

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND
PROFESSIONAL STUDIES
VOLUME 17
SPRING 2026

PILLARS



A Journey of
Resilience, Belonging
and Service.

PILLARS

VOLUME 17 | SPRING 2026

PILLARS MAGAZINE is published once a year by the University of South Alabama College of Education and Professional Studies and distributed to alumni and friends.

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Finding Purpose Through the Heart Project

What began as an internship became a powerful confirmation of purpose.

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A South Alum with Statewide Impact

A simple belief has grown into a statewide effort as one South alum helps schools across Alabama address the underlying causes of absenteeism and connect students with the support they need to succeed.

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South Shaped Her, Purpose Guides Her

Two bells mark survival and new beginnings as a South graduate transforms pain into purpose, guiding others toward mental, physical and spiritual well-being.

Page 9 | From music to movement science, Genevieve Batman's journey is driven by a passion to understand how the body performs and heals.

"This bold, intentional leadership is positively shaping our classrooms and strengthening our communities."

— ANGELA T. BARLOW, PH.D.

From Vision to Action

Picture it — July 2023. I am three days away from traveling to Mobile, Alabama, to interview for the role of dean of the College of Education and Professional Studies at the University of South Alabama. My outfits are selected and my presentation is ready, except for one thing — I need a motto. Something that not only describes me but also captures a vision for the future. I am drawing a blank. Then I write on a small piece of paper: "Leading today. Impacting tomorrow."

Looking back, I am not entirely sure how those words came to me. I sat with them for 24 hours and finally thought, "Well, I am now two days away from interviewing, so I will trust these words!" And now here we are, two and a half years later. What began as a personal motto and vision has come to define the very essence of this College. Our faculty, staff, students and alumni are leaders. We see leadership as not a passive goal but rather an active practice in the present. Our faculty bring expertise from more than 30 colleges and universities across the nation, strengthening every classroom at the University of South Alabama. You will see this story reflected throughout this issue, including in the snapshot of where our faculty earned their degrees. This bold, intentional leadership is positively shaping our classrooms and strengthening our communities.

Leading Today is our commitment.

As I reflect on the previous year, there are countless examples of our faculty, staff, students and alumni leading, many of which are captured in this issue of Pillars. One key example, though, is through the launch of our new Doctor of Education in Teacher Education. This program is not merely an academic milestone; it is a deliberate response to the needs of our state. Designed for literacy specialists, mathematics coaches and secondary instructional coaches, this program will cultivate a new generation of teacher educators and professional development providers — the individuals who will support and teach classroom teachers. In essence, this program is a strategic investment in teacher workforce development, ensuring that our schools are led by highly skilled professionals who are equipped to thrive in the classroom. We will welcome our first cohort of students in the 2026 fall semester.



Impacting Tomorrow is our legacy.

While our new doctoral program looks toward the horizon, I also want to pause and celebrate a historic milestone that honors our past: This academic year, the College of Education and Professional Studies awarded its 25,000th degree. If leadership is measured by the people we serve, this number represents a legacy of staggering proportions. Our graduates are leaders who serve our communities as teachers, counselors, administrators, specialists and more. If each of them impacts just 100 lives over the course of their career, our College's reach extends to millions of individuals. That is the true definition of impacting tomorrow — a persistent, growing wave of influence that begins right here on our campus.

Our momentum continues to build as the University launches its capital campaign, which identifies a new, state-of-the-art building for our College as a campaign priority. This facility will feature collaborative spaces and technology-rich learning environments, ensuring that our graduates are even better prepared to step into their careers and truly impact tomorrow.

Thank you for being part of our legacy. Together, we engage in the vital work of leading today so that we may continue impacting tomorrow.

In partnership and progress,

Angela T. Barlow, Ph.D.
Dean, College of Education and Professional Studies
University of South Alabama



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by the

NUMBERS

Student Focus



FROM

34

STATES
AND

29

COUNTRIES

College of Education and
Professional Studies students
2024-2025



207

LARGEST
FRESHMAN
CLASS EVER



20

UNDERGRADUATE
MAJORS



74

SCHOLARSHIPS

STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS

- Alpha Sigma Lambda Honor Society
- Chi Sigma Iota Counseling Academic and Professional Honor Society International
- Clinical and Counseling Psychology Graduate Student Organization
- Eta Sigma Delta International Honor Society for Hospitality and Tourism Students
- Exercise Science Club
- Health and Physical Education Majors Club
- Hospitality Club
- Instructional Design and Development Graduate Association
- Jaguar Sport Management and Administration Club
- Kappa Delta Pi National Professional Association and Honor Society for Educators
- Recreational Therapy Association
- Student Alabama Education Association



1,729

STUDENTS
ENROLLED
FALL 2025



27

STUDY ABROAD
PARTICIPANTS



\$188K

SCHOLARSHIPS
TOTAL



507

INTERNSHIPS
COMPLETED

3%

INCREASE IN
UNDERGRADUATES
2024 TO 2025



5

UNDERGRADUATE
MINORS



49

GRADUATE
PROGRAMS



4

ED.D. / PH.D.
PROGRAMS



13

ONLINE
PROGRAMS

74

GRADUATE

4

PH.D.



The college experience is about so much more than what happens in the classroom.

>> LEARN MORE

SouthAlabama.edu/CEPSNews

MOMENTS THAT BROUGHT US TOGETHER



Gia Almuna Carreno, a secondary education student and an EPIC Ambassador, enjoys the Homecoming tailgate with her mom and sister — one of many moments that connect our Jaguar community.

Building a community where students feel connected, supported and proud to be part of something bigger helps create opportunities for success. For everything from friendly competitions and hands-on creative sessions to service projects, our students showed up for one another and for our community. They celebrated big wins, formed new friendships and found their place here. Let's look back at a few of the moments that made this year feel special.

First Place for USA Quiz Bowl Team

A team of students from the Department of Health, Kinesiology and Sport brought home first place in the Quiz Bowl at the Southeast Chapter of the American College of Sports Medicine Annual Meeting, earning their spot at the national competition in Atlanta. In a tense final round, Parker Day, Connor Roden and Ann Marie Kight, with alternate Brody Caver, clinched the victory with the only correct answer — catapulting them from fifth place to first.



Paws and Paint: Where Future Educators Connect

Offering a relaxed, creative space for lighthearted mingling, the Paws and Paint Social has quickly become a favorite annual event in the Department of Leadership and Teacher Education. Now in its second year, the event invited teacher education majors to spend the afternoon painting their own wooden jaguar paw-shaped door hanger while connecting with fellow students and faculty and strengthening their sense of community.



PASSAGE USA Cornhole Tournament: A Fun Way to Give Back

PASSAGE USA (Preparing All Students Socially and Academically for Gainful Employment) hosted a cornhole tournament to raise funds for the Gaillard-Neville Reynolds Scholarships, which support students in the program for students with intellectual disabilities. It was a fun-filled event, and our students had a great time tossing bags for a worthy cause!

Graduate Student Appreciation Week

During Graduate Student Appreciation Week in April, we celebrated the graduate students who are already shaping the future of their fields. The week's events offered treats, encouragement and recognition for the hard work and dedication they bring to their teaching, research and service.

Conversations That Count: Shaping Careers Through Research

The Department of Integrative Studies hosted its annual Capstone Conversations, an evening of bold ideas, student research and real-world reflection. The event celebrated student achievement and gave students a platform to share what they had learned and how they expected it to shape their futures. Attendees heard from two engaging panels on internships and student theses.

Therapy in Action: Seated Volleyball Tournament a Success

The court came alive during the Seated Volleyball Tournament, where 48 students faced off in a single-elimination battle for the title of Grounded Glory Champions. More than 70 students watched and cheered as 15 future recreational therapists from the Department of Health, Kinesiology and Sport masterfully turned a class project into a powerful collision of sport and purpose.

Celebrating *Change*

Meet This Year's Honorees

Each year, we recognize students whose dedication, passion and perseverance rise above the rest. Across our programs, from counseling and instructional sciences to health, kinesiology and sport, and from hospitality and tourism management to integrative studies, leadership and teacher education, these honorees reflect the heart of our mission and the spirit of a Jaguar.

They lead with integrity, serve with purpose and lift their communities through their work. Their achievements shine in classrooms, labs and field experiences across the College. We are proud to celebrate the students whose commitment and hard work stood out this year.

Brady Denson, Outstanding PASSAGE USA Student of the Year; Victoria Dixon, Counseling and Clinical Psychology Ph.D. Psychotherapy Award; Paige Henry, Outstanding PASSAGE USA Peer Mentor of the Year; Adrian Brantley, Outstanding Global Leadership Student of the Year



Our Future Makers



2025 Undergraduate Awards

Health, Kinesiology and Sport

Taylor Atkinson, Outstanding Health and Physical Education Undergraduate Student of the Year

Molly Kate Atkins, Outstanding Health Promotion Undergraduate Student of the Year

Elleigh Layton, Outstanding Recreational Therapy Undergraduate Student of the Year

Morgan Wormely, Outstanding Exercise Science Undergraduate Student of the Year

Sasha Willems, Outstanding Sport and Recreation Management Undergraduate Student of the Year

Hospitality and Tourism Management

Adrian Brantley, Outstanding Global Leadership Student of the Year

Chloe Knippers, Outstanding Events Marketing and Management Student of the Year

Integrative Studies

Wayne Biggs, Outstanding Organizational Leadership Student of the Year

Alice Nolen, Outstanding Interdisciplinary Studies Student of the Year

Leadership and Teacher Education

Alyssa Cooper, Outstanding K-6 Teacher Education Student Teacher of the Year

Alexis Collins, Outstanding K-6 Teacher Education Undergraduate Student of the Year

Brady Denson, Outstanding PASSAGE USA Student of the Year

Sara Hollingsworth, Outstanding Early Childhood Studies Undergraduate Student of the Year

Paige Henry, Outstanding PASSAGE USA Peer Mentor of the Year

Alyssa Sbertoli, Outstanding Special Education 6-12 Undergraduate Student of the Year

2025 Graduate Awards

Counseling and Instructional Sciences

Marwa Alafoo, Dr. Chandru Hiremath Memorial Award Instructional Design and Development Ph.D. Student of the Year

Niasha Bendolph, Outstanding Educational Media-Library (M.Ed.) Graduate Student of the Year

Urvashi Dixit, Counseling and Clinical Psychology Ph.D. Research Award

Victoria Dixon, Counseling and Clinical Psychology Ph.D. Psychotherapy Award

Kimberly Graves, Outstanding Educational Media and Technology (M.S.) Graduate Student of the Year

Sa'Mya Jones, Outstanding Clinical Mental Health Counseling (M.S.) Graduate Student of the Year

Katherine Springer, Dr. John E. Morrow, Sr. Memorial Award Instructional Design and Development Master's Student of the Year

Rita Treutel, Outstanding School Counseling (M.Ed.) Graduate Student of the Year

Health, Kinesiology and Sport

Payton Benoit, Outstanding Exercise Science Graduate Student of the Year

Ornella Arrizon Sacre, Outstanding Health Promotion Graduate Student of the Year

Julia Smiley, Outstanding Sport Management Graduate of the Year

Leadership and Teacher Education

Elizabeth Bordeaux, Outstanding Higher Education Leadership Master's Student of the Year

Jessica Cassidy, Outstanding Special Education Graduate of the Year

Bobbie Ducksworth, Outstanding Elementary/Early Childhood Education Graduate Intern of the Year

Rachel Garbe, Outstanding Secondary Education Student Teacher of the Year

Kenya Lewis, Outstanding Elementary/Early Childhood Education Graduate of the Year

Jeannie Vaughn, Outstanding Secondary Education Student of the Year

MOVING THROUGH



GENEVIEVE BATMAN'S JOURNEY FROM ELITE CELLO PERFORMANCE TO EXERCISE SCIENCE HAS OPENED A NEW PATH TOWARD UNDERSTANDING AND PROTECTING THE BODIES OF PERFORMING ARTISTS.

MUSIC

BY TERI GREENE

By the time she was 15, Genevieve Batman had performed at Carnegie Hall, toured Italy with a youth orchestra and won national competitions as a cellist. Music had always been her direction, the through line from childhood into what she believed would become a profession. Her practice schedule reflected that ambition: unrelenting, disciplined and ultimately unsustainable, leading to severe wrist and shoulder injuries that curtailed her musical aspirations and left her searching for answers.

In time, that search led to a different calling.

"I didn't know what was happening to my body," she said. "I couldn't get an answer from anyone, and no one knew my instrument well enough even to explain it."

What began as frustration slowly revealed a gap she hadn't known existed: Performing artists, even at the highest levels, often lack access to informed, evidence-based medical care. For Batman, who had always felt drawn to science, that gap became a direction.

Now a senior at South, Batman is earning dual degrees in exercise science and interdisciplinary studies with plans to pursue a dual Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine/Doctor of Philosophy in structural anatomy and rehabilitative sciences. She wants to understand how and why injuries happen in musicians, dancers and marching performers and then address those problems, helping to build a field that does not yet entirely exist.

The past year has included its share of pivots. A long-running physiology project reached a natural stopping point when the data proved inconclusive — a common outcome during scientific research. Rather than slow her down, the experience sharpened her focus on the project she has been conceptualizing for years.

That project is rooted in her time performing with Drum Corps International (DCI), a competitive marching arts circuit she knows intimately. Typically, DCI performers complete a four-week spring training period before beginning a six- to eight-week national tour; practices can last from nine to 12 hours a day.

Throughout the summer season, performers experience extreme physical demands, often without the resources to manage their injuries, in a culture where it's common to keep injuries hidden for fear of missing the chance to perform. "There's inadequate medical care for these performers," Batman said. "People lose a lot of weight, dangerously so, but we don't have any data." She has seen indicators

consistent with RED-S — relative energy deficiency in sport — a condition that can affect hormonal function, bone density and overall health when energy intake (in the form of food) falls short of energy expenditure.

"No one has ever measured what's happening physiologically in Drum Corps," she said.

Her goal is to conduct the first systematic look at body composition and health metrics over the course of a full season. Early planning with the organization's health teams has begun. The logistics are complex, but the intent is firm. Batman's experiences outside the lab have broadened her perspective. Working under supervision with the USA cheer team, she assists during practices and observes injury patterns in a high-velocity performance environment. As an EMT, she brings medical training to the role.

**"I didn't know what was happening to my body.
I couldn't get an answer from anyone, and no one
knew my instrument well enough even to explain it."**

— Genevieve Batman

"Injuries in cheer are a lot like what you see in dance or Broadway," she said. "It's very close to the population I want to work with, and I've learned a lot."

Through all of this, she continues to play cello, performing at weddings, restaurants and University events. She teaches cello lessons and mentors students through the local youth orchestra.

"I still play a lot," she said. "Not as much as in high school, but I enjoy it more now."

The uncertainty of today's scientific landscape makes long-term planning difficult, but Batman remains driven. She wants young performers to have the care she didn't know how to access, an approach that understands their instruments, their movement patterns and the psychological toll of losing an identity built on performance.

"It's so common," she said. "You get injured, and suddenly you feel like you should have known better, like it's your fault. I want to change that."

Why I chose South

Choosing South,
Creating My Path



Laila Lang
K-6 Education
Sophomore

Why did you choose South?

I chose South Alabama because it feels like we are all one big, diverse family where faculty and staff genuinely care about students' success. Even though I am from Mobile and only live 15 minutes away, living on campus provided me with a sense of independence. It allowed me to not only attend classes but also attend events, meet new people and become involved on campus. Through this experience, I have come to see South as more than just my hometown. It's a supportive community where I've connected not only with people from Mobile but also with students from outside the area and international students.

What's your favorite part about being a student at South?

The diversity makes me be a proud South student when I know that I have a college that's not just academically inclined, but also inclined toward helping their students with programs like the Jag Pantry. They also have a clothing closet for job interviews.

What would you say to someone considering going to South?

Here at South, we try to include everybody for everything. We have so many organizations, so many clubs, because we want everyone to feel like this is their home

no matter where you come from, no matter your skin color, no matter anything — you're at home. I want people to know that South is a really good choice. It's not just academics, which I know we come to college for — you come to get your degree. But while you're getting your degree, you will have a sense of home. Even if you're not from Mobile, you'll be able to feel like "I have someone I can talk to."



Trenton Sullivan
Sport Management
& Recreation Studies
Junior

Why did you choose South?

After graduating from Coastal Alabama Community College with my associate degree, I was searching for a good college nearby to get my bachelor's. South Alabama was affordable and provided a supportive community that has given me many friendships.

What does it mean to be a student at South?

Since sixth grade, I've known I wanted to go to college to make something of myself and be someone others could look up to. Since then, I've made sure to always do my best. Due to my disability, I was not able to get my high school diploma right away, but I didn't give up. I worked for over seven years to earn my GED. Then I worked to get my associate degree at Coastal Alabama. I am now working toward my bachelor's degree at South.

I work with the football team and want to work for the NFL once I graduate. Being a student at South means making my family extremely proud and achieving my goals.

How has South supported you?

They supported my decisions. They supported me a lot in every way. Professors and advisers helped me through it. They didn't give up on me one bit. They wanted me to get tutoring. They helped me make up work. They gave me tutoring advice. They helped me with my academics. They gave me a lot of confidence. Confidence to be myself. Confidence not to give up, not to be a failure or give in. They always pushed me to try and strive for my best.

What would you say to someone who is considering South?

It's not too late. No matter your age, ability, race or background, South is always open to you. You are always welcome. I hope I can be an example to my family and also my friends with disabilities, some of whom could not attend college, that you should never give up!



Caroline Clem
PASSAGE USA
Sophomore

Why did you choose South?

South has provided me with an opportunity to live independently and build important life skills. Learning to navigate campus

and figure out where everything is has helped me gain confidence and independence. South also offers courses that focus on independence. I have learned how to take care of a home, cook for myself, use appliances, clean and budget. I have also gained work experience through semester positions set up by South. I've worked in four different positions so far. I've chosen South because it prepares me for the future.

How has South supported you in achieving your goals?

Something I love about South is getting to pick my own schedule because it lets me explore the classes I enjoy most, like science and art. I'm an artist, so taking visual art and ceramics courses let me study what I'm interested in. I tried joining the esports team after learning about it on Discord because it was something I loved in high school. I would suggest that all students get involved in something fun or join a club that matches their hobbies or interests. It is a great way to make friends and get to know campus better.

How does having a mentor help you?

Having a mentor is a great experience! College can be a lot when you're independent for the first time. Mentors make the college experience better by helping with assignments, showing me how to get around campus and answering any questions I have. I enjoy hanging out with them and playing games like Uno, which is always fun.

FINDING PURPOSE THROUGH THE HEART PROJECT

BY TIFFANY DAWKINS



When J'amie Renee Simpson began her internship with the USA HEART Project, she didn't expect just how deeply the experience would confirm her calling.

Long before she arrived at South, Simpson had spent more than a decade walking alongside people in their most vulnerable moments. As a midwife, she delivered babies, supported families and cared for trauma survivors with a steady, compassionate presence. By the time she came to the University of South Alabama, she knew she wanted to channel that same commitment into the field of mental health.

She found that opportunity in the HEART Project, a program jointly administered by the College of Nursing and the College of Education and Professional Studies that supports survivors of sexual assault, gender-based discrimination and trauma. Its focus on empowerment and recovery felt like a natural extension of the work she had always been called to do. The program is funded at present through a cooperative agreement from the Department of Justice's Office of Violence Against Women.

As an adult learner returning to college with a significant number of previously earned credits, Simpson needed a program that met her where she was. The fully online undergraduate degree in interdisciplinary studies in the College of Education and Professional Studies — with an emphasis in science and a minor in psychology — offered the flexibility and academic fit she needed to move forward without starting over.

For Simpson, the program's adaptability extended beyond coursework. She saw her internship as the point where her lived experience and professional goals came together. "I didn't know much about the HEART Project," she said, "but I knew I wanted to work with Dr. Candice Selwyn and Dr. Trés Stefurak. Their passion and commitment made me want to be part of the team."

During her two-semester internship, Simpson poured herself into the work. She assisted with research, helped organize fundraisers, supported advocacy efforts and volunteered alongside community partners. She sat in on cases at child advocacy centers and worked with the Domestic Violence Task Force for Mobile County. She collaborated with organizations such as the Rape Crisis Center and Prism United. She also worked directly with campus housing to help ensure that students who experienced trauma had safe places to go.

"They get you fully involved," Simpson said. "They ask, 'How would you approach this? What would you do?' They let you learn, think and lead."

That level of mentorship from Stefurak, associate dean in the College of Education and Professional Studies, and Selwyn, research associate professor in the College of Nursing (who jointly serve as principal investigators of the grant that funds the HEART Project), left a lasting imprint on Simpson.

"Working with them encouraged me every step of the way. I saw the difference the HEART Project made for our students, for the University and for the city of Mobile. I wanted to be part of that."

Simpson called her time with the HEART Project transformational. "It made me a stronger person personally and professionally," she said. "It gave me confidence I didn't know I needed." The hands-on experience, combined with the depth of mentorship she received, helped her earn acceptance to Loyola University in New Orleans. Simpson is pursuing a master's degree in clinical mental health counseling with a focus on trauma. She plans to work with survivors of sex trafficking, domestic violence and childhood trauma.

"You can't erase trauma," Simpson said. "But you can help people learn their triggers, work through them and find some quality of life again."

"It boosted my confidence and my résumé, but more than that, it reminded me why this work matters."

— J'AMIE RENEE SIMPSON

Among the many moments she carries with her, one stands out: helping Penelope House, an organization that aids victims of intimate partner violence, secure recognition for a statewide Domestic Violence Awareness Day. "Knowing we helped bring attention to something that affects people of every age meant everything."

For Simpson, the most rewarding part of her internship wasn't a single experience but rather the people. "Every conversation, every challenge, every success, I'll use it for the rest of my life," she said. "There is nothing the HEART Project did that didn't benefit me."

Simpson encourages any student considering an internship with the project to take the leap. "It gives you so many avenues to learn who you are and what kind of professional you want to be," she said. "It boosted my confidence and my résumé, but more than that, it reminded me why this work matters."

Looking back, she offers simple advice to anyone following a similar path: "Just listen. Listen to your mentors. Watch. Learn. Be respectful. Take care of yourself. And remember why you're doing the work, because someone out there needs hope, support and guidance."

For Simpson, her purpose is clear. "At the end of the day, somebody has to show up for victims," she said. "And I will."

"The funding helped purchase equipment that enables students with physical limitations to utilize the recreation center they are paying for in their tuition."

— BRODY CAVER

Through service, collaboration and a commitment to listening first, two student senators transformed ideas into action, strengthening access, equity and engagement across the College.

Brody Caver and Kyla Carpenter, 2024-2025 Student Government Association senators, sponsored legislation and led initiatives that made a difference to students and the College.

Exercise science major Caver said he was inspired to run for his position after discovering the impact he could have on fellow students. K-6 elementary education major Carpenter said she wanted to give back to the College that had poured so much into her.

They served as voices for the student body and liaisons among University leaders, faculty and staff. Their goal was simple: Listen first, then act.

"I love bringing students' ideas to life and being able to support them," Carpenter said. "I get to collaborate with other student groups, as well as faculty, and celebrate the greatest University."

Throughout the year, she and Caver worked to pass multiple bills, including those providing funding for accessible exercise equipment at the Student Recreation Center, outdoor classroom supplies and Praxis materials for education majors. Many of these needs were identified through events such as the Pi Day meet and greet, which encouraged student feedback and interaction.

One of their most impactful initiatives was partnering with the Center for Educational Accessibility and Disability Resources to fund and install accessible workout equipment in the Recreation Center.

"I am most proud of our work in the fall semester," Caver said. "The funding helped purchase equipment that enables students with physical limitations to utilize the recreation center they are paying for in their tuition."

The senators also collaborated with the College dean, Dr. Angela Barlow, and others in College leadership to support outdoor classroom supplies for both the Health, Kinesiology and Sport Building and the University Commons building. They worked closely with faculty, staff and SGA advisers.

This experience reshaped their understanding of leadership and service. Caver will return to South after being accepted into the Occupational Therapy Doctorate Program. Carpenter plans to become a first-grade teacher and later pursue her master's degree in elementary education.

"My college experience would be nothing without SGA," Carpenter said. "I have gained skills to use in my career, and I have made lifelong friendships I never would have dreamed of having."

VOI



BY TESS WARREN

CESTHAT LEAD





“I’VE GROWN IN WAYS I
NEVER THOUGHT I WOULD.
I’VE LEARNED I’M MORE
THAN JUST AN ATHLETE.”

— BROOKLYNN BOCKHAUS

Beyond the Game

Refined Through Adversity

BY KERRY COHEN

From the outside, being a Division I student-athlete can look like a straight line of success. But for Brooklynn Bockhaus, a University of South Alabama softball player, the journey has been anything but linear. That is where her leadership was formed.

Raised in Houghton, Louisiana, the only girl among four siblings, she found that competition shaped her life early. Softball quickly became central to her identity. By the time she arrived at South, she had set records, had traveled nationally and carried the confidence of someone used to standing out.

"My identity growing up was in my sport," Bockhaus said.

College, however, brought a reckoning.

Her freshman year as a student-athlete majoring in exercise science in the College of Education and Professional Studies challenged everything she believed about herself. Though she earned opportunities on the softball field, performance did not follow effort. Confidence slipped, and frustration grew.

"I was working so hard, and it felt like nothing was going my way," she said. "My sport quickly failed me. I didn't know what else to do."

Like many student-athletes, she tied her worth to performance, only to discover how fragile that foundation could be. That season of adversity became a turning point.

Feeling defeated and unsure how to move forward, Bockhaus turned to South's Campus Outreach and the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. There, she found space to reflect, ask hard questions and begin separating her identity from performance. Surrounded by other student-athletes navigating similar pressures, she began to understand that her identity extended beyond her sport.

"I started to believe that my identity is in the Lord and not in my sport," Bockhaus said.

Those conversations became a foundation for her personal growth and the way she now supports others. The lessons were not instant, but they were lasting. Over time, frustration gave way to perspective. Anxiety coalesced into purpose. She stepped fully into her leadership.

"When I stopped letting softball decide my worth, everything changed," she said.

The relationship she built with Becky Clark, head softball coach, also played a significant role in her journey. Known for her open-door approach, Clark made space for conversations that went beyond softball. Whether navigating setbacks or simply needing support, Bockhaus found a coach focused not only on performance but also on preparing her athletes for life beyond the field.

Through softball team community service opportunities, Bockhaus connected what she learned in the exercise science classroom with compassion in the community. The team's strong commitment to service also helped to shape her desire to pursue a career supporting children through difficult times.

"I've grown in ways I never thought I would," she said. "I've learned I'm more than just an athlete."

Now a senior, Bockhaus carries those lessons forward as a leader among her peers. Through mentoring and peer conversations, she helps other student-athletes navigate the same pressures she once faced.

"I want other student-athletes to know they're not alone," she said. "If I can help someone avoid the spiral I went through, that matters."

As she prepares for graduation in May and looks ahead, she said, "The game shaped me, but it doesn't define me."

Called to Care

HOW ONE INTERNSHIP OPENED THE DOOR TO HOPE

BY KERRY COHEN

Mandeville, Louisiana, native Andrew Moore found more than just a degree in the Clinical Mental Health Counseling master's program in the College of Education and Professional Studies. He also found unwavering support and a path to impact the behavioral health field.

As Moore began his two-year master's journey, he knew he wanted to make the best use of his time in the program. His goal was to pursue a Ph.D. in counseling or clinical psychology immediately after graduation. He wanted to strengthen behavioral health.

"Some of the happiest people I knew were actually the ones who needed the most support," Moore said. "I wanted a career in behavioral health where I could help people move beyond the masks they wear and make a meaningful impact in my community."

The Power of Mentorship

Achieving this objective required focused work. Moore credits exceptional guidance from his professors. With the help of Dr. Yvette Getch, professor of counseling psychology and coordinator of the graduate counseling programs for clinical mental health and school counseling, and Dr. Trés Stefurak, associate dean and professor of counseling psychology, Moore successfully embarked on completing his master's thesis.

"At times, I felt as if I was doing too much or I was in over my head," Moore recalled. "But these professors never stopped helping me along the way."

Their support extended far beyond the thesis. They continue to encourage and guide him as he navigates each step of the competitive doctoral program application process.

Invaluable Experience: A Commitment to Service at Victory Health Partners

Moore's spirit of service found a perfect home during his master's clinical internship

at Victory Health Partners, a medical nonprofit in Mobile, Alabama, dedicated to providing healthcare to adult patients without health insurance.

During his year at Victory Health, Moore thrived under the mentorship of the late Jason Byrum, a licensed marriage and family therapist. "He allowed me to develop my skills and confidence in myself in an environment that has done nothing but supported me the entire way," Moore said.

Moore's hands-on experience was wide-ranging, from individual and couples counseling to treatment planning and patient advocacy. Many of the people he served would have gone without mental health support because they lacked insurance, which deepened his sense of purpose. The clinic's integrated approach, where medical and mental health providers worked side by side, offered his most profound lesson.

He saw firsthand how social and economic challenges shape a patient's overall well-being. The experience gave him a clearer understanding of people's complex needs and affirmed his commitment to his career path.

He said a quote attributed to Winston Churchill summed up the profound impact of his internship: "We make a living by what we get, but we make a life by what we give."

Now practicing as a provisional licensed professional counselor in Long Beach, Mississippi, Moore primarily serves veterans through the nearby Biloxi VA Medical Center. While supporting clients with a wide range of needs, Moore also is working on research for his doctoral program alongside Getch, his former teacher and mentor at South — pursuing that dream of giving back to the profession that he loves and that can help make so many lives better.

"Some of the happiest people I knew were actually the ones who needed the most support."

— ANDREW MOORE

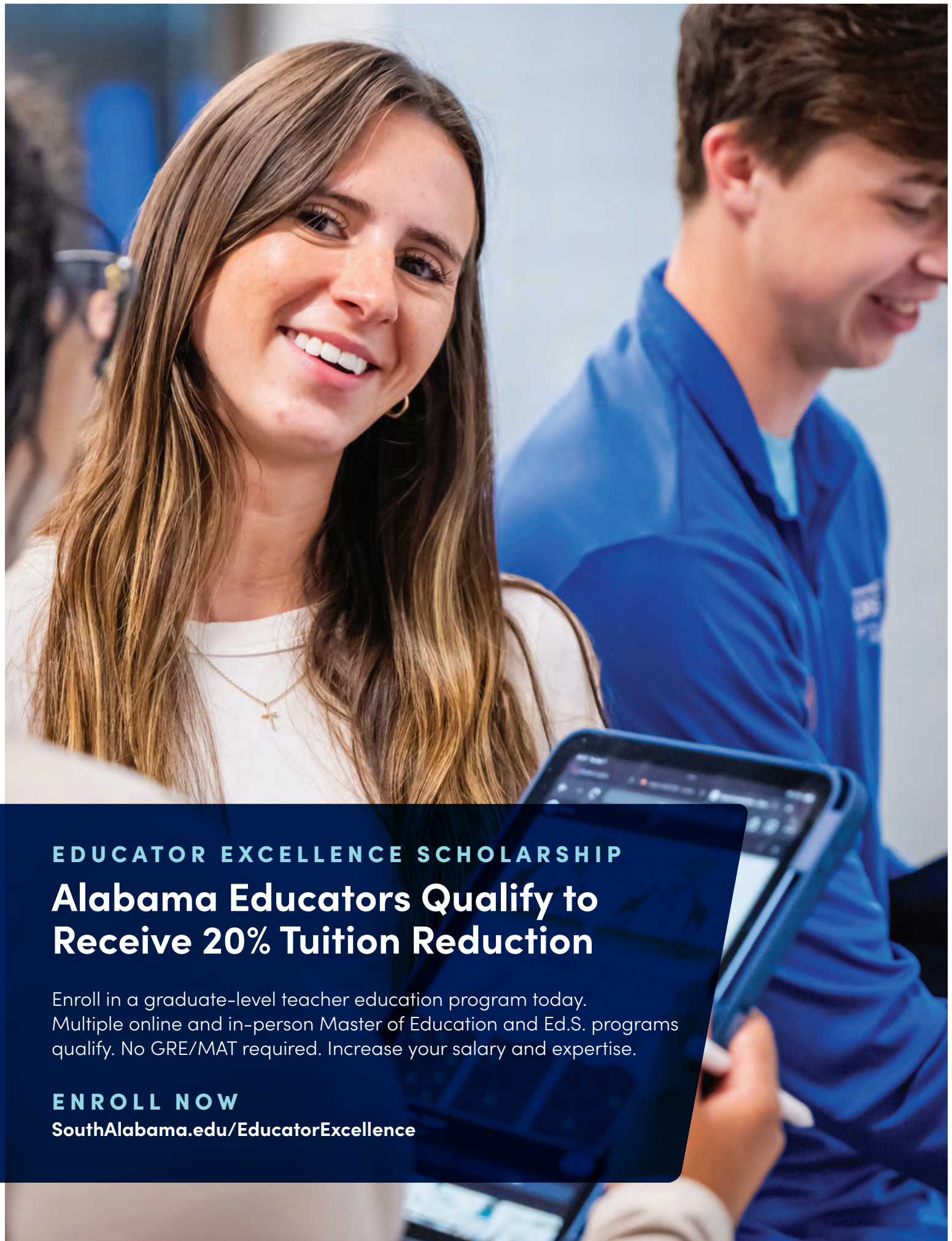




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THE POWER OF *Partnership*



For the University of South Alabama's College of Education and Professional Studies, collaboration with David Clark, president and CEO of Visit Mobile, has played an important role in connecting students with career pathways.

That partnership was evident during the Visit Mobile Job Fair, held in April 2025 at the USA Student Center Ballroom.

Visit Mobile, a public-private partnership, promotes the city of Mobile as a tourism and meeting destination. At the job fair, employers and students connected over full-time

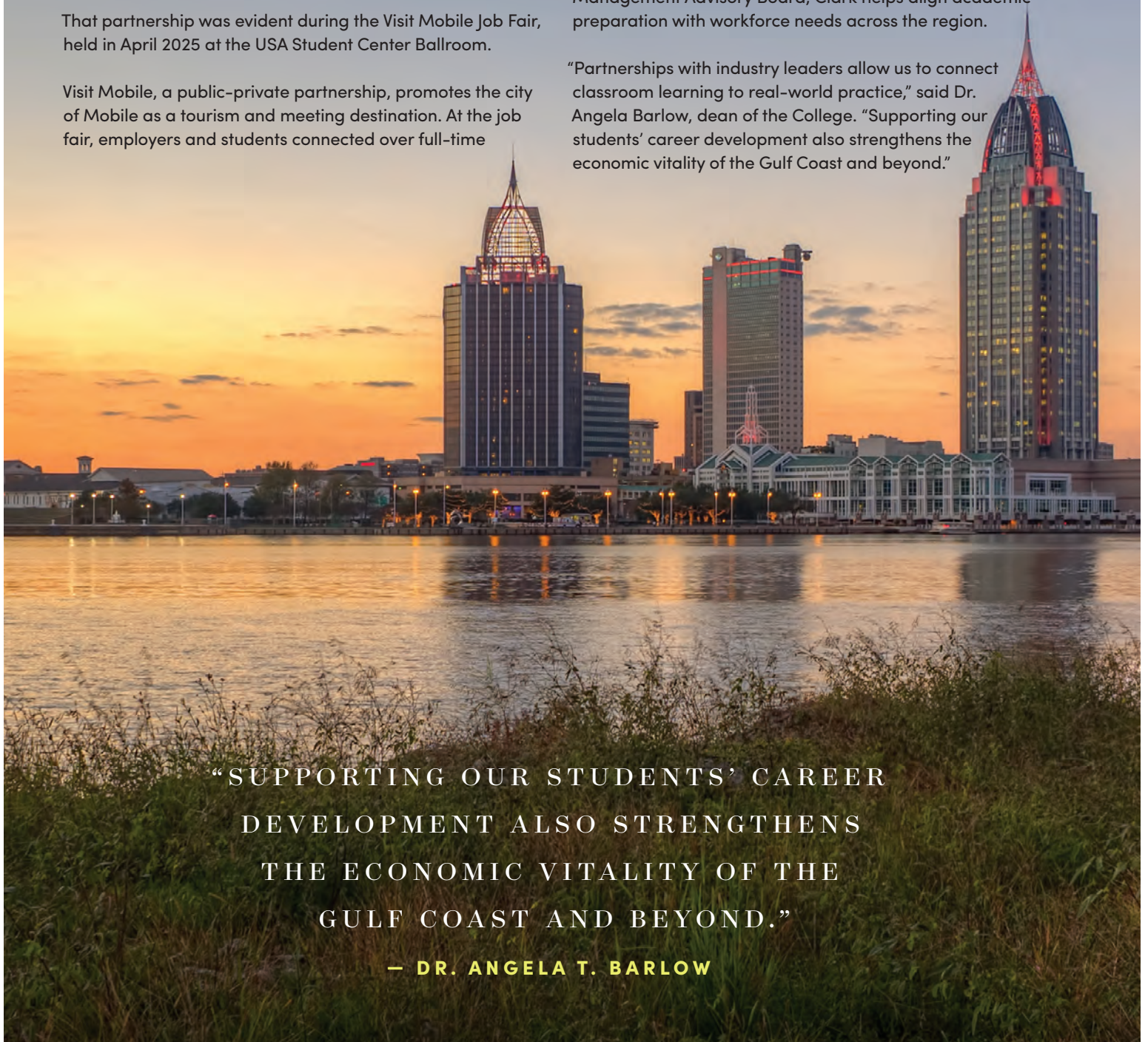
and part-time jobs, internships and seasonal work across hospitality and tourism. For many students, it served as a first contact with employers eager to hire emerging talent.

Industry and community partnerships also link students to scholarship opportunities. Through his service on the College Advisory Council and the Hospitality and Tourism Management Advisory Board, Clark helps align academic preparation with workforce needs across the region.

"Partnerships with industry leaders allow us to connect classroom learning to real-world practice," said Dr. Angela Barlow, dean of the College. "Supporting our students' career development also strengthens the economic vitality of the Gulf Coast and beyond."

"SUPPORTING OUR STUDENTS' CAREER
DEVELOPMENT ALSO STRENGTHENS
THE ECONOMIC VITALITY OF THE
GULF COAST AND BEYOND."

— DR. ANGELA T. BARLOW





South Goes the Extra Yard

SUPPORTING LOCAL GULF COAST CLASSROOMS

As the familiar excitement of South's football season ramped up, that same energy found its way into classrooms through the annual College Football Playoff Foundation Extra Yard for Teachers Week. During September, University of South Alabama Athletics teamed up with the College of Education and Professional Studies to support and celebrate educators across the Gulf Coast.

The week kicked off with a "Big Reveal" pep rally at Indian Springs Elementary School in Prichard. Excited laughter and the steps of small feet echoed throughout the gym as 265 students and their teachers streamed in. They were greeted with a tunnel of high-fives from South Alabama football players and the cheer team. The atmosphere shifted when the Jaguar Pep Band struck its first note, sending cheers bouncing off the walls. Giggles and wide-eyed reactions filled the gym as University mascot SouthPaw delivered hugs and high-fives.

Then came the reveal. Dr. Angela Barlow, dean of the College of Education and Professional Studies, presented Principal Jameson Branch with a \$1,000 check for school projects.

She then surprised Speech Therapist Kaliyah Benning with a \$100 gift card for school supplies.

For Branch, the moment carried special meaning. A double South graduate with degrees in secondary education (English language arts), he stood in the gym where his students cheered and remembered his own days as a member of South's inaugural Jaguar Marching Band. "It feels great to feel the support and for our students to see community members taking an interest in their education," Branch said. "We'll use these funds for the creative projects our teachers want to do."

"Partnering with our community's educators is at the heart of our mission," Barlow said. "Extra Yard for Teachers Week is a powerful way to show our appreciation for the tireless work of educators like Ms. Benning and leaders like Principal Branch, who are truly leading today and impacting tomorrow."

In addition to the donation, the College provided classroom essentials from the school's wish list, including composition notebooks, binders and other basic supplies, and plenty of Jaguar swag for students and teachers.

South Alabama Athletics played a key role in ensuring the celebration reached as many educators as possible. "Great teachers change lives," said Cori Scherbring, assistant athletic director for fan engagement.

"We are thrilled to give back in a way that helps teachers succeed in the classroom."

The week's momentum carried into the Jaguars home game versus Coastal Carolina, where the collaboration among Athletics, the College, the Sun Belt Conference and the foundation came together on a big stage. Through this partnership, teacher wish lists across the Gulf Coast were fulfilled with a total of \$7,600 in supplies. From the educators who registered at the game, 27 were selected to receive Amazon Wish List fulfillments valued at \$1,000, \$500 or \$200.

Extra Yard for Teachers Week offered more than a moment of celebration. It created an opportunity to support educators and students directly in their classrooms, giving them the kind of backing that inspires teachers, empowers learning and strengthens the future of the Gulf Coast.

\$7,600

CLASSROOM SUPPLIES DELIVERED

27

TEACHER WISH LISTS FULFILLED

265

**STUDENTS IN OUR KICKOFF
CELEBRATION**

\$1,000

**DIRECT SUPPORT FOR INDIAN
SPRINGS ELEMENTARY**

A collaboration among South Athletics,
the College of Education and Professional Studies
and community partners



Student Leadership in Action

The Education and Professional Studies Impact Crew (EPIC) is a leadership ambassador program for students who are passionate about serving the University of South Alabama, Flagship of the Gulf Coast, and the College of Education and Professional Studies.

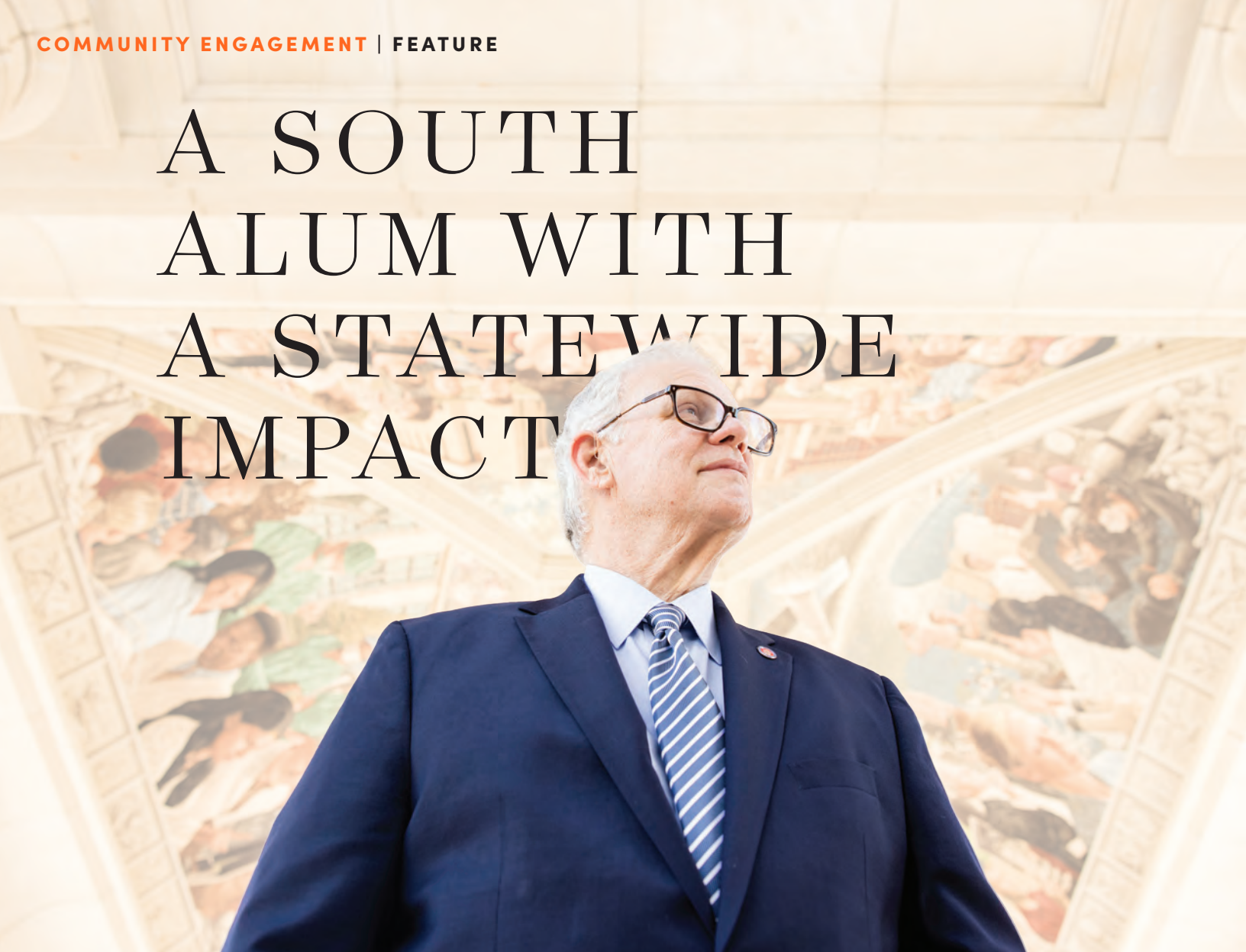
EPIC AMBASSADORS

EPIC Ambassadors represent the heart of the College. Through leadership, service and storytelling, they help connect prospective students, families, alumni and community partners with the opportunities found within our programs.

Whether welcoming future Jaguars, supporting College events or sharing their experiences with prospective students, EPIC Ambassadors bring the mission of the College of Education and Professional Studies to life.



A SOUTH ALUM WITH A STATEWIDE IMPACT

A photograph of a man with white hair and glasses, wearing a dark blue suit, white shirt, and a blue and white striped tie. He is looking upwards and to the right. The background is a large, colorful mural depicting various people in a dynamic scene, possibly a historical or cultural event. The overall tone is warm and professional.

WHEN A NAME GOES UNANSWERED, WHAT HAPPENS NEXT MATTERS

BY KERRY COHEN

In classrooms across Alabama, quiet moments shape the course of a student's year. A teacher greets students as they arrive and begins taking attendance. Name after name gets a reply, until one doesn't. A student who is usually present has missed several days. Instead of shrugging it off, the teacher makes a note.

Small incidents like this are often the first sign that a student may need support. When absences begin to form a pattern or behavior suddenly shifts, the Helping Families Initiative steps in to understand what might be happening and connect families with resources that can make a difference.

Those moments and the students behind them are at the heart of the initiative.

A New Approach to an Old Problem

Founded by South graduate John Tyson Jr. and launched in 2003 in the Mobile County District Attorney's Office, the Helping Families Initiative began with a simple belief: When a student stops showing up, the first response should be support, not punishment.

Across Alabama, school systems vary in how quickly they reach out, but the initiative, which works through participating district attorneys' offices, follows a consistent, prevention-focused process. Intervention begins when a student reaches a threshold of unexcused absences or behavior concerns. Families may receive a district attorney letter, phone call, text or meeting, not to blame, but to notify, listen and offer help.

“SUPPORT GROWS STRONGER
WHEN SCHOOLS, FAMILIES AND
COMMUNITIES WORK TOGETHER.”

— JOHN TYSON JR.

A case officer then uses assessment tools to understand academic, social, health or family challenges and recommends support ranging from counseling and mental healthcare to tutoring, medical services or community resources. The goal is always the same: Address the root causes behind absences before a child becomes disconnected from school entirely.

Real Results for Students and Schools

During the 2023-24 school year, nearly 15% of Alabama’s students were chronically absent. In Mobile County, however, the picture is improving. Since the return of the initiative to the district in 2023-24 after an absence of several years, truancy has dropped by 50%, and chronic absenteeism has dropped by 58%.

These numbers reflect more than improved attendance. In two years, Mobile County Public Schools avoided wasting an estimated \$64.4 million in expenditures made to educate students who weren’t there.

Today, Helping Families Initiative serves 19 judicial circuits and 44 school systems, supporting more than 95,000 students and 73,000 families across Alabama each year.

Why Teachers Matter Most

Even with statewide systems in place, the initiative still relies on one daily routine: teachers taking roll. Teachers are often the first to notice when a child begins to slip away, and their observations form the early warning system that makes timely intervention possible.

That belief in the power of teachers is part of what led Tyson to reinvest in the university that helped shape his career.

In 2023, Tyson and his family established the Charles R. McDonald Family Scholarship at South with a \$1 million gift, matched by the Mitchell-Moulton Scholarship Initiative. The resulting \$2 million endowment now provides a \$500 scholarship to every undergraduate student teacher in the College of Education and Professional Studies.

To date, 240 student teachers have been supported — future educators who have worked with more than 15,000 pre-K-12 students across southwestern Alabama. Tyson also meets with each new student-teacher cohort, reminding them that something as simple as calling roll can be the first moment a child is seen and connected to help.

A Partnership Strengthened by Research

Since its early years, the Helping Families Initiative has relied on South faculty to help study its work and refine its impact. The first evaluation, led by psychology faculty members Dr. Jennifer Langhinrichsen-Rohling and Dr. Lisa Turner, documented clear gains in attendance, academic performance and overall well-being.

Today, that partnership continues in the College of Education and Professional Studies. Associate Dean Dr. Trés Stefurak and graduate students in the College’s counseling psychology graduate programs are conducting a long-term follow-up study of former Helping Families Initiative participants and evaluating how the initiative operates across Alabama.

This research partnership provides clarity and accountability and gives the College’s emerging counselors deeper insight into what helps families thrive and how Alabama’s systems can better support children.

A Full-Circle Story

From his early days at South to decades of public service and statewide leadership, John Tyson Jr.’s journey has come full circle. Tyson was awarded the 2024 Dean’s Award of Excellence by Dr. Angela Barlow. For the College and Helping Families Initiative, the work continues, building stronger connections between schools, families and the systems that support Alabama’s children.

South Her, P Guid



Shaped purpose es Her

BY KERRY COHEN

A journey of resilience, belonging and service

During August, two bells rang for Dr. April T. Berry, and both echoed victory. One sounded inside a cancer treatment center as she marked the end of radiation treatment after her second cancer diagnosis in two years. The other rang that same day at the front door of her first house. Two bells. Two beginnings.

"God gets all the glory," Berry says softly. "I prayed the entire time that I would never look like what I was going through."

Those two moments weren't just milestones. They were tributes to perseverance, to faith and to purpose. And to a life dedicated to helping others recognize their strength long before they see it in themselves.



Mentorship Beyond the Classroom

"There are moments now when the mentorship shifts from me mentoring her to her mentoring me," says Dr. Linda J.M. Holloway, associate professor at Alabama State University, about Dr. April Berry. Berry and Holloway have partnered on research and curriculum development, creating a study guide designed to encourage healthy dialogue around race, culture and mental health, inspired by a nationally publicized 2023 riverfront incident in Montgomery, Alabama.



To see the study guide, scan the QR code.

Finding Her Calling

Berry arrived in psychology through a path shaped by faith, environment and lived experience. Growing up in a rural, close-knit community, she was surrounded by people who trusted her with their struggles long before she understood the meaning of mental health.

"In high school, people would just call me and talk," she remembers with a laugh. "My mom said, 'You need to be a therapist!'"

She planned to pursue medicine, but during a dual-enrollment psychology course, something unlocked within her. "Suddenly, the dots connected," she says. "I could understand what people were carrying." She saw a language and framework to explain everything she had seen up to that point in her life. That was the moment she discovered her purpose, one that was rooted in listening, understanding and healing.

Breaking Barriers and Lifting Others

Berry's journey to her Doctor of Philosophy in Clinical and Counseling Psychology, a program administered by the College of Education and Professional Studies and the College of Arts and Sciences at South, required courage and trailblazing spirit. As the first woman of color accepted into her adviser's lab, she quickly learned that academic excellence involves more than books. It also comes from belonging, identity and the courage to take up space.

"It was challenging at first. I had to remind myself why I was there and that I belonged," she says. "It was the first time I was officially the minority. I had to work on building my confidence, but I wasn't alone."

She leaned on peer support and the guidance of her adviser, Dr. Ryon McDermott, professor of counseling psychology.

"April was a trailblazer in our program," says McDermott. "She is a

fighter who has earned her success through resilience, determination and meaningful contributions to the professional community."

Berry says she also relied on late-night calls with her mentor, Dr. Linda J.M. Holloway, a retired U.S. Army Reserve colonel and an associate professor at Alabama State University, and the strength of her faith. In time, she flourished.

She became the first student in South's history to be awarded the prestigious Southern Regional Education Board doctoral fellowship.

Leading with Heart and Science

Berry completed her doctoral internship at the University of Florida's Counseling and Wellness Center in Gainesville, serving college students and collaborating across campus offices. "That internship taught me the value of liberation," she says. "I learned how interconnected our wellness really is and the importance of living purposefully and intentionally." She earned her doctorate from South in 2022.

That experience now serves her daily in her work as a clinical and counseling psychologist and behavioral health consultant at Keesler Air Force Base in Biloxi, Mississippi. There, she works in a health clinic alongside primary care physicians, pharmacists and other healthcare providers. Her patients include active-duty service members, veterans and their families. They may arrive seeking physical care, but many also carry mental and emotional trauma that needs attention too.

"When mental health struggles surface, they often appear first in the body," Berry says. "Pain, fatigue, sleep changes ... our bodies speak. We just have to listen."

She is passionate about breaking the stigma surrounding mental illness by helping others see how physical, mental and spiritual well-being are deeply connected.



“NEVER DOUBT YOUR PLACE. YOU
BELONG. YOUR VOICE MATTERS. AND
YOUR JOURNEY, EVEN THE HARD PARTS,
CAN BECOME SOMEONE ELSE’S HOPE.”

— DR. APRIL BERRY

Berry is also an adjunct professor in the Department of Leadership and Teacher Education in the College of Education and Professional Studies.

Purpose Refined Through Pain

In January 2023, life took an unexpected turn. Berry was diagnosed with stage II breast cancer. Two months later, her father was diagnosed with stage IV lung cancer. He passed away two months after that.

“It was the most challenging season of my life,” she says. “I was in treatment, working, grieving and fighting for my life.”

In July 2025, a second diagnosis came: stage IV breast cancer, metastasized to the spine.

Even then, Berry’s strength never wavered. Her voice remains steady, anchored. “Cancer didn’t take my purpose,” she says. “It sharpened it.”

Her journey reshaped her. In the uncertainty and the healing, her purpose crystallized: to help others live with intention,

listen to their bodies, and care for both their mental and physical health. She launched Pathway 2 Purpose Wellness & Consulting, LLC, a private practice in Mobile, Alabama, rooted in holistic care that honors the mind, body and spirit.

“I want people to understand their purpose and that health is multidimensional,” she says. “It’s physical. It’s mental. It’s spiritual. It’s life satisfaction.”

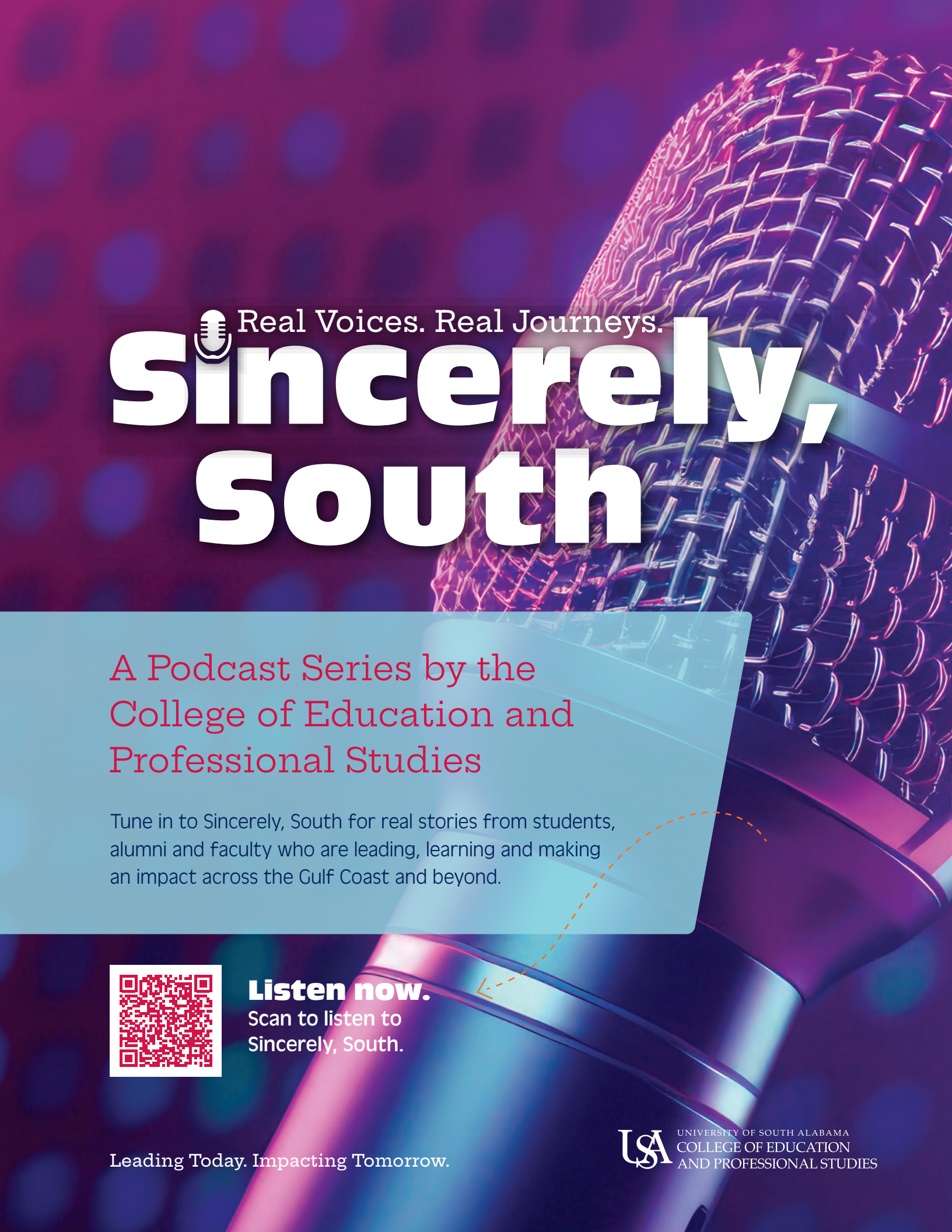
Hope, Healing and Paying It Forward

Today, Berry’s days are filled with service to military families and anyone else seeking strength in hardship.

She is a clinician. An educator. A trailblazer. A mentor. A woman of unwavering faith. And a living reminder that even in life’s hardest seasons, purpose lights the way forward.

Her greatest hope for others?

“That they listen to their bodies, protect their well-being and live fully,” she says. “Not someday ... but today.”



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Sincerely, South

A Podcast Series by the
College of Education and
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Tune in to Sincerely, South for real stories from students, alumni and faculty who are leading, learning and making an impact across the Gulf Coast and beyond.



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Leading Today. Impacting Tomorrow.

USA UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH ALABAMA
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION
AND PROFESSIONAL STUDIES

A TRAILBLAZER LEGACY:

HONORING DR. CAROL SCOTT CASH

When Dr. Carol Scott Cash first stepped onto the University of South Alabama campus in 1966, she didn't realize she was helping shape history. "We were the first kids who moved into the dorms," she said. "It was a really new experience, but we were part of the beginning of that story."

That story became the foundation for a lifelong commitment to education and leadership. A two-time graduate of South's College of Education and Professional Studies, Cash earned her bachelor's degree in secondary education (mathematics) and a master's in guidance and counseling before earning her doctorate from Virginia Tech.

Her 30-year K-12 career included time as a teacher, counselor and principal, culminating in being named Virginia High School Principal of the Year in 2000. As a clinical professor and professor of practice at Virginia Tech, she guided more than 200 doctoral graduates, shaping the next generation of educational leaders.

Throughout her career, Cash has championed the idea that great leadership begins with empathy. "There's an obligation to look through the eyes of other people," she said. "We don't easily do that unless we consciously make the choice to."

Reflecting on receiving the USA National Alumni Association Distinguished Service Award, Cash turned the honor back toward her roots. "South gave me the knowledge, the skills and the outlook I needed," she said. "I wouldn't be here without the chance they gave me. It's a special place, and I'll always be grateful."

Listen to Dr. Cash's full story by scanning the QR code:



"SOUTH ALABAMA GAVE ME
THE KNOWLEDGE, THE SKILLS
AND THE OUTLOOK I NEEDED.
IT'S A SPECIAL PLACE, AND
I'LL ALWAYS BE GRATEFUL."

— DR. CAROL SCOTT CASH



From Gilly Gator to the Oscars of Teaching

Alum Mary Travis

Wins \$25K



When Gilly Gator, the mascot of Gilliard Elementary, danced across the gym floor, students at the assembly roared with laughter — unaware that the teacher behind the mask, Mary Travis, was about to receive national recognition. Also unaware was Travis herself.

Moments later, as Dr. Eric G. Mackey, the state superintendent of education, smiled proudly, Stephanie Bishop announced that Travis was the state's sole recipient of a 2024-2025 Milken Educator Award, a national honor known as the Oscars of teaching. Bishop is a Milken Educator Awards vice president and a 2001 Milken Educator from Virginia.

Travis, a 2011 University of South Alabama elementary education graduate, is in her 11th year of teaching at Gilliard, in the Mobile County Public Schools System. She is known for her creative, high-energy approach to learning. She writes rap songs to teach math and science concepts, encourages collaboration through problem-solving "breakout" projects and reminds students that "mistakes are magic — they are exactly how we learn."

The award includes a \$25,000 cash prize and recognizes outstanding educators nationwide. "I couldn't believe that this would happen to me, ever, because I'm just doing my job, which I truly love to do," Travis said. "I didn't know I was up for a nomination or anything."



Nicole Bolton, Barton Academy STEM educator and two-time South graduate, received the Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching.



Saraland Elementary Principal and South alumnus Dr. Stan Stokley was surprised with a schoolwide celebration recognizing him as Alabama's 2025 National Distinguished Principal.

Alumna Nicole Bolton Wins Top Presidential STEM Award

For Nicole Bolton, teaching computer science and STEM is more than a profession — it's a calling. The educator at Mobile's Barton Academy for Advanced World Studies was recently honored with the Presidential Award for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching, the highest recognition a K-12 math or science teacher can receive from the U.S. government.

Bolton, who earned both her bachelor's degree in elementary education and master's in educational media from the University of South Alabama, was selected after advancing as a state finalist in 2022. She received a \$10,000 award from the National Science Foundation.

"Being a proud graduate of South Alabama, I carry the values of excellence, innovation and community into my classroom every day," Bolton said. "This award belongs to our students as much as it does to me, for it is their greatness that I am fortunate enough to showcase and nurture."

College alumni, your story matters.

We want to celebrate you. Scan to share your latest achievements and milestones with the College of Education and Professional Studies.



Student-Centered Leader

When the Saraland Elementary band launched into its opening notes, recently retired Principal Dr. Stan Stokley assumed he was walking into another pep rally. Instead, he was met with a surprise he never expected: He had been named Alabama's 2025 National Distinguished Principal.

He was one of 43 principals recognized nationwide by the National Association of Elementary School Principals.

A College of Education and Professional Studies alumnus, Stokley spent more than a decade leading Saraland Elementary to statewide and national acclaim. Under his leadership, the school earned recognition as a National Blue Ribbon School and a National Title I Distinguished School. His innovative leadership, focus on relationships and passion for student success all stem from a deep belief in the possibilities within every student.

Stokley is quick to share the spotlight. "This award has my name on it," he said, "but it belongs to our teachers, staff and students."

Known for his student-centered approach, Stokley met individually with all 1,000-plus students each year, making time to learn their stories, celebrate their growth and encourage their potential. He also invested deeply in his 88-member faculty and staff, leading professional learning that built confidence, collaboration and momentum.



Conversations That Connect



"Those conversations remind us that education is built on relationships and that our work continues long after graduation."

— DR. ANGELA T. BARLOW

Thousands of educators from across Alabama gathered in Mobile for the state's largest professional development event, providing great opportunities for the College of Education and Professional Studies. During the annual Alabama State Department of Education MEGA Conference, held July 14-18 at the Mobile Convention Center, faculty and staff reconnected with alumni, conferred with current educators and met potential new students.

The College's booth became a hub for renewing acquaintances and making new friends. Educators shared classroom stories, exchanged ideas, reflected on leadership roles and asked questions about how continued education can support their work across schools and districts statewide.

A FULL ROOM. FAMILIAR FACES. NEW CONVERSATIONS.

More than 160 alumni and friends gathered for the College's Alumni and Friends Sip and Mingle social, where conversations and connections continued in a room overlooking downtown Mobile. President Jo Bonner, Executive Vice President and Provost Dr. Andi Kent and College Dean Dr. Angela Barlow addressed a packed room, reflecting on the growth of the College and the University and on what lies ahead.

"MEGA gives us the opportunity to reconnect with our alumni, friends and educators who may be exploring what comes next," Barlow said. "Those conversations remind us that education is built on relationships and that our work continues long after graduation."

As the afternoon unfolded, guests chatted with faculty and staff, shared stories over food and celebrated their ties to South. The costumed mascots SouthPaw and Miss Pawla drew smiles and posed for photos, and attendees left with College T-shirts in their swag bags. The gathering offered time to slow down, catch up and strengthen relationships.

Throughout the week, the College-affiliated South Alabama Research and Inservice Center (SARIC), which provides professional development for K-12 educators in its region, also engaged with conference attendees from around Alabama.

"MEGA allows us to listen closely to educators across the state and learn alongside them," said Dr. Stephanie Hulon, director of the center. "Those conversations help shape how we support teaching and leadership in meaningful ways."

At the end of the week, teachers and administrators returned to their home districts infused with fresh energy and new ideas for their core mission: improving teaching, learning and leadership across Alabama.



New Faculty, New Possibilities

Dr. Charity Bryan | Associate dean for student services, academic affairs, accreditation and pedagogy; interim co-chair, Department of Leadership and Teacher Education; professor, Department of Health, Kinesiology and Sport

Dr. Charity Bryan Joins South

When Dr. Charity Bryan talks about her work, she doesn't start with her titles, though she has plenty. She starts with teams. As the new associate dean for student services, academic affairs, accreditation and pedagogy in the College of Education and Professional Studies, Bryan is already bringing that team-first mindset to South, pairing her background in kinesiology with a clear focus on student success.

Bryan comes to South from Southeastern Louisiana University, bringing her leadership and experience from her time as department head for Kinesiology and Health Studies. Though she is a Georgia native, Bryan earned her doctorate in kinesiology from Louisiana State University.

Since arriving, Bryan has hit the ground running, meeting with faculty, staff and students to shape her goals for this year. She is focusing on assessment, accreditation, recruitment, and, most importantly, student development and success. In addition to filling the associate dean role, she is interim co-chair of the Department of Leadership and Teacher Education and is working closely with the team to search for a permanent chair.

"As a kinesiology professional, I believe strongly in the power of teams, and our College has an amazing one," Bryan said.

"I look forward to all that we will accomplish together in the years ahead."

Bryan is passionate about health and physical literacy and serves as a data analyst for the Alabama-based Healthy Eating Active Living United. The only program of its kind, HEAL United provides Alabama schools with comprehensive resources and support to improve children's health.

In March 2025, Bryan received the Donna L. Dunaway Medal from the Southern Tier of the National Academy of Health and Physical Literacy. The medal is the Southern tier's highest honor, recognizing more than 15 years of service and significant professional contributions.

When she's not working, Bryan loves to spend time at Smith Lake in north Alabama with friends and rewatch her favorite TV show, which is currently "Hacks," starring Jean Smart. She is always down to play any and all sports and can be found making the most of the Rec Center.

"I am truly thrilled to be at South and in the College of Education and Professional Studies. Everyone has been so welcoming, and I have enjoyed getting to know our faculty, staff and students," Bryan said. "South Alabama had a great reputation, so it was an easy decision."

Five new faculty bring fresh perspectives on special education, mathematics education, low-income students, social studies and hospitality.



Dr. Sabrina Caldwell
Assistant professor of
social studies education,
Department of Leadership
and Teacher Education

Helping future social studies teachers navigate complex content with care and confidence

Dr. Sabrina Caldwell has a diverse background, having grown up outside Washington, D.C., and having journeyed to Boston, Germany and Nashville, Tennessee, before settling in Florida to complete her doctorate remotely. She successfully defended her dissertation in April 2025 and graduated in May with her doctorate in teaching and learning from New York University. She has since made her home in Mobile, Alabama, sharing the city with a close college friend and roommate.

"I'm excited to move to a city with such rich history and culture," Caldwell said. "I'm excited to be learning and living in a new state and to become a part of a quickly growing university."

She has approached her position with intentionality, attending as many events as possible to familiarize herself with her students and colleagues.

Her dissertation explored how secondary social studies teachers in Florida and Tennessee navigate teaching responsibly within curriculum limitations. With educators in Alabama facing similar challenges, she's excited to continue her research locally and work with her preservice teachers.

"I'm looking forward to working with new colleagues both within the College and across the street in the social sciences departments," Caldwell said. "I hope to get the ball rolling on one or two research projects that connect directly to the community and are relevant for current issues and challenges."

As a social studies educator, Caldwell prefers to start her morning with podcasts from National Public Radio and The New York Times to brush up on daily news and current events. At home, she enjoys spending time with her dogs, Gronkhusky, a 12-year-old Siberian husky, and Zelda, an 8-year-old mix.



Dr. Ahmet Hacikara
Assistant professor of
hospitality and tourism
management, Department
of Integrative Studies

Connecting Gulf Coast hospitality with global perspectives and emerging technology

Born and raised in Izmir, Turkey, Dr. Ahmet Hacikara developed a passion for hospitality and tourism while working in resort towns along the Aegean coast in the late 1990s. Interacting with people from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds deepened his interest in the industry, motivating him to pursue an undergraduate degree in hospitality and tourism management at Virginia Tech.

Hacikara received his doctorate in hospitality management from the University of Central Florida in 2024 and served as a lecturer at Central Washington University. He joined the South hospitality and tourism program as an assistant professor in spring 2025.

"I was drawn to South Alabama by its dynamic Gulf Coast hospitality industry and the immense potential within its hospitality and tourism program," Hacikara said.

"I am most excited about contributing to the program's growth and mentoring the next generation of hospitality leaders in such a dynamic environment."

His research focuses on artificial intelligence and human-robot interactions in hospitality, tourism and education. South awarded Hacikara an internal faculty research grant in spring 2025. With a student-first mentality, he consistently looks for partnership opportunities that could benefit students and the department.

"Beyond incorporating my own industry experience to connect theory with practice, I focus on bringing external leadership into the classroom," Hacikara said. "To achieve this, I put together a leadership series, featuring experts such as Lee Cockerell, former executive vice president of operations for Walt Disney World Resort, to join our students virtually and in person to share their valuable experiences and insights."

His experience includes his time as a DJ. He got his start spinning tracks at all-inclusive resorts along the Turkish Riviera, but he has stepped away from DJing these days. He enjoys climbing the rock wall at the Rec Center with his 7-year-old daughter, Daphne.



Dr. Sarah E. Madsen
Assistant professor of
educational leadership
— higher education,
Department of
Leadership and Teacher
Education

Studying how students from low-income backgrounds navigate college — and how campuses can better support them

Before coming to South, Dr. Sarah E. Madsen spent a decade in Waco, Texas, studying and teaching at Baylor University. She earned her doctorate in higher education studies and leadership and a master's in higher education and student affairs from Baylor. Most recently, she served as a postdoctoral research associate on grant-funded projects that sought to support students from low-income backgrounds.

In March 2025 Madsen co-authored the book "Starving the Dream: Student Hunger and the Hidden Costs of Campus Affluence" with Baylor colleagues Dr. Nathan Alleman and Dr. Cara Cliburn Allen, published by Johns Hopkins University Press.

"My scholarship broadly focuses on the access, experiences and aspirations of students from historically excluded groups and the campus administrators who support their journeys through college," Madsen said.

Alongside Baylor colleagues, Madsen was awarded a \$2 million National Science Foundation grant to support and study the College pursuit of low-income STEM students. Over the next six years, she will lead marketing and recruitment for the program and co-lead qualitative research efforts.

"I am grateful to the College for their support of this collaborative project, which aims to make STEM higher education more accessible for all students," Madsen said. "I am so excited to join a campus community dedicated to serving the local Gulf Coast region and to addressing real-world issues, like food insecurity."

Along with her passion for academia, she is an avid antiques shopper. Madsen salvages and collects vintage hand-stitched quilts and enjoys gifting them to friends and family. She is excited to explore the antique shops along the Gulf Coast for "new" old quilts.



Dr. Daniela Tîrnovan
Assistant professor of
mathematics education,
Department of Leadership
and Teacher Education

Exploring how language, culture and artificial intelligence can shape more human and equitable approaches to teaching mathematics

When Dr. Daniela Tîrnovan talks about mathematics, she talks about people. Her work lives at the intersection of numbers, language and meeting the needs of all learners — where every equation tells a story. As the College of Education and Professional Studies' newest assistant professor of mathematics education, she's helping future teachers see mathematics as both a human and a creative endeavor.

Tîrnovan earned her doctorate in mathematics education from Rutgers University, where she focused on translanguaging and meeting the mathematical needs of all learners. A former K-12 teacher turned researcher, she joins South from Brooklyn College of the City University of New York, bringing deep experience working with multilingual learners and teacher candidates.

Her research explores how artificial intelligence can support teacher development and mathematical reasoning. In collaboration with Stellenbosch University in South Africa, she is designing short learning courses that help educators use AI tools in ethical, student-centered ways. Her recent publications, appearing in journals such as the Journal of Education, Language and Ideology, reflect her commitment to supporting the success of all students through community-engaged partnerships that center students' lived experiences.

Born and raised in Romania, Tîrnovan was drawn to South's leadership in strengthening mathematics instruction through the Alabama Numeracy Act. Since arriving, she has begun developing a graduate-level course in AI and education and is collaborating with the South Alabama Research and Inservice Center (SARIC) on professional development for teachers of emergent multilingual learners.

Through her work, Tîrnovan is shaping a future where mathematics teaching is innovative, inclusive and grounded in the belief that every learner deserves meaningful access to understanding.



Dr. Emily Tanner
Assistant professor
of special education,
Department of Leadership
and Teacher Education

Turning literacy research into real-world practice for students who are often overlooked

When Dr. Emily Tanner talks about literacy, she talks about opportunity. Her work bridges classrooms and communities, giving voice to students whose stories are too often left untold. As an assistant professor of special education, she's

helping future teachers understand that literacy is more than reading — it's access, empowerment and belonging.

Tanner earned her doctorate in special education from Georgia State University, specializing in high-incidence disabilities. She brings more than a decade of experience teaching students with disabilities across pre-K-12 and higher education settings. Tanner engages her students with hands-on activities and experiences to turn their research into practice.

She has a passion for supporting individuals with disabilities, improving literacy education and implementing equitable education. For five years, she assisted Dr. David E. Houchins with research that studied literacy

education in long-term juvenile justice facilities for the Institute of Education Sciences-funded Project LIBERATE (Literacy Instruction Based on Evidence through Research for Adjudicated Teens to Excel). Her experience on the project helped her develop her own research.

Her recent research has involved interviewing incarcerated students in juvenile justice facilities to gather their views on current learning interventions and record their experiences in their English language arts classrooms.

"This year, I am excited to expand my research on student perspectives in literacy interventions and move toward youth participatory action research," Tanner said. "I plan to involve

students as co-researchers who not only share their experiences but also take active roles in identifying issues and generating solutions that influence classroom practices and policies."

Through her research, Tanner seeks to develop evidence-based practices teachers can use to support students from typically marginalized communities who struggle with literacy. She is excited for the opportunities at South and thankful for the department's support during her transition to Mobile.

On her rainy days off, Tanner's go-to activity is curling up with a good book and her two pugs, Darth and Porkchop. She enjoys settling into a feel-good rom-com by her favorite author, Emily Henry.



**Funding Innovation,
Fueling Success: Dr. Kathy
H. Thompson**

Securing more than \$1 million in grant funding annually takes vision and relentless dedication. For Dr. Kathy H. Thompson, it has become a steady marker of her impact.

The University of South Alabama recently celebrated faculty and staff whose work is advancing research, innovation and student success. Among those was Thompson, founding director of the Center for Innovation in Postsecondary Education in the College of Education and Professional Studies.

Over the past 10 years, she has consistently secured more than \$1 million in annual grant funding, or very close to it, from national partners such as the Gates Foundation, the Lumina Foundation and the National Science Foundation.

This recognition highlights not only the value the center brings to funders but also the confidence national organizations place in her vision and leadership.

Through the center, Thompson leads projects that advance student success by partnering with community colleges, universities, employers and mission-aligned organizations. Together, they design and scale transformative practices in postsecondary education and career pathways.

Her partnerships span groups such as Every Learner Everywhere, Achieving the Dream, Alabama Possible and the Advising Success Network, a program of NASPA, Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education. These efforts help colleges and universities improve postsecondary attainment and career

pathway outcomes for all students, especially first-generation, underrepresented, low-income, adult and rural learners.

With goals ranging from elevating the work of Alabama's community colleges to shaping national efforts serving underserved and underrepresented learners, Thompson's grant-funded projects help more students enter college, stay on the pathway, persist through their programs and ultimately graduate into meaningful careers.



**Service That Inspires:
Aimee R. Meyers**

At South, excellence in service shows up in countless ways.

Aimee R. Meyers, director of university development, and a South alumna with bachelor's and master's degrees in exercise science, was recognized with the 2024

National Alumni Association Christie Miree Outstanding Employee Service Award.

Meyers' recognition came after a year of remarkable commitment. She stepped well beyond her development role to support the College of Education and Professional Studies during a period of short staffing. She helped expand the College's presence at the Alabama State Department of Education's MEGA Conference, turning what had previously been a small exhibit table into a meaningful opportunity to connect with alumni, educators and prospective students. She also played an important role in reshaping the Extra Yard for Teachers Week, coordinating communications, logistics and partnerships to ensure the event came together smoothly.

Through it all, Meyers brought steady leadership, a collaborative spirit and a genuine love for the University. Her work made a real difference for the College during 2024 and reflects exactly why she was chosen for this honor.



**Advising with Purpose:
Sally Morris**

Academic advising may happen behind the scenes, but its impact is unmistakable. Few create that impact more clearly than Sally Morris, director of advising for the College of Education and Professional Studies, whose student-centered approach has earned her the National Alumni Association Beth and Don Davis Excellence in Advising Award.

Morris goes far beyond helping students select classes or map out a major. She approaches advising as a partnership grounded in trust, encouragement and a genuine commitment to each student's success.

Her steady guidance helps students navigate majors, schedules and next steps with clarity and confidence.

What sets her apart is her proactive mindset. She anticipates challenges before they escalate and collaborates with students, faculty and departmental leaders to find solutions. Many resulting improvements extend beyond individual cases and enhance the experience for entire programs.

Her work with the organizational leadership program highlights her impact. As the inaugural cohort of this fully online degree launched, Morris played a key role in building an advising experience that felt personal, structured and supportive from the first inquiry to graduation.

Her work has not only helped students succeed, but it has also continued to elevate the advising culture within the College.



Where Academics and Athletics Align: Dr. Ryan Colquhoun

Excellence in teaching often comes down to how deeply a professor invests in students. South's student-athletes saw that dedication each day. It's part of the reason Dr. Ryan Colquhoun, assistant professor in the Department of Health, Kinesiology and Sport, was named South's 2025 Sun Belt Conference Faculty Member of the Year.

Colquhoun is known for bringing real-world application into every course he teaches, creating opportunities for students to grow through research, advising and performance-

based learning. His work often sits at the intersection of academics and athletics and supports his student-athletes in understanding performance, injury prevention and the science behind their sport.

His collaborative research with Jaguar Athletics is a standout example. Through a research partnership with South's baseball team that focused on performance and injury prevention, he helped advance both athletic performance and student well-being. Research projects like this not only supported the team's success but also prepared students for careers in sports science, coaching and health fields.

Colquhoun's influence is felt every time a student gains confidence, solves a problem or sees their potential more clearly.



Expanding What's Possible: Dr. Abigail Baxter

Academic innovation often starts with one person willing to believe in what's possible. For the College of Education and Professional Studies, that person is Dr. Abigail Baxter, professor in the Department of Leadership and Teacher

Education and recipient of the National Alumni Association Olivia Rambo McGlothren Outstanding Scholar Award.

As faculty director and principal investigator for PASSAGE USA (Preparing All Students Socially and Academically for Gainful Employment), she has helped open doors for young adults with intellectual disabilities, shaping a program that now serves as a model for inclusive postsecondary education across the Gulf Coast.

Her research and grant leadership have had real, measurable impact: families gaining hope, local employers hiring confident graduates and students discovering independence many once believed was out of reach. Baxter's work continues to expand opportunity, shift expectations and strengthen the region's commitment to inclusion.

LEADING THE WAY: THE ANNUAL FACULTY AND STAFF AWARDS

The College of Education and Professional Studies honored excellence in teaching, research, service and support, its core pillars, through the 2025 award recipients:

DR. THOMAS ADAMS, associate professor, Integrative Studies, Faculty Excellence in Teaching Award

DR. RYAN COLQUHOUN, assistant professor, Health, Kinesiology and Sport, Outstanding Advising and Mentoring Award

DR. LU DING, assistant professor, Counseling and Instructional Sciences, Early Career Faculty Award

DR. CAITLYN HAUFF, associate professor, Health, Kinesiology and Sport, Faculty Excellence in Research Award

DR. SHELLEY HOLDEN, professor, Health, Kinesiology and Sport, Outstanding Service Award

DOMINIQUE BROUGHTON HOUSE, coordinator, graduate admissions, Office of Graduate Studies and Research, Gerry Jean Clark Staff Excellence Award

DR. KATHY THOMPSON, director, Center for Innovation in Postsecondary Education, Grant Writing Award

JOHN M. TYSON JR., former Mobile County district attorney and director of the Helping Families Initiative, Dean's Award of Excellence

CELEBRATING YEARS OF DEDICATION AND A LEGACY OF SERVICE

Two faculty members were honored with a special acknowledgement for their dedication and service as they prepared to retire this year.



Dr. Peggy Delmas (left), associate professor, Leadership and Teacher Education, served the University of South Alabama for 19 years and the Alabama higher education system for a total of 28 years.

Dr. Wanda Maulding Green (right), associate professor, Leadership and Teacher Education, served the University of South Alabama for 14 years and the Alabama higher education system for a total of 25 years.



From **Everywhere** to **South**

More than 30 universities.
One academic home.



List of Institutions

Auburn University
Baylor University
Florida State University
Georgia State University
Indiana University
Iowa State University
Louisiana State University
Middle Tennessee State University
New York University
Oklahoma State University
Old Dominion University
Rutgers, The State University
of New Jersey
Texas Tech University

The Ohio State University
The University of Alabama
The University of Alabama
at Birmingham
The University of Arizona
The University of Chicago
The University of Southern Mississippi
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville
University of Arkansas
University of Central Florida
University of Florida
University of Georgia
University of Houston
University of Louisville

University of Maryland
University of Missouri
University of North Carolina
at Greensboro
University of South Alabama
University of West Florida
University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
University of Wyoming
Vanderbilt University

by the

NUMBERS

Faculty

2025

RESEARCH THEMES

EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY AND AI:
Digital literacy, gamification, virtual reality, technology integration, and ethical implications and best practices for artificial intelligence in education.

HEALTH, WELLNESS AND KINESIOLOGY:
Academic integrity, student resilience, hybrid instruction efficacy in health professions, exercise and cognitive function/bone health, diet and sports injury recovery, and recreational therapy for social and behavioral health.

COUNSELING AND BEHAVIORAL HEALTH:
Gender-role stress and counseling, teaching counseling skills, trauma, psychopathy and the psychological well-being of student-athletes.

STEM AND MATHEMATICS EDUCATION:
Preservice teacher self-efficacy for integrated STEM education, measuring the effectiveness of professional development on math teaching and curriculum alignment in K-5 mathematics.

SOCIAL JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SERVICE:
Community organizing, political economy of service, urban commons and public health partnerships/service learning.



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\$5,615,053

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FUNDING SOURCES

- NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION
- ALABAMA STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
- U.S. DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
- HEALTH RESOURCES & SERVICES ADMINISTRATION



A COMMITMENT CARRIED FORWARD

When the family of Linda Meyers Robinson decided to endow a College of Education and Professional Studies scholarship, it was out of gratitude, purpose and a desire to extend the values that shaped her life.

"She believed deeply in education and in students who were often overlooked," said her son, John S. Hixon. "This scholarship reflects who she was and what mattered most to her."

Over the years, Robinson's children heard from former students and their families whose lives had been changed by her belief, encouragement and persistence. Those stories resurfaced after her death in 2007, reaffirming the family's desire to honor her legacy in a way that would continue to make a difference.

That legacy began decades earlier.

In 1972, three years before federal law required public schools nationwide to provide special education services, Robinson enrolled at South with a clear purpose:

to ensure that all students would receive the instruction they needed to reach their full potential. By December 1974, she had earned her graduate degree in special education from the College.

"She strongly believed that every child deserves a quality education," said Hixon.

Throughout a career spanning more than 25 years, Robinson's teaching philosophy centered on compassion, persistence and personal attention. "You treat each child as if they were your own," she often said, a principle that guided her work in the classroom and beyond.

"There were no hopeless cases," said her daughter Gillian H. Rogers. "Mom never gave up on anybody."

All of Robinson's children — Garrett Hixon Chase, Rogers and Hixon — said their mother would have been proud to have seen her name connected to something that helps more children receive the specialized instruction they need.

"Becoming a special education teacher is a calling. Linda Meyers Robinson had that calling, and we will help scholarship recipients carry forward her belief that every child deserves to be seen, supported and given the chance to succeed."

— DR. ABIGAIL BAXTER

Creating Opportunity for Future Educators

Building on that commitment, Robinson's family chose to invest in future educators who feel called to special education.

Beginning in Fall 2026, the Linda Meyers Robinson Scholarship in Special Education will provide merit-based partial awards to students preparing for careers as special education teachers. By 2031, the scholarship is expected to reach full funding and offer a full award to a deserving student.

Although family members had long planned to endow a scholarship in Robinson's name, participation in the Mitchell-Moulton Scholarship Initiative, which matches outside scholarship contributions, inspired them to expand their commitment.

"While our family was committed to honoring Linda, the Mitchell-Moulton match motivated us to increase the value of the scholarship to a full ride once fully funded," said Robinson's brother, David Meyers. "We know that would have made Linda very proud."

"This scholarship represents a transformational gift," said Dr. Angela T. Barlow, dean of the College. "It bridges the gap between potential and opportunity for students who want to serve children with diverse learning needs."

Meeting a Growing Need

The need for highly trained special education teachers has never been greater. Today's classrooms are more inclusive and more complex, serving students with a wide range of learning differences and social-emotional needs who require individualized education plans.

Special education teachers serve as instructors, advocates and collaborators, working closely with families, counselors and support teams to ensure that students receive the services they need to succeed. The role requires resilience, creativity and deep empathy.

The challenges Robinson recognized decades ago have only intensified, making thoughtful preparation and sustained support essential for those entering the field. Scholarships strengthen the pipeline of educators ready to meet these challenges with confidence and care.

"Investing in future special education teachers is an investment in a world where every child, regardless of ability, can thrive," Barlow said.

Preparing Teachers for Today's Classrooms

At South, preparing educators has always been about more than coursework. Through the College, students receive hands-on learning grounded in real-world experience and faculty mentorship.

Through everything from early field placements to student teaching, South's special education students are immersed in classrooms and guided by faculty who understand the evolving needs of today's learners. Faculty members work closely with students to translate theory into practice and build the confidence of future educators.

Programs such as PASSAGE USA (Preparing All Students Socially and Academically for Gainful Employment), designed to help students with intellectual disabilities, reflect South's commitment to access, innovation and inclusive excellence — values that align closely with Robinson's lifework.

"Becoming a special education teacher is a calling," said Dr. Abigail Baxter, professor of special education and director of PASSAGE USA. "Linda Meyers Robinson had that calling, and we will help scholarship recipients carry forward her belief that every child deserves to be seen, supported and given the chance to succeed."

Carrying the Work Forward

The Linda Meyers Robinson Scholarship in Special Education reflects a commitment, carried forward by her family, that began decades ago and continues today. For those who feel called to special education, the scholarship offers support and possibility. At the College, that same belief remains at the heart of special education — guiding those who choose to teach, advocate and care.

Building What Comes Next

Graduate scholarships invest in the teachers shaping tomorrow's classrooms.

The strength of a school system begins with the strength of its educators. Teachers who are supported, challenged and continually developed throughout their careers are better equipped to shape student success.

At the College of Education and Professional Studies, that belief is shaping the next chapter of advanced study. As communities across the state work to improve literacy and mathematics achievement, the College is expanding opportunities that help experienced educators deepen their expertise and improve learning for students.

Recent scholarship commitments are helping lay that foundation.



Dr. Anna F. Clausen Trailblazer in Education

Established by Drew and Joanne Clausen in honor of Drew's mother, the Dr. Anna F. Clausen Trailblazer in Education Graduate Scholarship reflects a legacy of leadership and service. A visionary educator, Clausen opened doors throughout her career — in the classroom and in leadership roles that shaped learning beyond them.

This scholarship continues her belief that excellent teaching transforms lives. It supports graduate students who are committed not only to teaching well, but also to helping other educators grow and thrive.



Eric and Pam Patterson Graduate Scholarship

The Eric and Pam Patterson Graduate Scholarship reflects a long-standing commitment to the educators who shape classrooms and the communities they influence. Longtime advocates for the College, the Pattersons believe that strong communities begin with strong teachers.

Their scholarship supports graduate students who are strengthening their expertise in literacy and mathematics while continuing to teach in the classroom. As the College builds the next chapter of graduate education, this gift affirms a shared commitment to preparing experienced teachers to lead in their schools and communities.

Together, these scholarships reflect a shared belief: Education is a lifelong calling. It is shaped by legacy and carried forward by educators who choose to lead — not only for today's students, but also for generations to come.



Create Opportunity, CHANGE LIVES

Be part of a collective effort that creates opportunity and changes lives through education and service.

Empower Students



Scholarships attract and prepare talented students to lead, serve and make a difference across the region.



Put Your Giving to Work

Support the College with a charitable gift. Thoughtful, tax-efficient strategies help strengthen the next generation while offering potential tax benefits.



Give Through an IRA Charitable Rollover

If you are age 70½ or older, make a direct gift from your IRA to potentially reduce taxable income while supporting scholarships or academic programs.



Partner with Us

Hands-on learning connects classroom knowledge to real-world challenges through partnerships with schools, courts and community organizations.



Plan with a Bequest

Include the College in your will or trust to create a flexible, lasting gift that supports our mission.

Your generosity supports today's students and strengthens the future of the University of South Alabama College of Education and Professional Studies.

Visit USALegacy.org or contact Aimee Meyers, director of university development, at ameyers@SouthAlabama.edu or (251) 414-8276.

Community Voices,

Shared Purpose

The College of Education and Professional Studies Advisory Council

The advisory council strengthens the work of the College by offering guidance, insight and community connection. Members advise leadership, support program excellence and help advance the mission of the College across the region.

2025 Advisory Council Members

Dr. Carolyn Akers | CEO Emeritus and Senior Adviser, Mobile Area Education Foundation

Retired Lt. Col. Frank Barrow | Retired Director of Army Instruction, Mobile County Public School System

Retired Lt. Col. Travis M. Bedsole Jr. | Retired Attorney

Dr. Khalilah Burton | Vice President for Instructional Services, Bishop State Community College

David Clark | President and CEO, Visit Mobile

William DeMouy | Educator, Grand Bay Middle School

Dr. Brent Harrison | Superintendent, Saraland City Schools

Rufus Hudson | Vice President, Commercial Banking, Regions Financial Corp.

Betty Huff | Senior Consultant, AACRAO Consulting

Claire Minto | Academies and Work-Based Learning Supervisor, Mobile County Public School System

Allison Moore | Executive Director, Jennifer Claire Moore Foundation

Dr. Jeremiah Newell | Chief Executive Officer, Mobile Area Education Foundation

Eric Patterson | Retired Vice President, Alabama Power Co.

Martha Peek | Retired Superintendent, Mobile County Public School System

Paige Plash, PT | Co-Owner, Encore Rehabilitation Inc.

Kellie Snodgrass | Director of Workforce Development, Mobile Area Chamber of Commerce

Mark Spivey | Senior Vice President, Commercial Banking, Hancock Whitney

Chresal D. Threadgill | Superintendent, Mobile County Public School System

Eddie Tyler | Retired Superintendent, Baldwin County Public Schools

John M. Tyson Jr. | Former District Attorney; Director, Helping Families Initiative

Dr. Antonio Williams | Principal, Leflore Magnet High School

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