

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH CAROLINA

UPSTATE

ALUMNI MAGAZINE

SPRING 2025



The **FUTURE** of the Humanities

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● Empathy Mapping

● Visual Learning

● Philosophical Inquiry

● History

● Historical Context

● Reason

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Message from the Chancellor

Growing up on a farm — where we relied on an agricultural and mechanical economic system to meet our basic needs — it might seem unexpected for me to appreciate subjects like history, philosophy, religion, languages, literature, the fine and performing arts, and other cultural activities. However, this assumption is far from accurate.

Growing up with diverse and enriching experiences, I developed a profound appreciation for the humanities. These experiences shaped my understanding of the world and my place in it. At that time, television was limited, so my siblings and I found other ways to entertain ourselves.

Singing four-part harmony gospel music with our father, performing late-night dramatic poetry readings of Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Raven,” and practicing for the theatrical performances of Shakespeare’s “Julius Caesar” and “Romeo and Juliet” (roles I played in school theater), and following art lessons from an art-by-mail course all contributed to my love for creative expression and critical thinking. My early encounters with religion and philosophy, guided by my minister, laid a solid foundation for understanding complex texts and ideas. These formative years were marked by a beautiful blend of discipline, creativity, and intellectual curiosity.

These early influences have stayed with me throughout my life and have significantly enriched my perspective. They taught me the importance of empathy, communication, and the ability to see the world through various lenses. That’s the transformative power of the humanities.

At USC Upstate, we continuously strive to prepare students for the real wants and needs of the workplace. While programs like engineering, nursing, and education are often seen as direct pathways to employment, the humanities offer a different but equally valuable set of skills. A background in the humanities provides students with the ability to understand and address the world’s most complex challenges.

Employers highly value the proficiencies gained from liberal arts disciplines. Indeed, a recent study showed that 80 percent of employers recognize and appreciate these skills. Despite this, many students have avoided humanities fields due to perceived career limitations.

To address this, we are working hard to attract more students to these programs, supported by a \$4.9 million grant from the Mellon Foundation.

This grant will enable us to develop and implement a model internship program in humanities education. The program will provide students with opportunities to engage in humanities study, hands-on internships, and career exploration. This will address critical gaps in career readiness and foster social mobility.

The program will offer stipends to 425 humanities students participating in internships with local nonprofits, community groups, and government agencies such as the Chapman Cultural Center, Hub City Roots, Spartanburg County Foundation, and Project R.E.S.T. As part of this initiative, we are redesigning curricula across all 13 humanities programs to include internships for both majors and minors. Faculty support, community mentorships, and resources like workshops and professional evaluations will strengthen the program’s impact.

We expect these efforts to increase internship participation among humanities students by up to 600 percent by the end of the grant period and enhance graduation rates for humanities disciplines by up to 5 percent. Furthermore, we aim to drive a 15 percent increase in humanities enrollment during the grant period, with up to 25 percent growth anticipated within five years.

Reflecting on my own experiences, I am confident that these initiatives will help students recognize the value of the humanities and how they can lead to rewarding careers. By investing in the humanities, we are investing in a more thoughtful, empathetic, and well-rounded future for our students and society as a whole.



Bennie L. Harris, PhD
Chancellor

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Training Partners

Jerry Allred believes deeply that child welfare work is a calling. As executive director of the Crosswell Home for Children in Columbia, he sees that same conviction shared among his staff. But Allred also knows from experience that many who enter the field aren't really prepared for what they'll face.

"We were seeing that people were coming to us with the heart to do the work, but not necessarily the understanding of how taking care of children from hard places is tough work," he says.

That was resulting in high turnover, an industry-wide problem. Allred realized new staff, and even some experienced ones, might benefit from some professional development. His team reached out to different organizations for help, and Jodie Martin, director of the Center for Child Advocacy Studies at USC Upstate, responded.

An experienced counselor with an extensive background in child welfare, Martin understood the challenges Allred's staff faced. She pulled together a group of faculty, staff and outside experts to create a three-part course, consisting of 10 modules each, that was geared toward group home care.

"We hope that with a little background on trauma and all the other things in the modules that (staff) will stay longer," she says.

The online training served as a pilot for what Martin believes can be a program utilized by other group homes in the state. While there are other online trainings available for child welfare workers, they tend to be broad and not location-specific, Martin says. The cost can also be prohibitively expensive for nonprofit organizations. The USC Upstate training offers an affordable alternative that can be customized for different parts of the state.

Fifteen of the 16 Crosswell employees who started the training completed it, Allred says. The feedback was positive, with some mentioning the content helped them better understand the needs of children in the foster care system. Those who were new to the field seemed to especially appreciate learning how South Carolina's child welfare system worked, he says.

Allred and Martin recently shared their findings from the pilot program at an industry conference to help spread the word about the training. Martin says she hopes to keep improving the content by creating more engaging videos and additional resources. She also sees other places where the training could be valuable, such as school districts. Ultimately, she and Allred note, better training results in better care.

A Head of the Game

Change starts at the top, or so the old cliché goes. So the top is what Spartan Athletics focused on when it redesigned its spirit mark.

Why the change? As many members of the Spartan Army can attest, it's not uncommon to be mistaken for those "other" Spartans (Michigan State) when out and about in spirit gear. The new mark preserves the warrior spirit while creating a distinctive look.

Keep an eye on USC Upstate's social media accounts on May 17 for the grand unveiling.



Goal Achieved

The assignment senior instructor Brian Brady gave his class was straightforward: Conduct an informational interview to get practice networking.

But for senior Richard Carr, it led to a dream job coaching soccer.

Brady's course, Principles of Organizational Management, teaches students leadership and strategic planning and other career skills. Brady also encourages students to reach out to people who work in a field they're interested in and speak to them in person.

Carr, an interdisciplinary studies major, saw an opportunity to connect with the director of Carolina Elite Soccer Academy (CESA) in Spartanburg. Carr had played club soccer most of his youth, and had been an activity leader for a soccer summer camp in North Carolina. Though an injury ended his soccer career, he hoped to get into club coaching, particularly at the academy level.

He put together a list of 10-15 questions, and set up a time to talk with CESA director Amer Resumovic. At the end of their conversation, Carr mentioned his desire to coach.

"He kind of took a pause and he said, 'Are you interested in coaching with us?'" Carr recalls. "He asked

about all my licensing that I have through U.S. Soccer and through the state of South Carolina.

"It was literally four days later he said that he had a training session with his kids, and he wanted me to come out and coach it alongside him just so he could see how I was in that environment."

Resumovic liked what he saw, and the day after the training session offered Carr a job coaching the recreation and academy teams for boys 7 to 15. Rec players are still building their skills, while those at academy level are more advanced.

"It was just an interview, but then, within a week, I had a job coaching club soccer—just from that assignment," Carr says.

When it was time to turn his assignment in, Carr put a small text box at the bottom thanking Brady for helping him secure his dream job.

While the outcome was unexpected, Brady says it shows what real-world learning can lead to.

"The Johnson College of Business and its faculty provide many experiential learning programs and opportunities for our students," he says. "This assignment adds another element to their skill sets."

— Christina Cleveland



Singing Their Praises

Even before the USC Upstate Gospel Choir's album came out, it was achieving success.

"Elevate," released March 28, is the first recording in the choir's nearly 50-year history. "Already Done," a single from the album penned by Jared White '11, charted No. 94 on Billboard in the gospel category when it was released last November.

Recording an album had long been a dream for choir director Alphaeus Anderson, and he poured his creative energies into making it a reality. That included contributing two of his own songs.

"This project is so grand in my eyes," Anderson said. "Major artists don't get to this point that we are, where we're at right now."

Of the choir, he added, "We would not be here if it wasn't for them. They are the ingredients for the dream."

You can find "Elevate" on Spotify, Apple Music, Pandora and YouTube Music.

— Reported by senior Shaina Street





Ice in Her Veins

Emma Hudson is no stranger to high-pressure game days. Working in the Athletics department, she has emceed many Spartan basketball games, and has even done a few Greenville Drive baseball games.

But hosting her first hockey games for the Greenville Swamp Rabbits tested Hudson's coolness under pressure. Hockey, as any fan knows, is an intense sport, with not only opposing teams getting into fights but also fans. Hudson's job as emcee was to keep the crowd engaged during breaks in the action, and narrate activities during timeouts and intermission.

"It was a good experience, because you have to be on your toes," Hudson says. "You have to be prepared in advance and ready to go with the flow."

The Greenville arena was much louder than any other venue where Hudson had hosted, but having worked for the Swamp Rabbits for two seasons as game day staff, she was prepared for the noise. Her usual responsibilities at home games include helping with marketing activities, such as raffles and promotions, and making sure Stomper the mascot is where he needs to be. This season she has been trying her hand at photography. "No two days are the same," she says.

Hudson's opportunity to emcee arose when the team's usual host, sports radio personality Rob Brown, was unavailable. Brown has been a mentor to Hudson, and gave her confidence that she was up to the task.

"Basically, I have to ad lib everything," she says. "I've got an earpiece in my ear that's like, OK, you're on, you're good to go. And then I just say what I feel is right in that moment."

Hudson admits she still gets nervous at the start of any game she's hosting, even when it's the Spartans. But once she gets going, the feeling disappears. "I like that you have to think on the fly," she says. "That used to intimidate me when I was younger. But you know in sports that something's going to happen that you've never seen before, so you have to be able to think on your feet and adapt."

Hudson dreams of one day becoming an athletics director like Matt Martin at Upstate, who has been a mentor and role model. She also credits Lenny Mathis, senior associate athletics director, and Ryan Frye, associate director of sports communication, for helping her learn new skills and put them into practice.

But in the meantime, she's busy absorbing all she can about sports marketing and communication, with the goal of working in those fields after graduation. It's important to her that fans have fun and enjoy games, so she approaches every event with energy and enthusiasm.

"I'm very blessed that I look forward to going to work every day and like what I do," she says. "I always say, whether it's someone's first game or their fiftieth, I try to make it memorable for them so that way they want to keep coming back."

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Get the Party Started!

Shrimp and Grit Bites
SERVES: 10-12

1. cup peeled/deveined shrimp, chopped
2. tbsp. butter
1. tsp. seafood seasoning
2 1/2 cups leftover cooked grits
1 cup shredded sharp cheddar cheese
1 cup all-purpose flour
3 large eggs, beaten
1 cup seasoned panko bread crumbs
peanut oil for frying

1. Fill a large Dutch oven one-half to two-thirds full with oil and bring to a temperature of 350°F over med-high heat.
2. Add 2 tbsp. of butter to a medium-sized sauté pan and heat over medium heat.
3. Once the butter has melted, add shrimp and seafood seasoning. Sauté for 2-3 minutes until cooked through. Transfer to a dish to cool slightly.
4. Add grits and cheese to a mixing bowl; stir until well combined.
5. Form golf ball-sized portions in your hands and coat with flour. Add beaten eggs and panko.
6. Now, in one batch, coat the shrimp and grits mixture with the panko, coating them thoroughly.
7. Dip each grit bite into the egg mixture. Finally, coat the bites with the panko, coating them thoroughly.
8. Carefully, add each bite to the Dutch oven, and fry until golden brown.
9. Remove the balls to a paper towel-lined plate before serving.

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The **FUTURE** of the Humanities

By Elizabeth Anderson

**Programs adapt to attract
students in the face
of nationwide declines.**

It's a tough time to be a humanities or social sciences department.

Between 2012 and 2021, bachelor's degrees in the humanities – which include English, history, philosophy and foreign languages – dropped 18% nationally, according to the Humanities Indicators project. In South Carolina, the decline was even sharper – 24%. Majors in the social sciences declined 10% between 2011 and 2021, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. Some budget-strapped colleges have even eliminated a few humanities and social sciences programs.

But at USC Upstate, the trend is being treated as an opportunity rather than a cause for dismay. In the fall, enrollment in the English major rose 14.5%, while history was up 18.8% and political science up 34%. Spring majors also increased from a year earlier: 19.6% in English, 35.5% in history, and 39.7% in political science.

So what happened?

Online options

Esther Godfrey, chair of the Literature, Languages, and Composition department and an English professor, says online learning has played a big role in the English major's turnaround. When Upstate's program was added to Palmetto College, the University of South Carolina system's online platform, enrollment went up.

"The reason it's so desirable, and I think why we've gotten so many more students, is that it's just so flexible," Godfrey says. "Some of these students don't even live in the state anymore, but they want to finish up, and we are the avenue to do that."

Qwinlyn Osborne, who will soon complete her English degree online, is grateful for that flexibility. Virtual classes have made it possible for her to pursue her dream on a schedule that works with her family life. Osborne had started college right out of high school, but thought the only pathway for English majors who liked to write was journalism.

That wasn't for her, however, so she dropped out of college in her second semester, got married and focused on raising her three children. But she never abandoned her dream of getting an English degree. "Literature ties into so many other facets of our life, like sociology, history, even psychology at times," Osborne says. "For some of these writers, that was their outlet for dealing with things, for trying to speak their mind. It's such an important major, because these are things we don't want to lose."

Godfrey notes that many adult learners who have been out in the workforce awhile, or served in the military, or had a family, understand the value of an English degree. "You see the power of being able to communicate, to think critically, to come up with your own ending, to think outside of the box," she says.

That was the case for Ethan Murphy, who is earning his degree online while working in plastics manufacturing. Murphy also serves in the South Carolina Army National Guard and plans to eventually become an English teacher.

"It used to be I just wanted to read in general," Murphy says. "But then in high school, it was like, oh, you can have discussions about what you're reading and how it applies to things in the real world." Those are the kinds of conversations he hopes to one day have in his own high school classroom.

Now in his second year at Upstate, Murphy has enjoyed being introduced to new genres of literature. He cites a book he read in his adolescent literature class that tells the stories of three different refugee children. One of them, about a modern-day Syrian child, resonated with Murphy.

"I was in school watching CNN when this stuff first started in Syria, and you can see it and digest it at 15 or 16 years old, but it's not the same as reading it in this book," he says. "It's like you are them, or right alongside them. So it gives you the ability to be more empathetic, even though you've never been through anything like that."

The four Cs

Tanya Boone-Holladay, dean of the College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences, often makes a similar point about the humanities in general when she is talking to students and their families. "The word 'human' is in humanities," she says. "It's about who we are as humans, and can we understand other people as humans. That is basically social and emotional intelligence."

Too often, she says, people focus on majors with the best salaries right out of college. While that's understandable when students are paying more for college now and accruing loan debt, it's also simplistic, Boone-Holladay says.

She notes humanities students develop important skills that employers repeatedly emphasize they need: critical thinking, collaboration, communication and creativity. "Our students come out of our majors with those things in spades," she says.



I think people too often reduce English and English majors to, **'Why do you need that with ChatGPT?'**



Godfrey agrees. Part of studying English involves examining different interpretations and considering other arguments that might be different from yours, she says. Then you figure out a way to bring all those viewpoints together, much as you would when working on a project at a job.

"I think people too often reduce English and English majors to, 'Why do you need that with ChatGPT?'" she says. "But it's the critical thinking skills that come with being a reader and lover of words and language and stories. That's what we do."

Retail politics

Online offerings have benefited political science as well. Trevor Rubenzer, a political science professor who chairs the department of history, political science, philosophy, and American studies, says about 20% of the students admitted for the spring semester were through Palmetto College. On-campus students, too, like the flexibility of being able to take a course or two online if they need to.

While online learning is a strong recruiting tool, it's part of a larger, highly personalized two-pronged strategy that Rubenzer has developed. The process begins when prospective students indicate interest in one of the department's programs. Rubenzer meticulously tracks them on a color-coded spreadsheet. Names are marked orange once a faculty member contacts them, then purple if they enroll and red if they don't.

Throughout the application period, prospective students receive emails tailored to their interests. Political science is particularly specialized, with messaging subcategorized for those interested in pre-law or online studies. Rubenzer and his colleagues in political science also reach out personally to students to tell them a little about themselves and any upcoming events they might be interested in attending.

"After doing this for three years now, I think it's fairly well demonstrated that you get a bump by contacting students," Rubenzer says. By his estimates, the faculty outreach can improve enrollment by 15%-20%.

Once students arrive and declare a major, the strategy shifts to retention. That means doing everything possible to keep students on track, Rubenzer says. "We have to work hard to structure our advising and mentorship and everything else towards getting students to schedule their school time as if it's work time," he says.

In collaboration with the Student Success Center, the department has helped struggling students get assistance early so they don't drop out. That has resulted in better retention between semesters – an average of 93% between history and political science, Rubenzer says.

Choose your own adventure

English, political science and history have also retooled their programs to make them more flexible. In English, once students have completed their six required core classes, they can select the rest of their classes based on their interests. Godfrey says creative writing is popular with many students who want to hone their storytelling skills, and there are several options in linguistics or film studies that can count toward the major.

History and political science have taken a similar approach, Rubenzer says, adjusting their core requirements and then letting students follow their interests for the rest. Students who are interested in international affairs might focus more on that area, for example, while those planning to attend law school can take courses in law and justice studies, an emphasis that has been especially appealing to online students.

History also has added new courses with a contemporary focus. A new public history course offered in spring has been very popular, as have courses on Southern Conference history and women in leadership, Rubenzer says.

It's the critical thinking skills that come with being a reader and lover of words and language and stories

He is quick to add that creating classes with broad appeal doesn't mean compromising academic standards. He compared it to sneaking vegetables into a child's meal without them being aware.

"You have to try and go where the students are while maintaining your disciplinary focus, so students who take a sports history class still learn how to analyze primary source documents related to sports history," he says. "It just happens to be an area they're interested in and so they're learning stuff."

Endless possibilities

Boone-Holladay notes that humanities and social sciences have a special challenge because they don't have clear career paths like many of the STEM fields do. "These disciplines aren't linear," she says. "You don't get a history degree and become a historian. You get a history degree so you have all these skills so you can do things."

For senior Trinity Pride, that's one of the benefits of being a political science major, too. Since transferring to Upstate as a sophomore, she's explored several career pathways with Rubenzer's help, including law and the foreign service. After a study abroad trip to Chile, she decided to pursue humanitarian development work. "There were a lot of fires when I first went there, and they had a lot of volunteer work that we could help with to help people who lost their homes," Pride recalls. "And to witness that and be at the forefront, I was like, oh, that's something I like doing."

Students also continue to take the more traditional routes associated with the major. Edward Jacobs, a senior political science major minoring in history, will be pursuing a master's

degree at George Washington's Elliott School of International Affairs. Serving in the Marine Corps helped him see the world and got him interested in studying different governments and the relationships between countries.

"A hobby of mine now is reading history books," Jacobs says. "I've got such a better contextual understanding of our world, why we are the way we are. And hopefully I can influence policy in the future and tackle some of the really big issues we're going to be facing in the next few decades."

Grant opportunities

Students who want to pursue careers in humanities fields will be getting a boost from a new \$4.9 million grant that USC Upstate recently received from the Mellon Foundation. The money will fund internships at nonprofit organizations for students in select majors. "It's giving us an opportunity to put these students out in the world so they can see that they have these skills and can hone them," Boone-Holladay says.

It's also an opportunity to flip the script on the notion that humanities majors have no practical value. "We have to tell our own story," the dean says. "We have to promote for ourselves."

And telling stories is at the heart of the humanities, says Godfrey. To anyone who thinks the humanities are dying, Godfrey counters they will endure as long as people have stories they want to share. "There's something really beautiful and intrinsic to the humanities about that optimism," she says. "There are stories that need to be told for us to make sense of the world around us."



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Going With the Flow

Alumnus Reid Johnson has built a life exploring new pathways.

Growing up in Spartanburg, Reid Johnson '18 savored the freedom of hopping on his bike or skateboard and setting out with friends to roam and explore. That curiosity and sense of adventure has stayed with Johnson all his life. An entrepreneur, teacher, yogi, surfer, skater, soccer player, and musician, Johnson is comfortable pursuing his interests and seeing where they take him. "I'm not afraid to fall flat on my face, because I'm not concerned really with anyone's opinions outside of my own," he says.

Johnson's current ventures include Habit Beverage Lounge, which he co-owns with his wife, Ashley Rushing Johnson, and Flow State, a wellness center, both in Drayton Mills in Spartanburg. The couple is also setting up a barber school in Drayton, where Ashley Johnson operates Bareknuckle Barber Shop.

But while Johnson's journey has led him back to his hometown, his wanderings have included many stops in between. At 18, he moved to Boston to pursue a career in music and see what life in a big city was like. The rich cultural offerings and diversity of people had a major impact on him. "I got to hear all these amazing sounds that I had never heard, in the different styles of music that you find in places like Boston, New York, and L.A.," he says.

From Boston, Johnson moved to Charleston, where he continued developing his musicianship. He took on odd jobs to support himself, eventually becoming a barber. The flexibility of the work allowed him to practice four or five hours every night with Volusia, the local band he fronted.

"I learned a lot during that time period about dedication and sacrifice," Johnson says. "We were doing this five, six nights a week, because there's always another band out there that will do what you're doing, if not a little more."

Then Johnson got a break. The manager of the band Number One Contender heard him perform and brought the band's members to a show. A week or two later, Johnson was officially offered a place in the group.

For the next five years, Johnson was on the road with the band, opening for major rock acts including Papa Roach, Shinedown, Candlebox and Duff McKagan of Guns N' Roses. Johnson loved performing, often before crowds of 10,000-15,000 a night. "It was very high octane," he says. "I was a very physical performer, climbing up things, diving in the crowd." Engaging with fans was energizing and exciting.

But the other parts of touring – the long bus rides, the hotels, the interviews, the sound checks, the long waits before the start of every show – were mentally and physically draining. Johnson compares it to "Groundhog Day," where every day is just like the one before. "As wonderful as that 45 minutes, hour and half, on stage is connecting with your fans, everything else you can have," he says.

Johnson was ready for a change, so in 2010 he left the music world and went to Guadalajara, Mexico. An avid surfer, Johnson had frequently visited Costa Rica, Puerto Rico and Mexico to surf during breaks in touring, and had fallen in love with Latin American culture. He found a job teaching English at a school and inadvertently launched his first entrepreneurial venture.

Johnson had bought an old building and realized it could provide him with both lodging and some extra income. He converted the space into nine units and



enlisted the talents of local artists to create themed murals for each one. The rooms were then rented out to students at the University of Guadalajara. “I’ve always had a passion to tie in with the arts and community, so that was kind of the first thing that really set a fire in me,” he says.

After a few years, he moved back to Charleston, where he got married and had a daughter. He was planning to offer pro scuba instruction on Utila, a small island off the coast of Honduras. But after a divorce, he and his daughter relocated to Spartanburg, where he could be close to his family.

The time seemed right to go back to school and get his degree, so Johnson enrolled at Upstate. Though he wasn’t sure what he wanted to do next, he embraced the learning opportunity. “Going back as an adult, I had a much different respect for the discipline of being a student again,” he says. His classes helped him see how the skills he had developed as a musician, such as leadership and public speaking, could apply to any new career.

He settled on an interdisciplinary studies major with a concentration in communication and sociology, and a minor in entrepreneurship. Somewhat to the surprise of his friends, his first job after graduating in 2018 was in advertising.

“I had always been this dreamer and chased things that were a bit abstract and not the norm,” Johnson says. “So I had never experienced the norm, and I wanted to understand all those different aspects of life.”

It didn’t take him long to realize that working in a cubicle was not for him, but he didn’t regret the experience. His next move was into real estate, which Johnson admits is ironic, since he hates sales. He did, however, have the “gift of gab,” which served him well in the business. He even flipped a few homes.

But when the pandemic hit in 2020, Johnson realized that as a single dad, he needed a more reliable income and benefits than real estate could provide. Over lunch with an old mentor from Spartanburg High School, Johnson mentioned he was thinking about a more service-oriented career, perhaps in teaching. His mentor immediately pulled out his phone, made a call, and secured him a few interviews.

Johnson ended up at Whitlock Flexible Learning Center. The alternative school serves students from all seven schools districts in Spartanburg County who have had behavioral issues at their assigned school. The job is tough, but Johnson says he felt at home immediately.

“It’s definitely not for everyone, but I don’t take anything personally, because I understand and have a deep empathy for the struggles and traumas these young people go through,” Johnson says. “I’m inspired in many ways by them. Their resilience has taught me so much.”

Johnson began teaching geography while students were still on a hybrid schedule due to the pandemic. Once students were back in the classroom full time, he worked hard to earn their respect. That included teaching the students breathing techniques, which at first they found silly. But

whenever Johnson saw tension building, he’d stop the class and have the students do some breathing exercises, which helped calm many of them.

Johnson is under no illusions that he’s had an impact on every student. But, he says, “Being consistent and authentic in who you are really translates.” He enjoys relating his global experiences to the class material and finding new ways to engage his students. When he does see the light go on, the reward is immense.

Johnson didn’t entirely abandon his entrepreneurial ventures when he started teaching. He partnered with a friend to reopen her hot yoga business, which had closed during the pandemic, and added cold plunging to the offerings. The practice, known as contrast therapy, involves immersing the body in icy cold water after experiencing heat. Johnson had been doing it for years to deal with his chronic back pain, but he noticed it had been gaining mainstream appeal, too.

The popularity of his “Fire and Ice” classes gave him the idea to start Flow State, which offers breath work sessions and contrast therapy. “People who have struggles slowing their mind and being in the moment, all that’s gone when you throw someone in ice, because all you’re focused on is the breath,” he says.

Flow State is located at the back of the Habit Beverage Lounge space and offers both open and guided sessions. In addition to coffee beverages, smoothies and juices, Habit serves beer and wine in the evenings and hosts regular entertainment nights that include improv comedy and live music by local acts. The walls are covered with works by local artists, reflecting the Johnsons’ shared love for street culture and art.

With the couple’s barber academy set to open soon, Johnson says he will be taking a pause on any new activities to focus on growing the businesses. His daughter, now in middle school, is a big part of his life. A surfer like her dad, and also a swimmer and wrestler, she recently started soccer, and Johnson hopes to coach her one day. He himself still takes part in soccer matches twice a week that include his old coach from Spartan High.

In spite of a busy life, Johnson is careful not to take on more than he can handle. Balancing school and parenting while at Upstate honed his time management skills, and he notes he still gets his eight hours of sleep every night. He also credits his wife for being an equal partner and sharing in the responsibilities of their businesses.

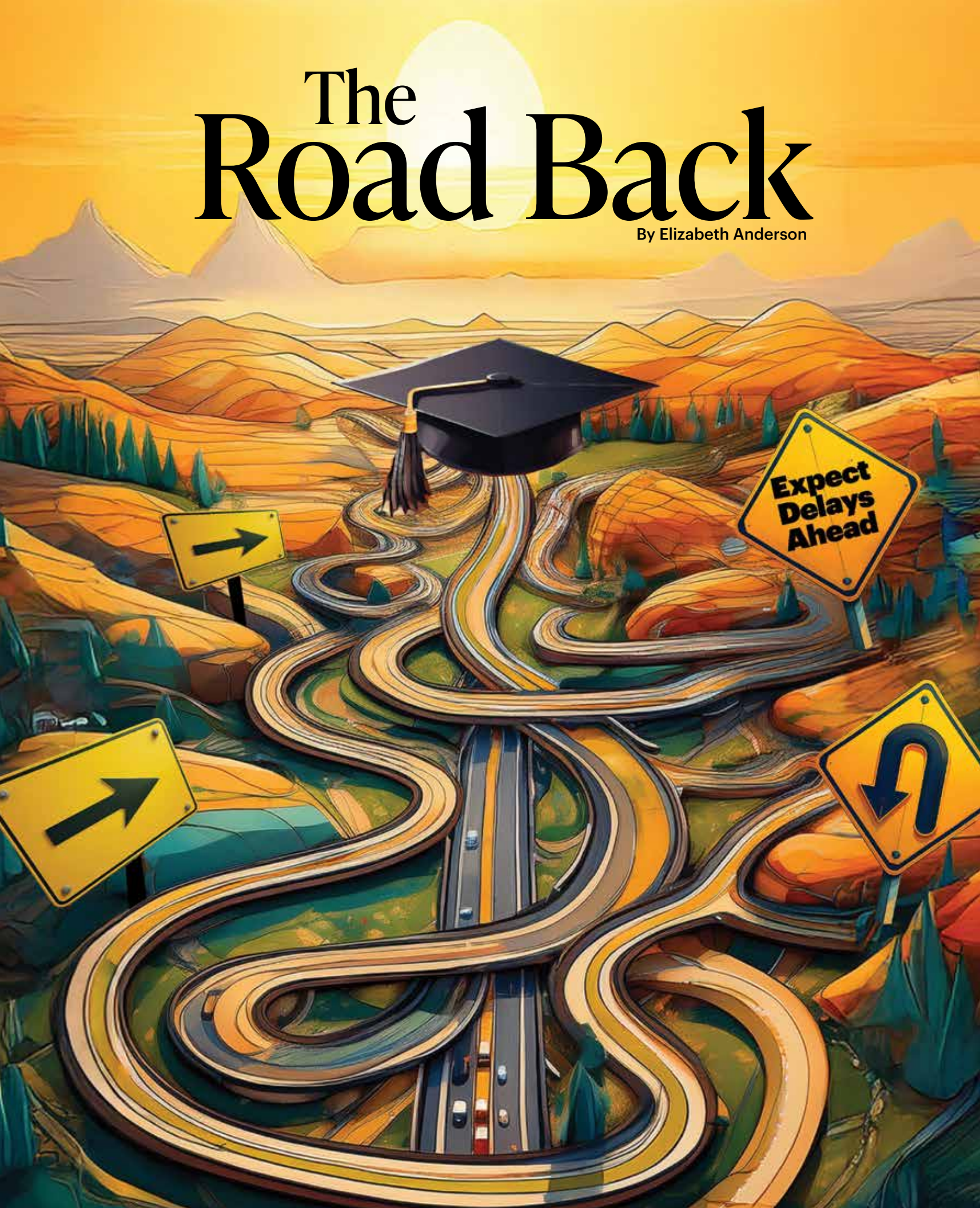
In the future, he envisions starting a venture in Puerto Rico, a favorite family destination for surfing. Johnson says he’s never afraid to take a chance and try something new, because it’s always an opportunity to grow.

“I think when we fulfill ourselves, we become the best individuals that we can be, and that’s usually those who have the greatest impacts on their communities and on the people around them.”



The Road Back

By Elizabeth Anderson



Adult students discover it's never too late to earn a bachelor's degree.

On the morning of Sept. 11, 2001, Sean Turner '22 was waiting for his introduction to psychology class to begin. All his classmates were there, but as the minutes ticked by, there was no sign of their professor. Then a friend of Turner's turned around and said, "Hey man, did you hear about the plane that hit the World Trade Center?"

By that evening, Turner, then a freshman at Eastern Carolina University, would be shifting away from being a student. "I was sitting in the lobby of my dorm," Turner recalls. "I called my mother and I said, 'Hey, I've been thinking ...' and that's the only thing I got out of my mouth. She said, 'Don't you do it.'"

But Turner had decided. He told his mom he would finish out the fall semester, then move home in December and join the Marines. "I said, 'College will always be here,'" he says. "I didn't realize it was going to be 20 years before I got back into it."

Helping adults such as Turner return to the classroom, no matter how much time has passed, has become an increased priority for USC Upstate and other state colleges. While South Carolina is not expected to experience the "enrollment cliff" – a decline in the number of high school graduates that begins next year – its students could be heavily recruited by those states that will. Adult learners offer an additional market to tap into to mitigate against potential losses.

But degree attainment also has economic implications, for both students and counties. While data shows college graduates have better social mobility than those without degrees, an educated workforce is also a draw for new business.

Economic impact

Nationally, about 37 million people under 65 have some college but no degree or credential, according to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center. In Spartanburg County, about 50,000 people fall into that category, representing a significant enrollment opportunity.

The push for degree attainment is about more than increasing enrollment numbers, however. USC Upstate and Spartanburg's six other colleges are part of Movement 2030, an initiative by the Spartanburg Academic Movement that seeks to improve degree or certificate attainment in the county. Only 28% of county residents have a bachelor's degree or higher, which can affect economic development, says Erin Smith, director of adult degree re-engagement at OneSpartanburg.

"When business and industry are looking at us as a place to set up a headquarters or open a new branch or expand, they're looking at that degree attainment rate as a factor for what kind of a skilled workforce we have," Smith says.

The Re:Degree program, launched last year by OneSpartanburg and Movement 2030, seeks to improve that rate. It works with adult learners, either directly or through coordinators on a college campus, to remove the barriers that led them to leave school in the first place. Re:Degree also helps students develop a plan for completing a degree or certificate.



Sean Turner '22 celebrates with his family after earning his bachelor's degree. Turner returned to college 20 years after he left to enlist.

Among the reasons students often drop out is money. That was the case for Sharrell Taylor, who, as a first-time student putting herself through USC Upstate back in 2012, didn't understand the limits of financial aid. "So it ran out," she says.

Taylor tried again a few years later, but left when she had a baby. By then she had also changed majors, from nursing to child development and family studies, which added to the time she needed to complete her degree. Still, Taylor never gave up on the idea of finishing. Now re-enrolled at USC Upstate as an interdisciplinary studies major, she hopes to become an early interventionist after completing her degree.

"I always wanted to have it done," she says. "I thought it needed to be completed, and I was always so close, so I just wanted to do it for me, my daughter, and my great-grandmother. Her biggest thing was education."

A welcome home

Taylor was among the students Debbie Little first contacted when she started as USC Upstate's Re:Degree advisor in April 2024. Little set herself the goal to re-enroll as many students as she could and support them in whatever ways they needed to finish. Armed with a list of former students in Spartanburg County, Little began cold calling, anticipating that she'd get a lot of hang-ups.

"But I was really surprised," she says. "It's been a very warm reception. They're really appreciative that somebody's thinking about them, reaching out to them, willing to help them."

Concurrent with her calls, Little began researching resources in the community that could help students with any obstacles to returning. That included everything from sources of financial assistance and child care to housing and school supplies. The Re:Degree program itself offers small grants to help cover tuition shortfalls.

Little also does a deep dive into each student's particular academic situation. In some cases, students need fewer classes to graduate than they thought due to requirement adjustments in the course catalog through the years. In others, such as Taylor's, switching to an interdisciplinary studies major allows students to be credited for the courses they've already completed while reducing the requirements they have left.

Little admits she initially was dissatisfied with her efforts. Fourteen former Upstate students were readmitted to college for the fall 2024 semester, 10 of them at Upstate itself. Little says sometimes she directs students to a different college if Upstate doesn't offer the classes they need, since the goal is graduation, no matter the school.

But the successes have quickly grown. In December, Upstate graduated its first six students from the program, and Little is proud there are 30 students enrolled this spring at the university, all but one of them a former Upstate student.



Ashley Turner '24 was able to complete the last class she needed to earn her degree with help from Re:Degree advisor Debbie Little.

Among the December graduates was Ashley Turner '24, an accounting major who needed just one class to complete her degree. Turner had transferred into Upstate as a sophomore in 2016 but got discouraged when she couldn't pass the last class she needed for her major. Because she had already secured an accounting job, she left school and went to work. "My boss was OK with me starting before I got my degree, but he always wanted to make sure I did continue and get my degree," Turner says.

His support and willingness to give her flexibility in her work schedule helped Turner when she decided she was ready to return this past fall. She had recently had a baby, and knew it would be challenging to juggle work, school and a newborn. Still, she says, "I got some inspiration from having my son. You have to finish what you start, and I wanted to be a good role model for him."

Although it felt strange to be back in a classroom, Turner discovered she was a more effective student this time around. Rather than taking notes on everything the professor said, she listened carefully so she would understand what she was writing down. She became better at time management, fitting in her studying and homework whenever her son was asleep. Her boss also gave her time off to study when she had a test the next day.



"I got some inspiration from having my son. You have to finish what you start, and I wanted to be a good role model for him."

— Ashley Turner '24

Now that she has her degree, "I think it'll give me more confidence to venture out for my job," Turner says. "My boss is like, you can always find something at a higher level than this, your degree can get you more opportunity."

That's exactly the message Smith shares when she gives presentations about Re:Degree around the county. "Education is the great equalizer, so by focusing on adult degree attainment, we're saying, 'Hey, you have an opportunity to grow yourself right here.'"

Going places

Some adults who return to college have come to that realization on their own after being out in the working world. Paula Fain '19, a business administration graduate with a concentration in accounting, had been a hairdresser for about 15 years when she decided she needed a career that would provide her with health insurance and retirement savings. Fain had briefly attended Greenville Technical College when she graduated from high school in 1990, but it wasn't for her.

In the years since, she had gotten married, had two children, then divorced. Fain was ready to make some changes. She applied at Upstate, but was advised to take some courses at Spartanburg Community College first since she hadn't been in college for awhile. That allowed Fain to complete requirements and earn an associate degree before transferring to Upstate for her bachelor's.

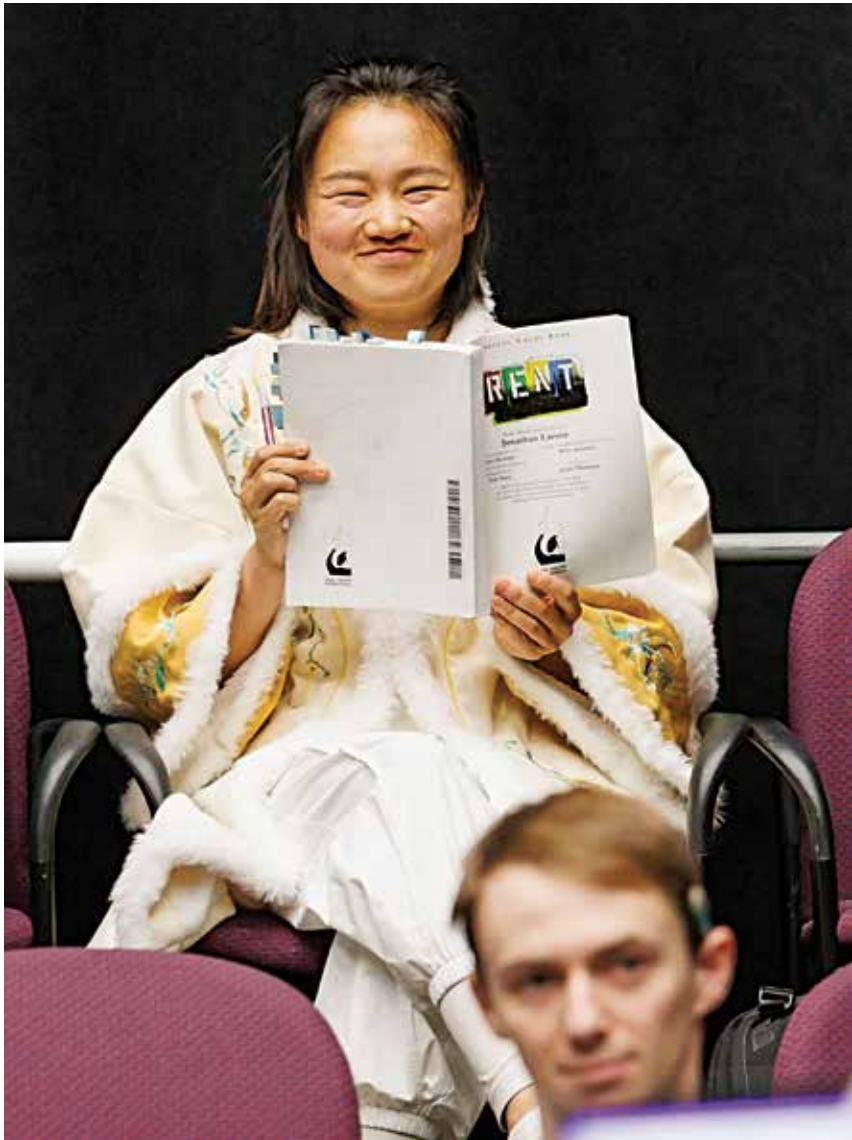
Going back to school in her 40s, Fain knew that a lot of people – including her first advisor – didn't believe she would succeed. "All of that noise kind of pushed me to think, 'I will make it. I'm going to prove you wrong,'" she says.

But it wasn't easy. Fain's young sons were active in soccer, so she had to balance her studies with being a soccer mom. Her part-time job as a bookkeeper for the soccer club allowed her to attend in-person classes after she dropped her sons off at school, but as soon as her classes were over, she was back over to school for pickup. During soccer practices, Fain would study in the parking lot.

"I became quite comfortable in my car," she recalls. "I would have my books here, my laptop there. I had my little cozy area."

After completing her degree, Fain found a whole new world opening up to her. With help from Hannah Terpack, director of Career Management at Upstate, she landed her first accounting job, then a second when the first company was sold and closed its office. That led to her current position, as controller and finance manager, and human resources manager, at Germany-based Eisenmann.

Fain's new job brought travel opportunities, too. On only two days' notice, she flew to Germany for the first time to meet the accounting team at company headquarters. The travel bug bit, and since then Fain has been to Iceland and Italy on her own, with a trip to Antarctica planned at the end of the year.



Ginger Jiang discovered a passion for theater after initially enrolling as a biology major at Upstate. She balances rehearsals with a busy schedule as a business owner and mom.



Sharrell Taylor will be graduating in May after returning to Upstate to complete a degree she started in 2012.

“Education has given me a life that I never realized that I could have,” Fain says.

New stage of life

Fain’s experiences highlight what Smith says is another benefit of having a degree. “When students get that additional credential, they’re eligible for more roles within the organization where they’re working, or for a new role outside of it,” she says.

Since many adults start degrees at a community college, Upstate partnered with Greenville Technical College in 2023 on a reverse transfer agreement. The arrangement allows students to transfer to Upstate after two years and continue to earn an associate degree while working toward a bachelor’s. School leaders say earning an associate can provide encouragement to keep going while also giving students something to fall back on if they have to put their studies on pause.

Ginger Jiang transferred to Upstate in the fall after earning an associate degree in science at Spartanburg Community College. Her plan at the time was to pursue a bachelor’s in biology, with the goal of going to medical school. But the death of a popular Chinese martial artist who Jiang followed on social media made her reconsider everything.

“He was only 20 years old, and he died in a car accident,” she says. “I feel like that could be me at any moment. So if this is the last day of my life, what would I want to do?”

The owner of a successful yoga studio in Spartanburg and an artist, Jiang turned her focus away from a career-oriented major to one she found enjoyable and meaningful: theater. She also is a mom of a 7-year-old son, and between her businesses and child, she realized she didn’t have the time or energy to devote to the years of schooling required for a medical degree.

“Theater is something that I can enjoy and still stay in

school and maintain my current career,” she says.

Earning a bachelor’s fits with Jiang’s desire to continually acquire new knowledge. Originally from China, Jiang says her worldview has grown since her days as high school student. “Coming back to school, I have the experience not only of being a student, but also of being a mom, a wife, a business owner, an employee of others, a community leader, and a participant in many organizations,” she says. “I’m always a learner. I think learning is what makes life meaningful.”

Jiang keeps a tightly organized schedule to make everything work. She rises at five every morning, then teaches an hour-long class at her studio at 6 a.m. or attends a martial arts class. Next, she takes her son to school and heads to campus for classes. After a quick lunch, she’ll teach a yoga class, sometimes at a corporate site, then squeeze in a massage therapy or private yoga session before holding her regular yoga class at 4:30. Before bedtime, she and her son practice jujitsu and Chinese before she leads an online mediation session at 8 p.m.

“I will see where the four-year degree leads me, but right now I’m enjoying every single moment,” Jiang says.

Dream fulfilled

Even for those adults who have gone on to build meaningful lives without a degree, the satisfaction of finally having one is immense. Turner, the Marine veteran, served for 20 years before retiring as a gunnery sergeant in 2023. Along the way he got married and had two sons and built a successful career in nuclear security at the McGuire Nuclear Station near Charlotte, North Carolina.

But Turner never forgot that phone call with his mom back in 2001, and his promise to her that he’d return to school. “I’ve accomplished all this stuff, and I feel really proud of myself for doing it, but something that I never really buckled down with was applying myself and finishing that degree,”

Turner remembers thinking.

After his first son was born, he also became conscious of setting an example. “How will I ever hold him accountable on finishing something he started if I’ve got this big black eye of quitting school?” Turner says.

So with his military retirement approaching, Turner decided the time had come to get his degree. Online classes made it easier to fit his coursework in around his job and family, but there were plenty of challenges. COVID hit the year after Turner started, and he found himself helping his son negotiate online learning while also working on his own classes.

But each time Turner felt like quitting, his wife was there to encourage him. “My wife is my number one support system,” he says. “She would talk me back and refocus me on the long-term goal.”

The night he turned in his final project for his senior seminar, the significance of the moment hit Turner all at once. “I’ll be honest with you, I cried a little bit,” he says. “I was like, you persevered. You made it. You didn’t do it alone, but my

gosh, you did it. And now it’s off the bucket list.”
When graduation arrived, Turner’s wife drove with his two young sons so his parents could take him. They wanted to complete the journey that had

started when they dropped him off at college all those years ago. Though some of Turner’s friends and colleagues wondered why he’d want to sit through a long ceremony, there was no question in his mind about attending. “This is a big deal, and by gosh, I’m walking across that field,” he recalls thinking.

No matter what path someone takes to return to school, whether on their own or through a program like Re:Degree, the important thing is to take that first step, Smith says. Anyone who started college at some point already understands the value of an education. “I tell students when I talk to them, you already have been thinking about this,” she says. “Sometimes just saying to them, ‘I’m here for you when you need me,’ gives them the courage to move forward.”

Re:Degree’s goal is to reach 10% of the 50,000 “some college, no degree” Spartanburg County residents. Even if they don’t all re-enroll, each one who does is a victory, Smith says. Out of the 570 the program has contacted so far, 110 have re-enrolled, ahead of the benchmarks Re:Degree has set.

“We want to do everything in our power to get everybody across the stage,” Smith says. “Are we going to get everybody across the stage by the year 2030? No. But if we can get you on that path towards graduation and keep you on it, that’s a success in my book.”



“This is a big deal, and by gosh, I’m walking across that field.” — Sean Turner ’22



play ball

Downtown Spartanburg's brand-new Fifth Third Park celebrated its opening April 1 in true community fashion – with a game between hometown rivals USC Upstate and Wofford College. The Spartans and Terriers played before a sellout crowd at the ballpark, which is the home of the minor league Hub City Spartanburgers.



Faculty Achievements

Kenneth Barideaux (Psychology) was awarded \$5,200 by the American Psychological Foundation David and Carol Myers Fund. The funds will be used to support a summer professional development workshop for high school psychology teachers in the Upstate South Carolina region. **Christa Christ** is the co-PI.

Logan Camp-Spivey (Nursing) was recognized in the Sigma Theta Tau International Society of Nursing Member Spotlight.

Chung-Yean Chiang (Business) had his paper "Whose AI Matters? Examining the Bilateral Effects of AI Capability Orientation on Supply Chain Resilience" accepted by the International Journal of Operations and Production Management.

Shirleatha Dunlap (Nursing) is project director of a \$1.3 million HRSA Congressionally Directed Spending grant, "Emergency Disaster Preparedness and Management Simulation: Equipment to Improve Healthcare Project." Co-project directors are **Logan Camp-Spivey**, **Stephanie Barnhill** and **Monique Jones '03**. Dunlap is also the co-author of "Addressing Program Effectiveness for Nursing Accreditation: Outcome Specification and Measurement" in the Journal of Nursing Education.

Derek Fenner (Art Education) and senior Morgan Kitts presented "Unfolding Art Research" at the National Art Education Association annual conference in Louisville, Kentucky, in March.

Uma Gupta (Business Analytics) was a keynote speaker for Virtu's Women in Data Science Virtual Conference in March.

Carmen Harris (History) has been serving as the state scholar for the Smithsonian exhibit "Spark! Places of Innovation" under the auspices of South Carolina Humanities. She provides scholarly expertise and historical knowledge to the five communities hosting the exhibit, including her hometown of Gaffney. In January, she gave a presentation in Gaffney on the impact of innovation on small towns.

Araceli Hernández-Laroche (Modern Languages) was recognized in November by Expo Latina Business among the Top 12 most influential women in the Southeast. She also served as the humanities scholar in the SC Humanities-funded documentary "Miss Perry Will Speak," which tells the story of legacy members of Business and Professional Women of South Carolina. The film premiered in March.

Tina Herzberg (Education) co-authored the article "Mission INSPIRE: A Science Fair-Type Activity for Youth Who Use Braille in STEM Learning" in the January/February issue of Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness. She also co-presented "How to support the transition to digital math tools for students with visual impairments: key skills, resources and issues" at the national Council of Administrators of Special Education conference in Savannah, Georgia, in November 2024.

Polinho Katina (Advanced Manufacturing) was the co-editor of two textbooks: "Cyber Space and Outer Space Security" and "Healthcare Industry 4.0: Computer Vision-Aided Data Analytics."

Bridget Kirkland (Graphic Design) will be chairing the panel "Beyond Boundaries: Exploring Interdisciplinary Teaching" at the Southeastern College Art Conference in Cincinnati, Ohio, in October.

Allison Lane (Communication) worked with the national Public Relations Society of America to establish a student branch of the organization at Upstate. It is only the fifth student chapter of the group in South Carolina.

Rob McCormick (History) won the University of South Carolina Trustees Professorship award for 2025. The award honors faculty who are committed to teaching excellence.

Kristi Miller (Nursing) published the textbook "Informatics and Nursing: Opportunities and Challenges." She also co-authored "Student Perceptions of Nursing School Safety Culture: A Longitudinal Study Using the Modified SON-COSS" in the journal Nurse Educator and "The Academic Nurse Educator Shortage: Recommendations for Policy Makers" in the Journal of Nursing Education.

Ben Montgomery (Biology) co-authored "Students in the Wild: Safety Instruction Practices in Distance-taught Biological Laboratory and Field Classes" in the journal The American Biology Teacher.

Nolan Stolz (Music) authored the chapter "The Origin of Progressive Metal Lyrics in Black Sabbath's Music" in the book "Progressive Rock, Metal, and the Literary Imagination." In March, the Oklahoma City University Symphony Orchestra gave a preview performance of the "26 Gas Stations" movement of his forthcoming Route 66 Suite at the College Music Society's South Central Chapter Conference.

Refika Turgut (Education) co-presented the paper "Exploring Translanguaging in Linguistically Inclusive Computer Science Curricula: Elementary Teachers' Perspectives on Supporting Emergent Multilingual Learners" at the Eastern Educational Research Association.



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Having a Ball

Cameron MacIntosh '22

For **Cameron MacIntosh**, life has always revolved around baseball. It was central to his time at USC Upstate, where he had a record-breaking personal performance in 2022 and set the school record for RBIs in a single game.

But like many athletes, MacIntosh faced a tough transition after his college career ended. Unsure of what his next steps should be, he tried several different jobs. Then a chance meeting in Nashville with former Upstate assistant coach Pat McGuff brought his aspirations into focus. He decided he wanted to coach baseball – not just anywhere, but in Japan.

MacIntosh's interest in the country began in elementary school, where his best friend was a classmate from Japan. Over the years, he developed a deep admiration for the country and its culture. So, after leaving his job, he booked a trip to Japan. The visit solidified his desire to coach there, and upon returning home, he threw himself into learning Japanese and finding a way to make his dream a reality.

In April 2023, he found the perfect opportunity through the JET Program, a well-known exchange initiative that typically hires English teachers. However, there was a rare opening for a sports exchange advisor, a position that allows participants to assist with sports training. MacIntosh now coaches elementary and junior high students on Sado Island, which has allowed him to teach and learn and blend American and Japanese styles of baseball.

MacIntosh credits many coaches for shaping his approach, including former USC Upstate head coach Mike McGuire, current head coach Kane Sweeney, and McGuff, who taught him valuable lessons about competition, connection, and attention to detail. Now, as a coach himself, MacIntosh emphasizes building relationships with his athletes, understanding what motivates them, and adapting his style to each player's needs.

— KC Smurthwaite

Read more of Cameron's story at uscupstate.edu/alumni.

Class Notes

1983



Tim Nicholls has been named executive vice president and president of DS Smith, an International Paper company. He will be based in London.

1998

Brian Bourke had a book published by Routledge in May 2024 titled "Integrating Social Justice into Student Affairs."

2001

Blake Singleton joined Yellowstone Landscape in 2016 as director of North Carolina maintenance operations when Yellowstone expanded to the state. He previously held account, branch, sales, and regional management positions for other landscape firms. Since becoming Yellowstone's mid-Atlantic regional vice president, Blake has led Yellowstone's growth across the region, and now manages branch locations in six states.

2003

Melissa Cunningham Young has been married for 16 years and has three children. She works as a professional wardrobe stylist in Atlanta, Georgia, and beyond.

2006

Trevor Berryhill is married to Kristi Berryhill and they recently celebrated their 13th anniversary. They have two children, 11 and 9 years old. Trevor has been the director of athletics at The Master's Academy for the last seven years. He assists in the baseball program, coaches his son's travel team, and loves watching his daughter play volleyball.

2007



Kehinde Laaro Elisha is CEO and founder of NP Certification Academy, which specializes in teaching board exam reviews. She received her master’s in nursing from South University in 2019, a MSC in informatics from the University of New England, a post-master’s certificate in psychiatry from the University of Cincinnati, and a Doctor of Nursing Practice in nursing informatics. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she started her academy to help students prepare for board exams. The platform has since grown to include mentorship, resources, and practical guidance for aspiring PMHNPs, FNPs, and other health care professionals.

2009



Shannon Coleman got engaged to Harry Austin on Dec. 26, 2024, and they plan to get married on March 28, 2026.

Shakia Bouknight Haynes is director of information technology at Family Health Centers in Orangeburg, South Carolina.

Cassie Beasley Mueller was recently named associate chief nursing officer for Tuomey Hospital in Sumter, South Carolina. She has more than 15 years of experience in nursing care and leadership roles. She previously served as director of nursing in emergency services for Greenville Memorial Hospital in Greenville, South Carolina.

2010

Whitney Chanea Patterson started her own telemedicine practice in November.

Finding Her Calling

Erika Pertell ‘13 uses her degree in English, literature, and creative writing to inspire a passion for reading in the minds of children at High Point Academy in Spartanburg.

While she did not always want to teach, she found her true calling in the classroom. She remembers being inspired by her fourth-grade teacher, and now enjoys helping children become better readers.

Pertell has loved writing since elementary school. She recalls a creative writing assignment in fourth grade that asked students to describe what the future would be like. Pertell enjoyed “the freedom of writing anything I wanted,” and has not stopped since.

In 2016 she was among the finalists for the South Carolina First Novel Prize (now called the South Carolina Novel Series) sponsored by the South Carolina Arts Commission, Hub City Press, the South Carolina State Library and South Carolina Humanities. Pertell was the only woman and only African American named a finalist that year.

Pertell says an English degree is “not just about reading and writing things, but it can lead you to many more possibilities and opportunities.”

In her free time, Pertell enjoys spending her time with her husband and two children.

— Kellie Addie ‘24



2011



Taylor Brown is the owner and digital strategist of Go-To Man Marketing Agency in Spartanburg. He recently received the Small Business Success Award from OneSpartanburg Inc. His company celebrated its 12th anniversary.

Brittany McFadden-Broderick Heyward owns her own business, a travel company called Catch B Travels.

2012

Morgan Thompson Rambert is married with two children, a 10-year-old son and 4-year-old daughter. Within the last year she began a new role working in sales and customer success for the pharmaceutical company Empower Pharmacy. She recently obtained her MBA with a concentration in project management from Louisiana State University Shreveport. Morgan is also a licensed real estate agent in North Carolina and South Carolina, practicing residential sales with an emphasis on assisting first-time homebuyers.

Tony Winters received his master’s in computer science from the Georgia Institute of Technology and now runs a software engineering organization.

2016



Allison Walker Stepp recently received the Rainbow Lake Middle School Teacher of the Year award. She teaches math at the Chesnee, South Carolina, school.

2018

Tiffany Jackson Langster recently accepted a position as a travel nurse.

Shardonne Alicia Simpson is currently working toward a degree in nursing.

2019



Aubriana Thompson Agnew was named teacher of the year at Castle Heights Middle School in Rock Hill, South Carolina. She teaches seventh-grade social studies.



Melodee Carandang Rosopa was named teacher of the year at Calhoun Academy of the Arts. She is a 4K teacher at the Anderson, South Carolina, school.

2020

Julia Jones McElveen married her college sweetheart, **Seth McElveen ‘20** in 2022. They purchased a house in 2023 in Boiling Springs, South Carolina.

Tiffany Newbern Smith was named teacher of the year at Chesnee Middle School. She teaches eighth-grade ELA and math.

2021

Alice Biganzoli is a doctoral student in clinical psychology at Palo Alto University and was matched at her top-choice internship site, the Center for Behavioral Medicine in Kansas City, Missouri, for her final year of graduate training. She is planning to become a forensic psychologist.

2022



Joshua Flack was named the Dorman Freshman Campus Teacher of the Year. He teaches math at the Roebuck, South Carolina, school.



Madison Fox recently received the Spartanburg School District 6 Induction Teacher of the Year, and was one of five state finalists for the award.

Ana Valdez-Beltran married **Dennis Ellington Hall ‘24** in June 2023. Ana is a registered nurse in inpatient oncology at Spartanburg Regional Medical Center.

2023

Delaney Suarez has started a Master of Science in cybersecurity at Georgia Institute of Technology.

Andres Villegas began medical school last fall at the Medical University of South Carolina.

2024

Salleah Brown-Massey started a new job in January as a member service consultant at Family Trust Credit Union.

Anthony Singleton has begun a master’s program in higher education at the University of Arizona. He is also serving as a graduate assistant in the African American Student Affairs office.

Jessica Xayasane is a database engineer with American Credit Acceptance, a job she secured after previously interning with The Johnson Group while a student.

In Memorium

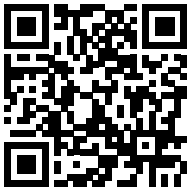
- Laurie Elliott Gregg-Hodge ‘83
- Leigh McCauley Nalley ‘83
- Eva Cecilia Hays ‘89
- Angela Scarboro Angeli ‘91
- James Allen Mabry ‘91
- Rondal Clay Johnson ‘00
- Shawn Marie Obradovich ‘08
- Jennifer B. Elgin ‘09
- Deontay Jayquan Lynch ‘16
- Hailey Madison Venable ‘16
- Telfia Tameka Johnson ‘24

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KLAY PETERSON

Hail to the Chief

When Chief Klay Peterson arrived at USC Upstate 18 years ago, then-Chancellor John Stockwell asked him what he thought of the campus police department. “Honestly, sir, not much,” Peterson says he responded. “But I can change that.”

And change it he has. Peterson’s previous policing experience, at two agencies in California, involved rebuilding departments, and he brought those skills to his current position. USC Upstate is one of only three campus police departments in South Carolina to have achieved national accreditation from the Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies.

Peterson, who is retiring this year, also is known for the entertaining stories he likes to share, not to mention the occasional dad joke. Here he reflects on some career highlights, including a memorable encounter on the slopes with a certain muscular movie star.

Where were you born?

Houston, Texas

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

Professional baseball player

What was your first job?

Gas station attendant (back when that was a thing!)

What’s a talent you wish you had?

I wish I had continued playing the piano.

What’s your favorite way to unwind?

Writing, listening to music, or watching BYU (Brigham Young University) football.

What’s a memorable experience from your career?

When I was the director of public safety at California Lutheran University in Thousand Oaks, California, my department assisted with President Ronald Regan’s interment at the Reagan Library which was just up the hill from our campus. I met a number of celebrities, including Nancy Reagan, Johnny Mathis, Pamela Anderson, Tommy Lee, Tommy Lee Jones, Clint Eastwood and Gary Sinise.

What type of music do you enjoy listening to?

I have an eclectic taste in music, but my two favorite genres are classic rock and sacred music (different ends of the spectrum, right?!)

What’s your favorite vacation place?

Montana

What or who inspires you?

I am inspired by majestic mountains and landscapes, fields of green, beautiful lakes and rivers, colorful sunsets, and the smell of ocean air. The first time I saw Zion National Park in southern Utah, it took my breath away and I literally cried. I was overwhelmed by the beauty, wonder and magic of its creation.

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

I played drums and vocals in a few rock bands when I was a teenager.

What’s the craziest thing you’ve ever done?

I met Arnold Schwarzenegger on a ski slope at Heavenly Valley ski resort in Lake Tahoe and told him it was his lucky day as I wasn’t going to beat him up. We both had a good laugh, and fortunately for me he was a good sport!

What’s your proudest achievement?

At one point in my career, I was the chief of police on a federal Indian reservation. I learned that many young Native Americans longed to have careers in law enforcement, fire service, or emergency medical services. However, due to their entanglement with drugs, alcohol and domestic violence and lack of education, they couldn’t qualify for these positions.

I had a friend and colleague who was in charge of training for the sheriff’s department where I had previously worked, and we came up with an idea to help with this.

We started an abbreviated public safety training academy for middle school and high school aged Native American students who would spend four weeks during the summer at the sheriff’s academy and learn the basic skills needed to qualify for employment in these fields.

The program ran for two years and each summer 50-60 youth from all over the country (including Alaska) participated in the program. Unfortunately, funding ran out and the program ended. However, during those two years we witnessed a new hope and vision for the participants’ futures.

What are your post-retirement plans?

Finish writing my novel and some short stories I’ve been working on, visit grandkids and serve a mission for my church with my wife.

This feature has been edited for length. Find a full version online at up.uscupstate.edu.





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