When she was in 10th grade, Georgia McClintock was told that a reading comprehension disability placed her at a fifth-grade reading level and a third-grade writing level. But she was determined to make her family proud, and not become another statistic among impoverished women of color.

It wasn't easy. She struggled academically until USC Upstate offered her a chance to start over in a new environment. She was the first black woman to receive the Shoestring Players theater scholarship, and it changed her life, McClintock says.

With a new support system and a great deal of hard work, McClintock achieved what she'd always dreamed of – becoming the first college graduate in her family. And she didn't stop there. She went on to earn a master's degree and became a career counselor at USC Upstate. "I feel like it's my duty as an alum to give back where I can," McClintock says. "And being present could change another student's life."



**Young Alumni Award
Midas Hampton '15**

Midas Hampton came from a home of financial poverty, yet one that was rich in values. His mother provided an example of what a successful life looked like. "Knowing where you come from, and the sheer dedication of my mother to just exist in spite of forces stopping her – win, lose or draw, the personal responsibility was there," Hampton says.

Hampton, the founding executive director of Strategic Spartanburg, has carried that model with him. At USC Upstate, he took the concepts he learned in class and put them into practice, while also developing leadership skills.

In his current role at Strategic Spartanburg, he develops data-based initiatives to improve the lives of Spartanburg County residents. His work includes collaboration with faculty at his alma mater. "For me, the work that Upstate does, and the way it engages with the community, allow me to pull back into what I call the microcosm that is USC Upstate," he says.

Class Notes

1982

Carmelina Onorato Livingston is the lead STEM education specialist at STEM Centers SC/SC Coalition for Mathematics and Science.

1988

Theresa Ferguson Rogers is a nurse manager in endoscopy for the Spartanburg Regional Outpatient Center and the Mary Black Campus. She gets to share her passion for nursing and hands-on patient care with her daughter, **Tyler Rogers '19**, who has also found a career in nursing. They are one of several mother-daughter duos who work together at Spartanburg Regional and bond over their love of nursing.

1989

John Everett Robinson is a Realtor in the Hilton Head Island, South Carolina, area and is a past president of the Hilton Head Area Association of Realtors. He is also a member of the Golfweek Amateur Tour and competes in amateur golf tournaments around the country.

1994

C. Scott Tripp is a mortgage banker at South State Bank, with expertise in first-time homebuyer loans, government home loan payments, lot loans, and construction loans. He enjoys being outdoors for a run or on the range.

1997

Edria Rowland Emory got married on May 28, 2011, and now has an 11-year-old son. She works for a nonprofit.

Robert (Bobby) Logan Wilder III has run 25 consecutive Boston Marathons since graduating from USC Upstate. He has run a total of 48 marathons in 12 states. Bobby has been working for the Assessor's Office in Horry County, South Carolina, for three years.

2002

Robert Taylor Reid graduated from Duke University School of Nursing in May 2023 with a postgraduate degree in family practice nursing.

2003



Rory Joseph Scovel is currently on a national comedy tour and has a new series on Max.

2004



Natasha Nesbitt Pitts developed her passion for serving the community while working for the city of Spartanburg after graduating from USC Upstate. She spent 17

years working for the city in various roles, overseeing minority business development and, later, equity and inclusion. She currently serves at the vice president of diversity and economic inclusion at the Greenville Chamber of Commerce.

2007

Lakisha Spears McNair has a new job as executive director of the Lupus Foundation of America, North Carolina chapter. Lakisha attributes her success in part to the nonprofit administration courses she took while at USC Upstate.

2008



Krish Vijay Patel is the founder and CEO of KVP Inc., a private equity management and real estate development firm. He also is a member of the Entrepreneurs Organization and Young Presidents' Organization.

Patel serves on the board of directors for Urban League of the Upstate, the advisory board for United Community Bank and the city of Greenville's Board of Zoning Appeals. "I love being an entrepreneur. I love creating opportunities for other like-minded individuals," Krish says. "The other thing I'm really proud of when I think of small business and entrepreneurship

is the impact of creating communities along the way. To me, community is everything."

2009



La Tonya Evonne White is a proud graduate of USC Upstate's Mary Black College of Nursing. Since her graduation, she has been living in Columbia and has completed her master's and doctoral degrees

in nursing with an emphasis in nursing administration. She currently serves as a hospitalist at Dorn VA Medical Center. She was recently awarded the Secretary's Award for Excellence in Nursing in the expanded RN role category. This is the highest nursing honor in the VA.

2011

Danielle Monique Harris is working full time while attending nurse practitioner school. She will graduate in the summer of 2025.

Shameeka Juanet Spann published her first children's book in December 2021, titled "Super Girl Azalee."



Ivey Gregory Vaughan was married in October 2023 to Christopher Vaughn. They are expecting their first child in June 2024.

2013

Larry Dale McCrum Jr. has recently taken a new job as middle school principal at Bob Jones Academy. Prior to that, he taught at Bryson Middle School and then at Bob Jones Academy as the learning resource teacher for ninth-12th grade, as well as serving as the LRC coordinator for K-12th grade. He credits his degree in special education from USC Upstate with preparing him to be an advocate for teachers and students.

Trent Douglas Randles recently spoke at the 48th Industry and Education Collaboration Conference hosted by the American Society for Engineering Education. He states it was a great opportunity to share insights about

running co-op programs from an industry perspective, to hear from leaders of co-op programs in both academia and industry, and to facilitate discussions about the challenges both sides face. He has also recently been elected as a board member of the executive committee of the Cooperative and Experiential Education Division of the American Society for Engineering Education.

2014

Joshua Emmitt Durham has a new job as a banker at Bank of America.



Daniel K. Francis started a new job on Nov. 29, 2023, as the interim director of student engagement at Spartanburg Community College. As a student at USC Upstate, Daniel says he was surrounded by great student leaders and mentors across campus. He says being involved in various clubs sparked a love for helping students, which turned into a lifelong career. At SCC, he has the opportunity to serve local students and help them feel connected to the college.

Casey Earl Frick credits USC Upstate and his biology degree, along with his work experience as a medical scribe, with giving him the skills to succeed in his current role as global study manager at Labcorp Central Lab Services.

2015

Kayla Rose Underdahl says USC Upstate's nursing program gave her the foundation to start her nursing career. She is nine years into her career, often works as a charge nurse on her unit, frequently trains new hires, and serves as a professional role model to her peers.

Benjamin (Ben) Eugene Womick is currently teaching a course for the Johnson College of Business and Economics.



You Can Come Home Again

Four USC Upstate alums shared their professional insights with the public relations class taught by senior instructor Allison Lane, above left.

Alex Love '17, a reporter at KCTV in Kansas City, Missouri, appeared via Teams, while **Samantha Swann '18**, a reporter for the Spartanburg Herald Journal; **Garrett Mitchell '17**, a reporter for the Woodruff Times; and **Drake DelosSantos '19**, above right, public relations manager at Midlands Technical College in Columbia, all visited in person.

2016

Ellen Bright Borland married Tyler Borland in June 2019. She received her Master of Education in May 2020 and was promoted from teacher to assistant principal in August 2020. She earned her educational specialist degree in May 2022. In April 2022, she gave birth to her daughter Sutton. She is hoping to complete her doctoral degree by August 2024. She credits the mentorship of several professors and coaches for her maturity and strong character.

2017

Khadijah D'Onna Kerri Cooke is the lead consultant of Essential Designs, which supports project planning, market analysis, web content writing, and improvement of customer service practices and processes for small businesses.

Kelsey Cobb DeLeon was married in May 2023.

Madison Duncan Gorettoy was married in 2015 and is currently pregnant with their second child. She is also applying to graduate schools to get her master's in forensic psychology. She wants to work as either a forensic child welfare case manager or a forensic investigator. Her dream is to get a job in the CIA and move farther north.

Nia Thomas Payne announced her candidacy for Greenville County Council this spring. Nia is a volunteer at the South Carolina Native Plant Society

and is passionate about preserving and protecting the native plants and habitats in South Carolina. She is also fluent in three languages and is starting a career in environment, health and safety focusing on industry pollution control and water treatment.

Tess Ellis Russell received an associate degree in American Sign Language from Spartanburg Community College. She then came to USC Upstate, where she earned a Bachelor of Arts in communication. After leaving USC Upstate, she earned a Bachelor of Science in education from Valdosta State University in 2022. She now serves as an education sign language interpreter in the Cobb County School District in Atlanta, Georgia.

Alexis (Lexi) Shubert Wilson was married in July 2020 and gave birth to her first child in March 2023.

2018

Danielle Louise Cassells will soon be an attorney in the state of Alabama. She credits her USC Upstate experience for preparing her for law school, and appreciates the help she received from a political science professor who went to law school and served as her mentor.

Myra Jasmine Covington gave birth to a baby girl, Amina, in December 2021. She also works as an office manager at the University of South Carolina. She credits the knowledge and skills she learned at USC Upstate with giving her confidence in the workplace.



Ludovic H. Nkoth, a Cameroon-born, New York-based figurative painter, was recently the inaugural recipient of a residency run by Académie des Beaux-Arts and Cité internationale des arts in Paris. In October

2023, Nkoth presented a series of new works at Le Corbusier's Maison La Roche, becoming the second living artist in the villa's history to exhibit there. He was also among a group of artists invited by Christian Dior to customize their Lady Dior bag with their art. He was recently named to the Forbes 30 under 30 list.

Alana Kummer Ray moved to Hawaii for two years after graduating from USC Upstate. She has recently moved back to South Carolina and now has a job at USC Upstate as an admissions counselor.

2019

Alexis McAllister Aiken married Kameron Aiken in February 2021. They now have two children, Kannon and Eliana.

Drake Reeves DeloSantos works at Midlands Technical College in Columbia, South Carolina, as public relations manager. He also works part-time on the weekends at WIS-10, the local NBC affiliate.

Tyler Jordan Rogers is a nurse at Spartanburg Regional Medical Center. Her mother, Theresa Ferguson Rogers '88, is also a nurse in the Spartanburg Regional system.

Andriana Velichko is now a sixth-grade science teacher for Spartanburg District 2 schools.

2020

Aidan Gabriel Dingler is a communications coordinator for Purpose Financial. He was married in September 2023 to Abigail Shackley, also a graduate of USC Upstate.

Brooke Rebecca Graydon is currently managing five accounts as a marketing coordinator and graphic designer. She also does social media management for all five companies.

Robert Gene Harris received a master's degree in management and leadership from Western Governor's University in December 2023.

Kacie Manning Jackson was married in 2020, following her graduation from USC Upstate. She had her first child in October of 2021 and her second child in May of 2023. She has led two North Dakota statewide social services-related programs for individuals with mental health or behavioral health disorders. She credits the child advocacy studies program at USC Upstate for giving her the knowledge and passion for her field.

2021

Tera L. Adams bought a new house in July 2022.

Erin Lee Greeley was married on Nov. 12, 2022, to Douglas Greeley III, her former classmate at USC Upstate. They met in chemistry lab.

Julian Cal Rip received his Master of Science in exercise and sport science from USC Upstate in December 2023, and began a new job as a strength and conditioning coach for the Atlanta Braves.



Educator and Advocate:

Dr. Jack Turner, 1942 – 2024

For generations of schoolchildren, some of their earliest lessons about South Carolina's ecosystem came from USC Upstate's Watershed Ecology Center. That center was the beloved creation of Jack Turner, its longtime director, who died May 2.

Turner was a Colorado native who came to Spartanburg in 1974 to teach in USC Upstate's sciences department. During his 38-year tenure, he taught microbiology to thousands of students. He was a passionate advocate for women in science, and his mentorship was what set some mentees on their career paths.

He was also dedicated to teaching students about the environment and inspiring them to love it as much as he did. In 1999, he formulated the idea to create programming for children that would give them a greater appreciation of the natural world. With a \$5,000 grant and one educator, Turner launched the Watershed Ecology Center in 2001. That first year alone, he reached 3,800 students, and by 2018, that number had grown to 23,500. The center continues to visit schools and teach students in first through sixth grades about the Upstate watershed. Turner continued in the role of director until his death.

Turner's legacy can be found in the generations of students who have learned about the beauty of the world around them and gone on to become educators themselves.

La'Kenya Dawkins Young recently celebrated her one-year work anniversary with the United Way of the Piedmont, as well as her sixth wedding anniversary.

2022



Kayla Morgan Hall was recently accepted off the waitlist of the University of Georgia for veterinary school. She also works at a veterinary clinic.

2023

Seth Campbell was married in August 2023.

Samantha Marie Cappatt was hired by Sherman College of Chiropractic as an admissions counselor just before she graduated from USC Upstate in spring of 2023. She says she could not have succeeded in her role without the support she received while at USC Upstate.

Zuri Marquaye Chancler had a baby boy in June 2023.

Steven Weston Hiott IV received the Outstanding Nonprofit Administration Student Award for the Interdisciplinary Student Awards.

A Life in Pictures

Les Duggins, 1954-2024

Wherever photographer Les Duggins went in the Upstate, he was certain to be greeted by the many people he'd photographed over his 50-year career. School athletes, business leaders, married couples, teachers, politicians, musicians – Duggins photographed them all, and more.

For more than a decade, Duggins captured key moments in the history of USC Upstate. His photographic legacy includes the construction of the George Dean Johnson, Jr. College of Business and Economics; three chancellor investitures; and multiple commencements. He also left a wealth of photos depicting the beauty of the Upstate campus.

Duggins had a seemingly inexhaustible work ethic. He would often arrive at campus before dawn, just to capture the mist hanging over the pond in front of campus or the light hitting the fountain as the sun rose. He took great pride in producing photos that would reflect well on his clients, but was ever modest about his work.



Duggins began his photography career in 1973 as a staffer for B&B Studio and the Spartanburg Herald-Journal. Subsequent positions included manager of the photography department at Spartan Foods; a team photographer for the Carolina Panthers; and photo editor at the Herald-Journal. He joined USC Upstate in 2009.

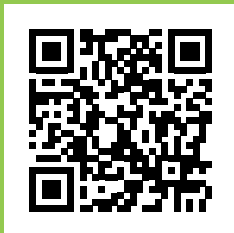
Although he officially retired in 2022, Duggins continued to take on photography projects in the community. He treated all his customers with kindness and respect.

What's New?

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uscupstate.edu/updatealumni



In Memorium

- | | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| Kathryn M. Smith '72 | Catherine L. Swofford '82 | Nancy T. Vickers '90 |
| Helen C. Traxler '72 | Eleanor H. Vaughn '83 | Angela S. Angeli '91 |
| Carolyn G. Adair '77 | Mary G. Ibbotson '84 | James A. Mabry '91 |
| Martha Jean C. Plumley '77 | Philip B. Thomason '84 | Rondal C. Johnson '00 |
| Duane L. Turner '77 | Patrick J. Brotherton '85 | Lyndsey G. Wooten '00 |
| Patricia T. Mitchell '79 | James R. Dawkins '85 | Shawn M. Obradovich '08 |
| Thomas E. Sherbert '79 | Danny D. Duncan '85 | Deontay J. Lynch '16 |
| Susan C. Jacobs '80 | Phyllis M. Leonetti '85 | Emily T. Bishop '22 |
| Anthony C. Smith '80 | Ola B. Hunsuck '88 | |
| Margaret J. Woody '80 | Paula R. McGinty '88 | |
| Sherrie P. Callahan '82 | M. Mark Cooke '89 | |
| Patricia A. Evans '82 | Amy A. Wood '89 | |
| Lisa C. McLay '82 | Frances J. Schmid '90 | |

Matt Martin has had an exciting first year at USC Upstate. Since starting his job as the new vice chancellor and director of intercollegiate athletics last August, he's cheered on the Spartans in their first-ever WNIT appearance in basketball, their first appearance in the

Big South women's soccer tournament finals, and their first-ever Big South championship, in softball. Here he shares his game-day ritual and inability to master a favorite pastime.

Where were you born?

Bellingham, Washington

What did you dream of being when you were a child?

A professional athlete – it was a short-lived dream!

What was your first job?

I grew up on "the Palouse," a region in Washington state known for its wheat farms. Beginning in middle school, farmers would hire my friends and me to do all sorts of odd jobs. It started with walking their fields to pull rye and weeds by hand. Those were some hot, miserable days! As we got older, we were promoted to drive wheat trucks and eventually operate the combines.

What's a talent you wish you had?

Flyfishing is one of the few things I really enjoy that I'm really bad at. I have friends who are really into it and catch a lot of fish – and they've tried to teach me, but my mechanics are still awful. Usually, you eventually improve at the things you really enjoy, but I haven't figured it out yet!

What's your favorite way to unwind?

I love to be in the outdoors, whether that be hunting, fishing, camping or even a simple hike. With the crazy schedule of working in athletics, plus with two young kids, it's not as frequent as it used to be, but I try to take any chance I can to get out into the woods.

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

This is difficult to narrow down. I have an eclectic taste in music.

- Lucero – 1372 Overton Park
- Turnpike Troubadours – Diamonds & Gasoline
- Jimmy Buffett – Live at Fenway Park

What's your favorite vacation place?

Banff, Canada. It's absolutely beautiful and offers all sorts of outdoor activities.

What or who inspires you?

The coaches who I had throughout my life are a huge part of why I continued into athletic administration and higher education. They held me accountable, challenged me to be a leader, and pushed me to become the best version of myself both on and off the field.

Favorite TV or streaming show?

The Office. I started watching when it first aired in 2005 and still find myself streaming it today.

What five items in your possession have special significance for you?

I do not consider myself sentimental when it comes to material items ... but I'd go with this:

- My wedding ring
- We have a framed photo of our kids that perfectly encapsulates their separate, unique personalities.
- Championship rings – I have been fortunate to earn a few, and every one of them is special in their own way.
- My first guitar – I am not a good musician. But, I taught myself how to play when I was young, and it was the first hobby that I had to really work at and not give up on.
- My first shotgun, which was given to me by my Uncle Ron when I was young.

If you could change something about yourself, what would it be?

I'm still as competitive as I've ever been, so I absolutely hate losing. That sounds like a good thing – but part of being an athletic director is understanding that sometimes our teams will lose, and that is OK. If you see me at games, I tend to move around a lot because I get anxious and cannot sit still. I'm superstitious enough to think that MAYBE moving around might somehow switch up the mojo in the air and have some sort of positive effect on our teams. I'm very aware of how dumb that sounds! So, while I do not ever want to be "OK" with losing, I would like to be able to accept it easier.

What's your favorite thing about USC Upstate?

The people. We've felt incredibly welcomed here and love how friendly everyone on campus is. As I often tell our recruits and their families, Upstate is big enough to matter, but small enough to care.

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

I'm color blind. Technically, I am red-green color blind, although reds and greens are not that difficult for me to decipher. Blues and purples, on the other hand, look identical to me. So, if you ever see me and my clothes don't match... that's probably why!





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