

BRONCO *PRIDE*



DAY ONE TO

D | E | G | R | E | E



BRONCO PRIDE

FALL 2025

ON THE COVER

Traditional student Adejuwon Balugon, transfer student Isabella Rumbold, adult learner Sierra Whitmore, military-affiliated student Staff Sgt. Shenitra Story, and graduate student Matthew Thorpe. **Photos by Ezekiel Best.**

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DAY ONE TO DEGREE

A letter from Chancellor Darrell T. Allison, J.D.

People, Partnerships, and Planning are Part of the Big Picture

What does it take to cross the finish line? At Fayetteville State University, the journey "From Day One to Degree" is likely to begin long before students arrive on campus or log on to their first class. Their pathways to success have been paved by the extensive work of the "3 P's": People, Partnerships and Planning. But that's only part of the big picture.

In this issue of Bronco Pride Magazine, we will highlight some of the best and brightest reasons why Fayetteville State University is rising in prominence not only statewide and in the southeast, but nationally.

Our numbers certainly reflect an upward trend.

For the fourth consecutive year, FSU set an all-time high enrollment of 7,628 students, exceeding last year's record of 7,100 by more than 500 students. The freshmen class is the largest in university history since 2007, gaining 820 students with an average GPA of 3.32. Retention numbers over the past four years also have surged – from 63% to 78%.

From traditional undergraduate, military-affiliated, adult learners, transfer and graduate students, the diversity of students truly makes FSU a special place.

In a rapidly changing world, our students – from all walks of life and backgrounds – are preparing to become the changemakers of tomorrow.

Many incoming freshmen moved into the new Bronco Pride residence hall, which defines modern campus living with smart design and conveniences that are conducive to learning. Because of FSU's continued corporate partnership with Lenovo, freshmen in need also received free laptops to start their college careers on the right footing.

Making a college education affordable for all students is always our aim. Is it any wonder that Fayetteville State was named the #1 most affordable university in the nation, according to The College Investor? It's an honor that we take seriously, and we do not rest on our laurels.





Chancellor Allison congratulates an FSU graduate at Commencement.
Photo by Ezekiel Best.

As an NC Promise School, FSU offers \$500 in-state tuition per semester and \$2,500 for out-of-state students per semester. Military-affiliated students attend tuition-free. This includes active-duty soldiers, military spouses and military children, and veterans. They have served us, and we are here to serve them.

At FSU, we believe that a good education is not only good for individual students – it has a real generational impact that can last well into the future.

Broncos feel like they are part of the FSU family from the very beginning, crediting engaged professors, instructors and staff, numerous resources, people and places to turn to in their times of need, and a campus culture that sets the University apart from other schools.

They make sure to add something much more basic – and irreplaceable.

They have felt genuinely cared for at Fayetteville State University.

I invite you to travel with me through this edition and discover the student journey at Fayetteville State University. 🌐

With Bronco Pride,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. Allison'.

Darrell T. Allison, J.D.

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MAKE WAY *FOR SUCCESS!*

BY JANET GIBSON

DAY ONE TO DEGREE



Chancellor Allison and FSU Cabinet members break ground on the new College of Education building.
Photo by Ezekiel Best.

FSU's Education Ecosystem Builds on a Common Vision for Today, Tomorrow, the Future

Building “education ecosystems” that stay laser-focused on student success in thriving communities where everyone feels a sense of belonging are hot topics on college campuses these days.

But, by all indications, Fayetteville State University is way ahead of the curve.

FSU has made a mission of strategically creating city, county and corporate partnerships – and strengthening the rock-solid one it maintains with its backyard neighbor, the world’s largest military installation, Fort Bragg.

Multiple construction sites on campus, in progress and recently completed, also are a testament to FSU’s continued growth – with a new, \$69.3 million College of Education set to open in 2026 as just one shining example.

As many of the country’s institutions of higher learning struggle to recruit and retain students, post-pandemic, Fayetteville State and several HBCUs are bucking the downward trend by growing and making huge impacts. Indeed, FSU, for one, is evolving its ecosystem in awe-inspiring ways.

But an ecosystem isn’t just about partnerships and buildings – or recording 12% growth in enrollment since 2018. It’s about something much deeper, if you ask Chancellor Darrell T. Allison. It’s about relationships.

Quality education relies on “empowered, engaged and mobilized individuals, all stakeholders, working toward student success, now and in the future.” Some examples are the momentum underway to establish FSU as a research-driven institution, and as a leader in the field of Artificial Intelligence; also in high-paying careers and internships; study-abroad programs; and undergraduate and graduate degree programs that attract that best and the brightest nationally, including but not limited to business administration, forensic science, cybersecurity, nursing, social work, and education.

Here are some of the most recent developments that also promise to be game changers for FSU.

FSU is among the most diverse institutions in the nation.”

— Fayetteville Observer



In July 2025, Fayetteville State University received a \$900,000 investment from Cape Fear Valley Health toward a new Health and Wellness Center. From left, Fayetteville Mayor Mitch Colvin, an FSU alumnus, Cape Fear Valley Health CEO Michael Nagowski, FSU Chancellor Darrell T. Allison and Cumberland County Commissioner Kirk deViere. Photo by TopEndShoots, LLC.

CFVH Invests \$900,000 In FSU Health & Wellness Center

In late July 2025, FSU announced “a transformative \$900,000 investment” from Cape Fear Valley Health at a special ceremony in the historic Seabrook Auditorium. The two-year commitment will support the construction and programming of the University’s new Student Health and Wellness Center, now underway at the gateway of campus.

The announcement highlights the shared dedication of both institutions to enhancing student well-being and academic success through improved access to comprehensive health services.

“Partnerships are not built overnight – they are outcomes of mutual interest, hard work, intentional conversations, and an honest belief that what we are doing collectively is for the greater good,” said Chancellor Allison. “This investment reflects a deep commitment to the health and future of our students and the communities we serve.”

The state-of-the-art Health and Wellness Center will encompass 24,631 square feet and serve as a central hub for comprehensive student care, according to a press release. “Its striking modern design features angled glass, metal panels, and a serene reflecting pool, creating a welcoming atmosphere for all who enter the campus,” the release stated.

Cape Fear Valley Health CEO Michael Nagowski commented, “Few things are more foundational to student success than access to health care and wellness support. Cape Fear Valley is proud to have committed these \$900,000 over the next two years. This is not a donation – it is an investment. You are training the next set of leadership for the next generation.”

The center will offer a wide range of health services, including:

- A 7,500-square-foot fitness floor with advanced equipment.
- Yoga and dance studios, locker rooms, saunas, and wellness offices
- A full-service retail pharmacy.
- Physician offices, treatment and triage rooms, psychiatric care, and laboratory services.
- Dedicated spaces for Bronco Wellness programming, health education, prevention, and outreach.

“The new Health and Wellness Center will serve as a beacon of health and healing,” said Dr. Juanette Council, FSU’s Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs. “This timely facility will bring together multiple critical services under one roof – creating a centralized student center for health education, prevention, treatment, and overall wellness.”

The project's modern infrastructure includes tall glass walls, a sleek rainscreen exterior, acoustical Tectum roof panels, and a durable masonry core for style and sustainability.

Bronco Pride Residential Hall Lives Up To Its Name

"Bronco Pride" took on a new meaning with the fall semester 2025 move-in. Some 336 students, mostly freshmen, now call Bronco Pride residential hall their home.

Described as "modern campus living reimagined," the brand-new residential hall blends comfort, convenience, and community under one roof.

Room Features:

- Double occupancy rooms designed for collaboration and comfort.
- Twin-size beds and layouts inspired by the popular Renaissance Hall.

Community Amenities:

- A full-size kitchen on the first floor – ideal for late-night snacks, meal prepping, or community cooking events.
- A spacious full-size laundry room to keep students looking sharp and feeling fresh.
- Multiple study rooms on each floor, so quiet focus is always within reach.
- This isn't just a place to stay – it's a place to build friendships, find support, and make memories that last a lifetime, according to the FSU team.

FSU Captures Media Buzz

"More families are wrestling with the question in America, 'Is higher education worth it today?'" Chancellor Allison has said. "We have to really show that it is. That we still believe that a good education is not only good for that individual student, but it has real



Bronco Pride Hall. Photo by Ezekiel Best.

generational impact not only for that student, but for their family and their families to come."

As a NC Promise school that also offers free tuition to military-affiliated students, Fayetteville State routinely shows up on national lists of "most affordable" institutions of higher learning, including The College Investor.

To stay relevant, the education ecosystem keeps evolving. Those changes get noticed.

"Bronco Pride reigns at Fayetteville State University, part of the University of North Carolina System and the state's second-oldest public institution of higher education, having been founded in 1867," noted The Fayetteville Observer in an article published on August 25, 2025.

The article pointed out "exciting growth and economic development," including a recently opened Chick-fil-A and Starbucks, renovations on campus and in Bronco Midtown, contributing to the revitalization of the Murchison Road corridor in collaboration with the City of Fayetteville.

Alluding to the University's mix of traditional, military-affiliated, adult learners, transfer, and graduate students, The Observer took their analysis one step further:

"FSU is among the most diverse institutions in the nation." 🌍

ECOSYSTEM OF STUDENT SUCCESS AT FSU

FSU



FIRST STEPS

Choosing a university, applying, enrolling, and attending orientation and welcome week events are important first steps.



BUILDING A STRONG FOUNDATION

Selecting a major, developing a degree plan, completing general education course and participating in clubs and organizations build a strong foundation.



Freshman completion:
30 credits

Graduating, landing a great job, and being accepted into graduate school are all signs of success.



SUCCESS



Graduation:
120 credits



**PREPARING FOR
THE FUTURE**

Participating in paid internships, studying abroad, learning how to interview, attending career fairs and applying for graduate school are just a few examples of how college students prepare for the future.



Junior completion:
90 credits



**GROWING
& LEARNING**

Completing upper-division courses, developing "soft" skills, civic engagement and experiential learning are all part of growing and learning.



Sophomore completion:
60 credits



5 PATHS 1 DESTINATION

BY JANET GIBSON



Traditional, Military-Affiliated, Adult Learners, Transfer and Graduate Students Bring Diverse Life Experiences to Fayetteville State University

Fayetteville State University students bring with them a wealth of real-world experiences – inspiring the collective to strive for continued excellence – and innovative, new ways to learn, grow and make a positive impact globally.

Of the 7,600-plus record enrollment, students fit into one or more of five categories. They may be traditional undergraduates, fresh from high school; military-affiliated, including active-duty, military spouses and children, and veterans; transfer students from community colleges or other institutions of higher learning; adult learners, defined by the UNC System as age 25 or older; and/or graduate students, working toward master's degrees from FSU's national- or state-recognized programs.

The current enrollment breakdown is:

- Traditional undergraduate – 54%
- Military-affiliated – 33%
- Undergraduate adult learner – 33%
- Transfer – 14%
- Graduate – 14%

For traditional undergraduate students, the journey to FSU may have started during Career Days at their high schools with visits from engaged FSU faculty or staff members. Or alumni might have taken future (and present) students under their wing, introducing them to all that the University has to offer, including paid internships, networking and career opportunities.

For many students, what may have seemed impossible – attending college – suddenly becomes possible when they learn about alumni-endowed and corporate-supported scholarships, as well as various forms of financial aid. These initiatives to help offset the cost of college are indeed a game changer.

Traditional students contribute a certain energy to the college experience – and skills. They have grown up with the latest technologies and are open to countless possibilities. They are among the first to stand when the call is given ... “BRONCO ... PRIDE!”

Military-affiliated students may be introduced to FSU through the University's Training and Support Center at Fort Bragg, where counselors are ready, willing and able to answer questions.

Serving in the military has endowed these students with “a high level of discipline and leadership experience,” the capacity to also be followers, and, for many, global exposure, points out Chancellor **Darrell T. Allison.**

Adult learners, transfer students and many graduate students often share a deep desire – an unbridled determination – to cross the finish line to earn their degrees. Many have already had first and second careers or have honed their skills as leaders of their families and running households, according to the Chancellor. They may come from different places – and bring fresh, new perspectives, ideas and ways of thinking.

In return, FSU ensures they are equipped to succeed “From Day One to Degree – and Beyond.”

In this issue, you'll gain insight through the eyes of five students whose lives were changed forever the day they decided to enroll in Fayetteville State.

You'll meet traditional student Adejuwon Balogun; military-affiliated student Staff Sgt. Shenitra Story; adult learner Sierra Whitmore; transfer student Isabella Rumbold; and graduate student Matthew Thorpe.

Each has their own unique story, but every student has one thing in common, notes Chancellor Allison:

“They all bring their dreams for the future to Fayetteville State University.” 🐾

STUDENT PROFILES



Traditional Student: Adejuwon Balogun

Adejuwon Balogun is a first-generation college senior majoring in computer science with a minor in cybersecurity at Fayetteville State University (FSU). Born and raised in Lagos, Nigeria, Adejuwon's path to FSU began as a senior at Seventy-First high school when visiting admissions counselors introduced him to opportunities at FSU. Graduating with a 4.0 high school GPA and being accepted into several universities, FSU was the most affordable when facing the cost of college. After touring the campus in person, he decided to make FSU the place he would call home for the next four years.

Transfer Student: Isabella Rumbold

For Isabella Rumbold, FSU was more than just a transfer destination—it represented a second chance to pursue her lifelong dream of playing college softball while laying the groundwork for a career in medicine. A native of Wallace, North Carolina, and a graduate of Harrells Christian Academy, Rumbold is the oldest of three siblings in a close-knit family. Her mother is a labor and delivery nurse, and her father is an insurance adjuster. Both have worked hard to support her and her siblings, instilling in them the value of perseverance.

Rumbold started her college journey at North Carolina Wesleyan University, where she played softball in her first year. However, an arm injury led her to reevaluate both her softball dreams and where she wanted to continue her education. "I still wanted to play softball because ever since I was in elementary school, that was my dream," she said. "I used to watch the World Series on TV and think, 'This is what I want to do.'"

When she connected with FSU head coach Kyrin Walker, she saw her opportunity. "I went on a tour at FSU, and that day I knew this was where I wanted

to be," Rumbold recalled. "Coach Walker gave me another chance, and it felt like home right away."

Adult Learner: Sierra Whitmore

If someone had told Sierra Whitmore in high school that she would one day aspire to earn her doctorate degree in microbiology, she might have responded, "Wrong girl."

School was not her thing – she was bored – and life does not change that drastically.

Or does it?

"Fayetteville State changed my outlook on everything," according to Whitmore, 27, who is on track to graduate this December with a bachelor of science degree in biology with a concentration in organismal biology.

A prestigious McNair Scholar who is involved in multiple extracurricular activities – and serves as an active-duty soldier – Whitmore has achieved a grade point average of 3.47. Furthermore, she is excited to take her educational journey to the limit.

What changed the most for Whitmore comes down to something simple – yet so intrinsically powerful it nearly brings her to tears. "I feel like I finally found people who really care about me," she said. "FSU is a family ... a place where I belong."

Military-Affiliated Student: Staff Sgt. Shenitra Story

Since she was a teenager, Staff Sgt. Shenitra Story '25 dreamed of enlisting in the United States Air Force. Yet, after graduating from Palm Bay High School in Melbourne, Florida, in 2002, Story deviated from her plan and enrolled in Brevard Community College, now Eastern Florida State College. The elder of two girls

born to single mom Cynthia Mathis, Story thought she'd give college a try, knowing she could always enlist in the military later.

"My mom was a single parent, and I didn't want to keep asking her for money for small things," Story, 41, said. "I did have a scholarship to attend Brevard Community College through the Melbourne-Palm Bay Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta, my mom's sorority, and I also got a scholarship through my church, which helped pay for books and things like that."

Story worked two part-time jobs while attending Brevard but became overwhelmed and quit school. Before too long, she was pregnant with her first of two sons. In 2012, she joined the Army Reserves but transferred to the Air Force Reserves two years later. In 2019, she left Florida for North Carolina because her fiancée got stationed at Fort Bragg.

Story said she never felt culturally connected at Brevard Community College, so this time around she wanted to enroll at an HBCU. She applied to and was accepted at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University and Fayetteville State, opting for FSU.

"Fayetteville State University is military friendly and understands that sometimes we have to leave for deployment or the field or other duties. They have so many resources for adult learners and military students, and that has helped me tremendously," Story explained.

Nearly a third of FSU students are military-affiliated, as are many of the institution's faculty and staff, including some members of senior leadership.

Graduate Student: Matthew Thorpe

Matthew Thorpe, 52, of Greensboro, N.C., is a busy man with a purpose.

At the end of this year, he will have earned two degrees from Fayetteville State University (FSU) even as he serves as Director of the Fire Occupational Extension Program at Guilford Technical Community College (GTCC) in Greensboro, N.C. The first degree, bestowed

in May 2024, is a B.S. degree in Fire and Emergency Services Administration. The second, which he's due to receive in December as a student with a 4.0 average, is an M.A. degree in psychology. Next spring, he'll begin pursuing a doctorate in industrial and organizational psychology through an online program at Liberty University, based in Lynchburg, Virginia.

At the root of these remarkable ambitions is a desire to change the ways that firefighters respond to their mental health challenges. "It's just a suck-it-up environment," Thorpe said, describing the culture he knew as a firefighter. "We just buried it. We didn't talk about it."

At one point Thorpe's personal situation became so problematic that when a friend committed suicide, he suffered in silence. He started having nightmares, began drinking heavily and even contemplated ending his life as well. He suffered from PTSD and depression.

"I want firefighters to know it's OK to talk about their feelings," said Thorpe, who hopes his research will not only lead to greater openness about mental health challenges but also comprehensive support systems for firefighters and their families.

Thorpe considered several schools before settling on FSU. Several factors influenced his decision to become a Bronco. For starters, the University was one of four UNC System institutions that participate in the NC Promise Tuition Plan, which dramatically reduces tuition costs to \$500 per semester for in-state undergraduate students. He liked the fact that he could take four classes over 16 weeks, which allowed him to finish faster.

He came to favor FSU because of its flexible scheduling, comprehensive curriculum, and commitment to supporting students with unique backgrounds and experiences.

Said Thorpe: "This was crucial for me, as it allowed me to balance my studies with my full-time work while addressing the mental health challenges I faced." 🌊

FIRST STEP

BY LAURIE WILLIS DAVIS

Creating a Seamless Process for Incoming Students

When students come to college for the first time, their experience should be as stress free as possible...

— Cierra L. Griffin, Ed.D.

There's just no way around it: Going to college can be daunting, even for students who excelled academically in high school or whose older siblings or parents went and can tell them what to expect.

There are many things that must happen before and after students enter college to ensure they're adequately prepared for the next four years of their lives, and a good start can be the difference between a college degree or a college dropout.

One of the first things students must do after deciding to attend college is apply, and Fayetteville State University recruiters work diligently promoting the institution, trying to attract students. On the first day of classes of the fall semester, instead of basking in another year of record enrollment FSU recruiters hit the road in search of prospective students, said **Cierra L. Griffin**, Ed.D., assistant vice chancellor of enrollment management.

Once students are accepted, they must complete FAFSA forms, which determine how much financial aid – including grants, scholarships, money from work-study jobs and loans – they're eligible to receive.

In North Carolina, students have to complete residency determination forms, which conclude whether they pay in-state or out-of-state tuition. The state also requires immunization records.

S

**FOLLOW ME!
FOLLOW ME!
FOLLOW ME!**



Prospective students enjoy a campus tour at the spring Open House. Photo by Ezekiel Best.



FSU's Strategic Enrollment and Student Success team led by Vice Chancellor Pamela Baldwin (first row, center). Photo by Ezekiel Best.

Some of the “first steps” college students must take are obvious. Others not so much. For example, not all students actually visit a college or university before enrolling.

“Students should visit the campus first to determine whether they think it’ll be a good fit, whether they like it,” Griffin said. “If they can’t physically visit their prospective campus, they should email or call their intended school to ask about the possibility of a virtual visit. FSU offers a virtual tour of campus, and students can also go to YouTube to watch videos of campus.”

Once students are admitted, they should immediately apply for housing if they plan to live on campus. Residence halls fill up quickly, and students who wait too late could find themselves completing their freshman year online, which is may not be ideal.

Another not-so-obvious first step is getting in the habit of opening campus emails. FSU sends new students a “Welcome Email,” which Griffin said is purposefully brief. Freshmen receive the email from Bronco One Stop, and adult learners, transfers and military students receive it from the ATM Office.

After Griffin joined FSU’s staff in 2023 as executive director of adult learners, transfer and military students, she hosted several virtual student groups to listen to what students said they needed from the University to help fill in the gaps.

The University has created a set of initiatives to help students, including an in-person, summer orientation program called TROT, or Transition, Registration,

Orientation, Transformation. TROT welcomes all new students to Fayetteville State and “aims to guide them through their initial steps in Bronco Land,” according to the school’s website. During orientation, students interact with other students, faculty and staff, undergo placement testing, register for the fall semester and engage with Orientation leaders while familiarizing themselves with campus resources.

Welcome Week is another way FSU allows students to meet classmates, faculty, staff and advisors while engaging in seminars and social activities. The theme for Welcome Week 2025 was S.T.R.I.D.E.: The Bronco Way! STRIDE stands for Students Taking Responsibility in Developing Excellence.

Griffin said Fayetteville State University has implemented an exceptional system to get students started on a path to success. It’s effective, she said, in large part because University leadership insists on making sure faculty and staff help equip students with what they need.

“When students come to college for the first time, their experience should be as stress free as possible, they should learn a lot and they should have a great time,” Griffin said. “Being a new college student is overwhelming. Students have to pay admission fees, follow a checklist, complete applications, set up their college email, etc. If the University doesn’t get it right, we risk losing potential students, but if we advocate for them, make them feel welcomed and treat them right, they’ll tell others about us.” 🗣️

STUDENT PROFILES



Traditional Student: Adejuwon Balogun

The process of starting college and integrating into campus life can be challenging. Adejuwon's onboarding went smoothly, and he felt welcomed to campus immediately. Even now while approaching his senior year, Adejuwon says "I'm totally prepared even my housing, I've never had any issues securing my room, the trick is to be aware of the dates and prepared for the portal to open."

Transfer Student: Isabella Rumbold

Rumbold credits FSU's orientation with helping her transition smoothly. "Orientation was good because we were able to tour the whole campus," she explained. "It still took me some time to find everything, but it was helpful to know where my classrooms would be."

An early advising appointment also had a significant impact, especially because her mother joined her. "My advisor was invaluable and reassuring. Having my mom there made it even better," she said.

Although she didn't receive a scholarship in her first year, she remained determined. "We took out a loan to make it work," Rumbold shared. "This year, when Coach Walker told me I'd be getting some scholarship support, I almost started crying. Anything to help my parents means the world to me because they've worked so hard for me to be here."

Adult Learner: Sierra Whitmore

U.S. Army Sgt. Whitmore's future was determined after visiting Fayetteville State's Training and Education Center at Fort Bragg in early 2021. Attending an HBCU was high on her list. She also had questions about financial benefits as a military service member and transferring previously earned academic credits when she served at another duty station. "(Program

Specialist) Teresa Griffin helped me with my application, tuition assistance, contacts, advisors, who I needed to talk to and where I needed to go next," Whitmore recalled.

That led her to Dr. Cierra Griffin, a veteran of both the U.S. Air Force and Army who now serves as the assistant vice chancellor for enrollment management. "Dr. Griffin asked me to sit on a panel to talk to faculty and staff about veterans and adult learners and their concerns, which got me really involved," Whitmore said. "She got me out of my comfort zone."

Military-Affiliated Student: Staff Sgt. Shenitra Story

When Story arrived on campus in 2021, the same year she and her fiancée got married, she met Veronica Alexander, director of military services. Alexander shepherded Story's initial FSU steps and gave her the unwavering support she needed.

"Ms. Alexander was very helpful and got me started on the right path," Story said. "She helped me get my GI Bill benefits going. That team does the legwork to make sure tuition is taken care of. Ms. Alexander and that department helped me get back in rhythm and helped me get mentally prepared a lot sooner than I would have otherwise."

Also instrumental in her success was Dr. Cierra L. Griffin, assistant vice chancellor for enrollment management. "Dr. Griffin is everything," Story said. "She's phenomenal. Ms. Veronica helps you get started, but Dr. Griffin keeps you sustained. If we're having issues with a professor, Dr. Griffin looks into the problem to find out why there's a disconnect. She helped us military people get parking for disabled vets."

Graduate Student: **Matthew Thorpe**

Thorpe praises FSU for laying out a clear pathway to success – and then making it easy for him to get there.

He was particularly impressed with how easy it was to navigate through Bronco One Stop, a “one-stop shop” for various student needs, offering assistance with advising, academic support, financial aid, registration, and more. Thorpe would agree: “I didn’t have to click all over the place. It was all right there.”

Thorpe began his FSU career at age 48, having earned an Associate of Applied Science in General Occupational Technology from GTCC, in 2022. Before enrolling in FSU, he sought to determine which of his academic and certification credits would be accepted and recognized by the University.

At other institutions where he considered enrolling, he often heard “this will probably work” or “this may work” when he inquired about which credits would transfer.

“Fayetteville State didn’t do that,” he said. “They said, ‘Here, it’s black and white.’”

In the end, FSU did accept some math and English credits from GTCC. Enough certifications were transferred to enable Thorpe to move directly into the upper-division coursework. 🌐



FSU students show off their new lapel pins at the annual Freshmen Pinning Ceremony held in August, 2024. Photo by Ezekiel Best.



The Admissions team led by Executive Director LaToya Floyd (center) supports incoming students every step of the way. Photo by Ezekiel Best.

BENEFITS OF TARGETED RECRUITMENT AND ENROLLMENT

BY LAURIE WILLIS DAVIS

Finding Innovative Ways to Attract and Support More Students

It's no secret college enrollments have declined across the country recently, but Fayetteville State University hasn't been part of that trend. In fact, FSU's Fall 2025 enrollment surpassed 7,600 students, marking the fourth consecutive year of record-setting numbers.

Factors impacting college enrollment include rising tuition costs, declining birth rates, questions about the value of degrees, popularity among alternative choices like trade schools and lagging impacts from the COVID-19 pandemic.

As competition intensifies for students, higher ed institutions must devise creative ways to attract and retain them. FSU doesn't have all the answers, but the institution founded in 1867 and ranked among the top 25 HBCUs by U.S. News & World Report has implemented targeted engagement strategies, particularly for adult learners, transfer and military-affiliated students, that are working.

"I would say number one our cost is among our biggest attributes," said Cierra L. Griffin, Ed.D., assistant vice chancellor for enrollment management. "Nobody in America can compete with us and the

other N.C. Promise Schools offering \$500 tuition. Number two, this campus has so many types of support for all types of students and all types of learners."

FSU has an office dedicated to adult learners, transfer and military students and educates faculty and staff on how best to support military-affiliated students. It has a team of advisors exclusively for freshmen and a well-run financial aid team that this year was among the first statewide to distribute financial aid award letters. Among FSU's faculty and staff are proud graduates providing sage advice to students sitting in seats they once occupied.

"There are a lot of friendly faces on this campus," said Griffin, who came to FSU



Future Broncos flood the Capel Arena to explore FSU's many academic programs and support services at the annual November Open House. Photo by Ezekiel Best.

more than two and a half years ago as executive director for adult learners, transfer and military students. "We figure out ways to get students scholarships and grants as best we can, and we have a virtual contact center averaging about 3,000 calls a month during non-peak time."

FSU also offers Bronco One Stop, a centralized hub providing a range of services and resources to undergraduate students, from academic advising to financial aid.

Employees like Griffin are arguably Fayetteville State's biggest secret weapon. By her own admission, Griffin, who has a military background, is so passionate about the University and its students she allows them to contact her after hours. "I think one of the biggest things is ... if a student asks me something that's typically not in my area, I research the answer then give them the link so they can find the answer next time," she said. "I create relationships with students, and they know I do what I say I'm going to do."

Fayetteville State benefits from diligent employees like Griffin. Others helping the University succeed include **Brittany Munday** '10, who succeeded her as executive director for adult learners, transfer and military students, and **SeQuenna Pennix** '20, program coordinator for adult learners, transfer and military students. Mundy and Pennix are both FSU graduates.

"Dr. Griffin is the person filling in for me as my advisor, and she's been very helpful," freshman Deon Brooks of Weldon, North Carolina, said in an interview just days before fall classes began. "I met her during Orientation Week, and she was able

to answer a lot of my questions and schedule my classes the way I wanted, providing enough breaks throughout the day. I had questions about joining the JROTC on campus, and she directed me to the right people."

Brooks learned about FSU from a high school guidance counselor and, though he was leaning heavily toward attending North Carolina Central University, was sold after participating in a weeklong Thurgood Marshall College Fund summer program for rising seniors.

"We learned about finances, financial aid and what to expect when we get to college," said Brooks, an aspiring nurse. "It was the first time I'd ever been in a college dorm."

Even though Brooks hasn't yet completed a semester, he said he's already comfortable recommending FSU to prospective students. And given the programs, initiatives and people FSU has as part of its infrastructure, chances are good other students, like Brooks, will become a part of the FSU family and continue its positive enrollment trend. 🌐



A student utilizes the resources at the Bronco One Stop in Charles Chestnutt Library. Photo by Ezekiel Best.

DEEDS NOT WORDS, FSU ALUMNI WALK THE TALK

BY TINA RAINES

Alumni are an important part of any university campus community. At Fayetteville State University, alumni are family. And family supports family. Chapters of the Fayetteville State University National Alumni Association celebrated the start of Fall 2025 in support of Broncos headed off to begin or continue their FSU journeys.

The Charlotte Alumni Chapter hosted 12 Bronco freshman and celebrated their journeys with food, games, gifts and joyful connection.

The Edgecombe-Nash Alumni Chapter welcomed incoming freshmen and returning students and awarded 4 student scholarships.

The Kinston-Lenoir Alumni Chapter hosted its annual send-off sharing tips on navigating college life, inspiring words for the journey and Bronco swag.

The Sampson County Alumni Chapter hosted its first send-off and provided financial support to new Broncos Kendra Boone, Alaysia Joyner, Jordan Oates, TaWanda Hargrove, Destanee Newman, Ariel Pegues and Tanella Boykin. 🌟



TO JOIN THE FSU ALUMNI ASSOCIATION VISIT
visit uncfsu.edu/alumni-and-friends/national-alumni-association or scan the QR code.



Members of the Charlotte chapter of the FSU Alumni Association help get new Broncos off to a good start. Photos by Kiara D. Nesbit

BUILDING A STRONG FOUNDATION

BY KENDALL BALKNIGHT

Building strong foundations is central to the student experience from day one.

Bronco One Stop helps students connect with academic advisors and many other services, helping them build a strong foundation. Photo by Ezekiel Best.



**BUILDING A
STRONG FOUNDATION**

Universities play a pivotal role in helping students lay the groundwork for future success. Through intentional resources, mentoring, and skill-building opportunities, they provide an environment where students can thrive academically, socially, and personally. These foundations extend far beyond the classroom—teaching students how to think critically, solve problems, and advocate for themselves while preparing them to enter the workforce as adaptable, confident leaders. Investing in such resources has a lasting impact, not only improving retention and graduation rates but also cultivating graduates who are resilient, prepared, and ready to contribute meaningfully to their communities.

At Fayetteville State University (FSU), building strong foundations is central to the student experience from day one. The Bronco Boost summer transition program gives incoming freshmen a head start, allowing them to live on campus, earn college credits, and connect with the resources that will carry them through their academic journey. Students are also taught the importance of self-advocacy—a vital skill that empowers them to take ownership of their education and navigate challenges with confidence.

FSU also helps students define what success means to them. Through high-touch advising and mentorship, students explore their passions, degree options, and potential career paths, supported by opportunities such as internships and career readiness programs. The Matriculation Institute, a four-year program serving 120 students annually, provides academic support, financial literacy, life skills, leadership development, and social-emotional guidance to help students succeed both inside and outside the classroom.

For students from diverse backgrounds, FSU creates welcoming spaces where peer-to-peer support is tailored to their needs—such as the Military Resource Center, where veterans and



The Student Affairs team led by Vice Chancellor Juanette Council (center) prepares students for life after college and fosters an inclusive campus environment.
Photo by Ezekiel Best.

military families can connect with others who share their experiences. TRIO programs further extend support by offering one-on-one academic coaching, tutoring, FAFSA assistance, graduate school preparation, and more.

The effectiveness of these efforts is measured not only through retention and graduation rates but also through intentional student tracking and feedback. Software tools monitor degree progress and identify when targeted outreach is needed, while learning centers log tutoring hours and assess outcomes. Just as important, administrators and faculty listen closely to students, ensuring their voices guide continuous improvement.

The results are clear: FSU students who engage with these programs develop stronger academic skills, greater confidence, and a clearer vision for their future. Alumni, too, play a key role in sustaining this foundation by mentoring current Broncos, offering internships, and contributing to initiatives like the Broncos Helping Broncos emergency fund. Together, these efforts ensure that FSU students not only begin their journey with the tools they need but also finish it with the resilience, knowledge, and leadership to achieve their goals. 🌟

STUDENT PROFILES



Traditional Student: Adejuwon Balogun

At FSU starting on the right path means networking and learning about the variety of resources available to students for both academic and personal success.

Adejuwon is a member of TRIO Student Support Services-STEM, a unit of the department of Student Success that creates opportunities for academic development, assist students with basic college requirements, and motivates students toward the successful completion of their postsecondary education by offering individualized support and encouragement through academic advising, college life coaching, graduation planning, financial aid assistance, and cultural enrichment. TRIO also ensures the opportunity to participate in career counseling, job readiness opportunities, internship experiences, and graduate school tours. Balogun is also a member of the FSU Honors program which creates incentives for all students to achieve at a level that leads to graduation with distinction. The Honors Program prepares students to excel in their careers, become civic leaders, and to achieve overall personal well-being.

Every student at FSU can build their own network of resources like Balogun, to secure their path to graduation.

Transfer Student: Isabella Rumbold

At FSU, Rumbold rebuilt her confidence through structure and support. As a biology major with a minor in Spanish, she juggles labs, practices, and study hall hours with careful time management, humorously referring to herself as a "chronic procrastinator." "I make sure all my work gets turned in. I might wait until the last minute, but I don't miss assignments," Rumbold stated. "Having the goal of medical school keeps me motivated."

Study hall became a crucial resource, offering both accountability and community. "Most of the time I'm in the training room or study hall," she said. "It's nice because you see familiar faces every day, and it really feels like family."

Adult Learner: Sierra Whitmore

Whitmore's decision to major in biology was shaped by her interest in science, animals and the medical field. "The deeper I've gotten into it, I knew I had chosen the right major," she said.

While serving in the military has taught Whitmore about discipline, Fayetteville State has given her a newfound confidence and a feeling of belonging, she said. As Whitmore immersed herself into the Bronco culture, she gained more support and a growing list of resources and mentors, including **Dr. Katanya Foust**, director of the female Matriculation Institute; **Dr. Shawnta Cummings**, TRIO Student Support Services STEM & Health Services; and **Dr. Danielle Graham**, an associate professor of microbiology and department chair for biological sciences. "Dr. Graham has always given me advice and a listening ear," Whitmore said. "Dr. Cummings provided me with supplies and study material, and was the first organization on campus that I volunteered with ...

"Dr. (Tomilowo) Abijo, a professor in biology and forensic science, let me gain research experience in his lab and was patient and provided me with useful advice for my future endeavors. ... My favorite course that I've taken so far was a chemistry lab with Dr. (Jonathan) Breitzer – he made it fun and provided hands-on experience, which was the best."

Military-Affiliated Student: Staff Sgt. Shenitra Story

As Story grew comfortable with being back in college, she joined FSU's chapter of Student Veterans of America, eventually becoming its president and trying her hand at public speaking. This past January, she joined Chancellor Darrell T. Allison at a meeting of the UNC Board of Governors, where she extolled the virtues of the institution's support of military students. For the fourth time, Fayetteville State University was awarded gold status in the 2025-2026 Military Friendly® Schools designation. FSU also received the Military Spouse Friendly® School designation, further solidifying its position as a leading institution for military-connected students and their families.

When asked why she thinks FSU ranks among the top 25 HBCUs in the country by U.S. News & World Report, Dr. Griffin cited the University's Military Tuition Scholarships as one reason. The scholarships are open to veterans who have exhausted their military benefit. "All you have to do is prove you're military affiliated," Griffin explained. "They apply for the scholarship and they get their tuition waived. It's open to family members, and it's a brilliant idea. We get a ton of students as a result of that."

Her journey wasn't easy by any stretch, but Story always knew she had what it takes to finish her degree and make a better life for her and her sons. Her mother, a staunch believer in the importance of education, paved the way.

"Coming from humble beginnings, she worked her way up and managed to get her educational goals accomplished," Story said. "She definitely set the standard in my life."

Yet even with such a strong mother, Story acknowledges she'd likely still be working on her

degree were it not for Griffin, Alexander and other caring FSU staff and faculty.

Graduate Student: Matthew Thorpe

The advising that Thorpe received from various faculty members not only kept him on track but also came to influence changes in his career goals.

A little background: Thorpe's career in firefighting led to his becoming an Assistant Chief for the City of (N.C.) King Fire Department and, then, a Research and Program Development/Accreditation Manager for the North Carolina Office of State Fire Marshal. His B.S. degree deepened his knowledge of fire service leadership and administration.

"I had already been in the fire service for years and wanted to move beyond just the technical aspects of firefighting into broader leadership, policy, and management roles," Thorpe said. "I wanted to understand not just how to respond to emergencies, but also how to prepare departments better, support firefighters, and improve community safety through research-based administration."

Soon after Thorpe received his B.S. degree, he found himself attracted by the prospect of pursuing graduate-level studies in psychology.

At the beginning of the master's program, Thorpe planned to become a licensed counselor. However, **Dr. Whitney Wall**, an Associate Professor of Psychology who served as Thorpe's faculty advisor, sensed that he should consider taking his psychology studies in another direction, namely research. She connected him to **Dr. Shanhong Luo**, a research-minded psychology professor at FSU who would open the door to formal research opportunities. 🌟

30, 60, 90 SUMMER SCHOOL — THE PATH TO ON TIME GRADUATION

BY LAURIE WILLIS DAVIS



Campus banners help remind students of the 30, 60, 90 Summer School path to graduation. Photo by Ezekiel Best.

It seems like a simple concept, but not every student enrolls in college knowing the best path – or minimum number of credit hours required – to graduate on time.

Fayetteville State University officials are effectively communicating that to students through their aptly titled 30/60/90 Graduate on Time initiative.

By offering free summer school courses, providing access to tutoring and other support services, connecting them with advisors and business services through Bronco One Stop and introducing them to an online student success tool, Bronco Navigate, the 30/60/90 program helps students stay on track while managing the rigors of college.

Cierra L. Griffin, Ed.D., assistant vice chancellor for enrollment management, said the initiative is a good example of how University leadership does a great job

tackling things that might seem obvious but shouldn't be taken for granted.

"We know you need 30 credit hours to be a freshman, 60 to be sophomore, 90 to be a junior and 120 to graduate, but all of the students don't know that," Griffin said. "We tell them what they need, and they start doing research and they start to calculate and pay attention to their credit hours. Kudos to our admissions and marketing teams for promoting the initiative."

A key component of 30/60/90 are the advisors who ensure students are taking the necessary classes to help them graduate on time. It gets rave reviews from participants like Aspen McNeil of Alexandria, Virginia, who transferred from Saint Augustine's University in Raleigh.

McNeil was attracted to FSU because of its \$500 tuition through N.C. Promise, its programs and the



Transfer student Aspen McNeil from Alexandria, Virginia.
Photo by Ezekiel Best.

I appreciate Fayetteville State for taking me in and setting me up for a better future than I thought I would ever have.

— Aspen McNeil '26

immediate sense of community and family she felt during her first visit.

She enrolled in Fall 2024 and learned about the 30/60/90 initiative from friends she met through intramural sports. All of her credits from Saint Augustine's didn't transfer, so when she heard it offered free summer school classes, she completed her application right away.

"My original thought was if I could go ahead and make up some credits for free and speed up the process for graduating, since I already knew I was going to be behind, I'd take that opportunity," said McNeil, a business administration major with a 3.6 GPA. "It also offered free housing and a free meal plan..."

During the summer of 2025, McNeil took three courses, two that counted for a required science lab and the other a virtual environmental business law class.

She's taken advantage of FSU's Learning Center and Bronco One Stop and has become an "unofficial" 30/60/90 ambassador.

"I've recommended 30/60/90 to a bunch of students," McNeil said. "I've told friends who are trying to decide if they want to go to college. I'm glad my friends told me about it, and I want to give back by telling others."

McNeil said the 30/60/90 program demonstrates FSU's genuine care for its students. "They're not just here to push you along and take your money. They're here to make it easy for a lot of young students, particularly Black students, to graduate."

Were it not for 30/60/90, McNeil acknowledges she wouldn't graduate in Fall 2026 but instead sometime in 2027.

Currently, she's working on obtaining winter and summer internships, and she operates the nail salon business she started in 2020. She worked at WAUG (750 AM), Saint Augustine's radio station, and hopes to land an internship with Bronco-iRADIO.com, FSU's student-run, internet-based, global station.

McNeil considered a few other colleges, including North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University and Johnson C. Smith University, but is certain she made the right choice. Her boyfriend died unexpectedly during her last semester at Saint Augustine's, and she said FSU professors have been accommodating when the stress of his death forces her to ask for extra time to complete assignments.

"I've found Fayetteville State to be very nurturing from day one, very welcoming," McNeil said. "I appreciate Fayetteville State for taking me in and setting me up for a better future than I thought I would ever have." 🌍

FEEDING THE NEED

BY JANET GIBSON

Campus Pantry 'Fills the Void' with Nonperishable Foods and Personal Care Items

The way **Lisa Wallace** sees it, no college student should ever need to worry about where their next meal is coming from, or if they have essential personal care items. At Fayetteville State University, there is a place for them to go.

"When you're hungry, you can't focus, and when you can't focus, you're not going to be as successful as you could be," said Mrs. Wallace, campus coordinator for the Food Resource Pantry, which is located on the first floor of the Barbour Administration Building.

According to Mrs. Wallace, the pantry opened in 2018, but really gained momentum in 2021 after Chancellor Darrell T. Allison came to the University with a vision to boost community and Bronco involvement. "The pantry has soared," she said.

Over the past year, about 2,500 students and staff have been helped by the pantry, she said, adding the number is likely to grow this year because of the economy and an increase in enrollment.

"The pantry fills the void," Mrs. Wallace explained, "when, let's say, Bronco Bucks have run out for the month or the cafeteria is closed. Or when there is no village or support system."

Even with a mostly steady stream of donations, the pantry is always in need and appreciates canned goods



The Bronco Food Pantry led by student conduct director Lisa Wallace helps many FSU students in need of food and other personal items.

Photos by Ezekiel Best.



and other nonperishable foods (no expirations, please), gluten-free products – and also gifts of personal care and sanitary items, even cleaning supplies.

Mrs. Wallace credits **Wesley Fountain**, vice chancellor for external affairs and military relations, for helping to get things rolling by securing a \$10,000 grant from Food Lion Feeds, and for the continued food deliveries from Food Lion Feeds.

“We’ve had Sam’s Club pull up with truckloads of items,” said Mrs. Wallace, with more than a hint of delight.

She sings the praises of **Dr. Juanette Council**, vice chancellor for student affairs, for being the conduit between the pantry and Broncos Helping Broncos. Alumni groups throughout the country, local churches and businesses also have stepped up to the plate to help the cause, many with monetary donations.

The pantry falls under the leadership of Mrs. Wallace – who wears a second hat as director of student conduct – and **Brian Thomas, M.Ed.**, who has been described as a “go-to guy” on campus.

They are assisted by a rotating group of volunteers who exhibit a similar passion and joy for helping others that’s positively contagious. One of the most active is Amaya McNear, a senior criminal justice transfer student from Maryland.

Amaya said she has learned to listen more and that people, and their circumstances, are often misunderstood.

“Both Brian and Mrs. Wallace have poured into me and everybody at the food pantry,” said Amaya, who logs in about 25 hours per week. “This work is transformative.”

HOW TO DONATE TO THE CAMPUS FOOD PANTRY

The Food Resource Pantry is located on the first floor of the Barbour Administration Building. There are set limits on food and personal care/cleaning supplies and number of monthly visits, “but we never turn anyone anyway,” said Lisa Wallace, the pantry’s campus coordinator.

The pantry also serves a greater purpose to educate Broncos about health issues, such as blood pressure checks or mini-classes in conjunction with the School of Nursing.

As in recent years, the pantry will host its popular Thanksgiving Box giveaway the week before the holiday. Stay tuned for details on FSU social media and signs around campus.

The weekday hours for the pantry are:

Tuesday, 10 a.m.-2 p.m.

Wednesday-Thursday, 1 p.m.-6 p.m.

Friday, 11 a.m.-2 p.m.

Call: 910-672-1201

Email: lwallac3@uncfsu.edu

bthoma14@uncfsu.edu

GROWING & LEARNING

BY NIEEMA WILLIAMS

Opening the Doors to Success: A Blueprint for Student Thriving

his section, Growing and Learning, showcases the heart of every thriving college campus. Institutions across the nation are facing a variety of social challenges however, one truth stands out: students who feel connected, supported, and empowered are far more likely to stay the course. At Fayetteville State University, the **Department of Student Success** and the **Department of Student Experience, Engagement, and Leadership** ensure this path is one full of both academic achievement and active engagement. A collaboration of planning, organizing and outreach aim to keep the spark of **student persistence** ignited and secure the foundation of **student retention**. Broncos do not travel this road alone!

Student Success hosts a variety of units that support FSU's traditional, adult, transfer and military students academically. The FSU learning Center offers tutoring services, houses The Writing Center and The Math Lab, and even offers extension-grade contracts to first time freshmen. Other key units include TRIO Student Support Service and TRIO-SSS STEM, the 2nd, 3rd and 4th Year Experience, a Retention Specialist, College Access Programs as well as, Testing & Assessment services. Faculty and staff in these units work year-round to meet students where they are. Understanding the stark variety of learners present on campus, the need to diversify and expand the academic resources



Traditional student, Adejuwon Balogun.
Photo by Ezekiel Best.



At FSU, Student Experience, Engagement and Leadership isn't just a department—it's the heartbeat of campus culture.

has proven beneficial boasting a record retention rate of 78% entering the Fall 2025 semester.

At FSU, ***Student Experience, Engagement and Leadership*** isn't just a department—it's the heartbeat of campus culture. This dynamic powerhouse is on a mission to transform everyday student life into something extraordinary. This vital campus entity is made of several areas including the Office of New Student Orientation, Office of Civic Engagement and Service Learning, Office of Student Activities, Engagement, and Leadership, and Parent and Family Programs. Through bold programming and imaginative initiatives, the Bronco spirit keeps bucking—enlightening minds, sparking joy, and fostering connection. Whether it's late-night events, leadership workshops, or spontaneous campus pop-ups, students find themselves immersed in a vibrant ecosystem designed to elevate their college journey far beyond the classroom walls.

From the moment students commit to becoming Broncos, and long before their first lecture, the ***Department of Student Success*** and the ***Department of Student Experience, Engagement and Leadership*** join forces to create a seamless, supportive transition into college life. Their collaboration is more than administrative—it's a shared mission to empower, guide, and uplift. As the initial excitement of campus life settles, these departments shift into high gear, offering tailored resources, meaningful connections, and transformative experiences that shape the heart of the collegiate journey. How a student navigates their four years in college is just as important as where they choose to pursue their higher education. From ***Smooth-Move*** and ***Welcome Week*** to ***Registration-Palooza*** and ***Declare Your Major Day***, we'll spotlight areas, resources and initiatives that build resilience, belonging, and long-term commitment. Because when students thrive, campuses flourish—and the journey from enrollment to graduation becomes more than a path. It becomes a purpose. 🌟



**GROWING
& LEARNING**

STUDENT PROFILES



Traditional Student: Adejuwon Balogun

Now in the rhythm of college life, Balogun balances his focus amongst several responsibilities and campus organizations. His involvements include being an intern for Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina, a Peer Career Coach for the Office of Career Services, a STRADA HBCU Scholar, a member of FSU Honors Program, the National Honors Society, Phi Eta Sigma Honor Society and TRIO SSS-STEM. Balogun is also a member of the Epsilon Zeta chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity inc. and he has been named on the Chancellor's list from 2023-2025. "Nothing is going to come to me, I had to put in the work, make sure I was always exposed to the opportunities that would help develop my leadership skills," Balogun remarked.

In 2024 Balogun served as a Community Navigator with Peake Fellowship Program where he lead a research project aimed to help small business owners of Cumberland County by creating and enhancing their online presence on platforms such as Instagram, X, Google Business, Facebook, & LinkedIn. That same year, he was also selected to be a FedEx Student Ambassador representing FSU in Los Angeles, California. Balogun spent this past summer as a Corporate Social Responsibility Intern for Blue Cross Blue Shield of North Carolina, working on several initiatives over 10 weeks.

Balogun's favorite role has been working as a Peer Career Coach with Office of Career Services. He accredits the Career Services leadership team—Assistant Director **Mrs. Daisy Osborne**, Internship Coordinator **Ms. Rachel Townsend** and Career Counselor **Mrs. Nicole Collins**—as being mentors who challenged him to take on new leadership roles. Balogun said, "getting a job on campus was my best decision, especially in career services. Being able to help other students create their resumes, prepare for interviews and even find professional attire using the

new career success closet has been so rewarding, I enjoyed being a part of making a change in the lives of my peers and making the space better for all students."

Transfer Student: Isabella Rumbold

Softball shaped Rumbold's discipline and determination, but the Chancellor's Fellows Program transformed her confidence. "I used to think, I'm not going to talk to these people; I don't know them," she admitted. "But the program put me in touch with important individuals who can help me on my journey. It's opened doors I never expected."

Through the Fellows Program, she participated in homecoming events, met alumni, and connected with professionals in her field—including doctors who later offered to write her letters of recommendation.

She also found mentorship in the classroom. "I wasn't interested in physics at all, but **Dr. Gautam** explained it in a way that made sense," she recalled. "He was one of the best teachers I've ever had. Even though it wasn't my favorite subject, he made me understand and succeed."

Her teammates provided a second family. "We really do everything together," she said. "If you see one of us, you're probably going to see a group of us. My coaches and teammates have been my biggest supporters."

Adult Learner: Sierra Whitmore

Whitmore notes the support at FSU runs much deeper than supplies or a professor's extra time in the classroom or lab.

For five months in 2024, she was deployed in two countries in the Middle East, so her courses had to be



Students enjoy the festivities at Spirit Night during FSU's Welcome Week. Photo by TopEndShoots, LLC.

taken online. She will always remember – and cherish – how FSU faculty and staff checked in on her. What also feeds her soul is staying involved with students when she is in Fayetteville or elsewhere. Whitmore recently returned from a trip with her fellow McNair Scholars to UCLA, where she presented at a national conference. Whitmore's research topic: The Effects of EGCG On Dopaminergic Depleted SH-SY5Y Cell Lines. Sierra also finds time to serve on campus as vice president of the National Society of Black Women in Medicine and as historian for a women's organization called L.E.A.D. (Learning, Excelling, Accepting, Dreaming).

"I enjoy spending time with my L.E.A.D. sisters, hanging out at my apartment, relaxing and having girl time, and volunteering."

Military-Affiliated Student: Staff Sgt. Shenitra Story

While a full-time student at FSU, Story also worked full-time for the United States Postal Service; however, her part-time military service took precedent over both.

Once during her last semester, Story was on assignment in the Reserves and was having trouble getting internet service. She was finally able to email her professors, who agreed to give her a few extra days to complete her work.

"When I was going through depression, my grades suffered a little bit," Story shared. "I was real transparent with one of my professors, **Amber Thomas**, and told her I was going through a separation

and asked her to please grant me some grace so I could make up all my missing assignments. She said 'yes, whatever you need.' I will never forget that. She probably doesn't even remember that, but I always will."

Graduate Student: Matthew Thorpe

Thorpe has abandoned his (initial) plans to pursue a counseling-focused career in psychology, having come to see the impact that his research can have on the fire service at a broader, systemic level.

"What I want to do is focus on those areas where I think could be the most beneficial in cutting back firefighter suicide rates and in helping firefighters understand that it's okay to talk about their mental health," Thorpe said. "And the way I think I can be the most effective in doing that is through research. This master's program pointed me towards the research side of things, and I fell in love with it. Who knew?"

Experiential learning helped seal the deal when it came to Thorpe deciding to make research the focus of his psychology career. This came in the form of a research project that he and several classmates collaborated on for a Wall-taught course called Psychology 511 Applied Research Design and Implementation.

The project demonstrated that overall job satisfaction has a significant impact on health confidence. It entailed coming up with a hypothesis, developing research questions, and analyzing findings, among numerous other facets. 🌩️

BRONCOS TAKE THE WORLD STAGE: FSU THEATER SHINES AT EDINBURGH FESTIVAL FRINGE

BY LINDA GERRON

The lights dimmed, the crowd hushed, and a group of Fayetteville State University students stepped onto the stage in Edinburgh, Scotland. Thousands of miles from Butler Theater, they were about to perform in the world's largest theater festival... the Edinburgh Festival Fringe.

For two unforgettable weeks this summer, FSU Broncos lived the dream of artists everywhere: seeing their names in an international program, meeting performers from across the globe, and proving their voices belong on the world stage.

The Trip to Edinburgh

The transatlantic journey began with rehearsals on campus, followed by preview shows in the heart of downtown Fayetteville. Then came passports, suitcases, and long flights to Scotland. Once there, the cast performed "Be a Wolf" four times as part of the International Collegiate Theatre Festival and spent their



Theater students enjoy their time in Edinburgh, Scotland while preparing to perform at the Festival Fringe.

days attending productions, connecting with artists, and exploring Scotland's culture.

Audiences responded with enthusiasm. On the Fringe website, one reviewer called the production "creepy, funny social commentary that pulls the audience into the action." Another described it as "suspenseful, funny, and... nothing short of masterful," praising the way the cast kept them "on the edge of [their] seat."

For Shakeela Slade, a senior theater major from Scranton, Pennsylvania, the trip created lasting memories. "The most memorable moment for me was the busking, walking the Royal Mile, and seeing how enthusiastic everyone was to showcase their talents," she said. "Being surrounded by so many passionate performers, especially the street artists, was inspiring."

Slade said the trip gave her a renewed sense of motivation. "It definitely changed the way I see my studies," she said. "Traveling to Scotland and seeing

all that hard work pay off made it truly worthwhile. I'm motivated for my senior year now that I know what's possible beyond it."

The Production: "Be a Wolf"

The centerpiece of the trip was an original play created for students. Professor **Jeremy Fiebig**, FSU's theater director, commissioned playwright Merlyn Q. Sell to create a new work tailored for his students. The result was "Be a Wolf," a witty, modern twist on "Beowulf" that doubles as a sharp commentary on social media and celebrity culture.

"Merlyn wrote it with our students in mind, and it was perfect for the festival," said Fiebig. "I directed the production, but the students carried it. They made the story their own."

This opportunity became a reality thanks to a scholarship from the Kenan Charitable Trust, support from the Florence Rogers Charitable Trust, and proceeds from the department's hit musical, "Kinky Boots." Each student received between \$4,000 and \$6,500, transforming a distant dream into a boarding pass.

"The confidence they came back with is priceless," said Fiebig. "They realized they can hang with the best. In some cases, they saw that their work was even stronger."

The Department of Performing and Fine Arts

The Edinburgh trip reflects the broader mission of FSU's Department of Performing and Fine Arts. Offering majors in theater, music, and visual art, along with a minor in dance, the department serves as a hub of creativity on campus and a cultural bridge to the Fayetteville community.

Concerts, plays, art exhibitions, and dance performances invite neighbors onto campus, while students and faculty help fuel the city's cultural heartbeat through partnerships with



FSU students performed their version of "Be a Wolf," a modern twist on the classic "Beowulf."

the Fayetteville Symphony Orchestra and Sweet Tea Shakespeare.

"Great cities have great art," said Fiebig. "That's what keeps people here - the culture, music, theater, food, fashion. We want Fayetteville to be that kind of city."

Alumni from the program are already demonstrating its real-world impact. Deon Releford-Lee has taken the stage on Broadway, reaching national audiences in major productions. Lydia Williamson is an active participant in Charlotte's dynamic theater scene, contributing to local arts. Alease Timbers and Adrian Knight now inspire new generations as theater educators in Cumberland County, helping build arts education in local schools. Traycie Zapata, drawing on her FSU roots, is now the artistic director of Sweet Tea Shakespeare, a company that has become a cornerstone of Fayetteville's theater community.

Back on campus, the spirit of Edinburgh lingers. Students who once questioned their abilities now speak with the boldness of artists who have conquered the world stage.

"These experiences don't just change careers," said Fiebig. "They change lives." 🌍

WANT TO GET INVOLVED?

Email Professor Jeremy Fiebig at jfiebig@uncfsu.edu or visit the Department of Performing and Fine Arts in the Butler Building.



FSU career counselor Nicole Collins consults with Nigel Gonzalez in the Clothes Closet he helped establish.
Photo by Ezekiel Best.

NIGEL GONZALEZ EARNS DEGREE — AND HELPS DEVELOP FSU CLOTHES CLOSET

BY KEN KEUFFEL

This past spring, at the age of 19, Nigel Gonzalez '25 earned a B.S. degree in Criminal Justice from Fayetteville State University (FSU). Along the way to this milestone, he both benefitted from FSU's Office of Career Services and contributed to it substantially.

Gonzalez began his tenure at FSU as a junior, having completed his first two years of college (in addition to completing his high school diploma) at Cross Creek Early College High School, which is on FSU's campus. He sensed early on during his time at FSU that because his junior and senior years "were going to go by fast," he needed to focus without delay on putting himself in the best

possible position to secure gainful employment after graduating.

So, he quickly made his way to the Office of Career Services, where he learned the finer points of writing an effective resume and cover letter and of interviewing persuasively. Career Services also helped him secure work this past summer as a Financial Crime Intern at U.S. Bank. And during the summer of 2024, he worked as a Bureau of Land Management Firefighter in Oregon.

It was at the Office of Career Services that Gonzalez also began giving back, becoming a Peer Career Coach a few months into his junior year. As a Coach, he not only passed on his job-search know-how to fellow students; he also helped develop and worked at the now-thriving Clothes Closet, a store-like space of Career Services that makes alumni-donated professional attire available to male and female students, who use it for purposes such as job interviews, job fairs, and award ceremonies.

Gonzalez described working with Career Counselor **Nicole Collins**, who's the Clothes Closet's coordinator, and several other Peer Career Coaches to determine which clothing items would be on offer. The items run the gamut: men can find everything from ties to suits, and women can uncover everything from pants suits and dresses to shoes.

Gonzalez and company also designed an effective Clothes Closet layout, which includes everything you might find in a typical clothing store: well-organized areas for men's and women's clothing, dressing rooms, mannequins, mirrors, and clothing racks (which were ordered from Amazon). "We literally took out a piece of paper to map everything out," Gonzalez said.

Once the Clothes Closet was up and running, Gonzalez assumed several roles. He helped male counterparts tie a tie. He suggested color combinations (for men and women). He answered numerous questions: Does this look good on me?



Shereena Jean Francois '25 and Nigel Gonzalez '25.
Photo by Ezekiel Best.

Does this combination become me? And he took inventories of clothing donations, helping Collins decide which items should be out on the floor and which ones should be put in storage.

Gonzalez remains justifiably proud of the contributions he made to the Clothes Closet.

"If you need some professional attire and you don't have any, you can stop by the Career Closet and obtain some," Gonzalez said. "It's all free, and students can come in multiple times throughout the semester and get professional attire. So, it's just an overall great service." 🌊

It's all free, and students
can come in multiple times
throughout the semester and get
professional attire.

— Nigel Gonzalez '25

PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

BY KEN KEUFFEL

This past August, **Dr. Monica Terrell Leach**, Provost and Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at FSU, met with University freshmen. Although commencement was four years off for many of the students, she wanted them to start thinking about their future after they graduated and what they could start doing immediately to make it as bright as possible.

So, she encouraged them to immerse themselves in all that FSU offered, especially as it pertained to co-curricular offerings. She touted the “transformational experience” they could gain if, in addition to pursuing academic work, they also secured an internship, studied abroad, joined a student organization, engaged in community service, or pursued a research project. She did so because “the data has shown” that the sooner students pursue opportunities outside the classroom,



Adult learner, Sierra Whitmore.
Photo by Ezekiel Best.



PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE



the sooner their degree subject areas and/or potential career paths will come into focus.

"We want to build their confidence, build their critical thinking skills, (illuminate) their purpose as to why coming to Fayetteville State was the right choice, and really develop them as engaged citizens in the world," she added. "And so our goal at the University is to really open their eyes to possibilities and to opportunities to really pursue their dreams, but also make an immediate impact once they leave the University."

In Leach's eyes, donors to FSU also have a role to play in making possibilities and opportunities happen. They not only help fund scholarships but also underwrite perks such as new facilities and 21st-century technology platforms.

Numerous partnerships also help FSU's students lay the groundwork for what comes after they graduate. One of the most prominent of these is with nearby Fort Bragg, the world's largest military installation.

Our goal at the University is to open their eyes to possibilities and opportunities to pursue their dreams.

— Dr. Monica Terrell Leach

About one-third of the students at FSU are considered military-affiliated due to its proximity to Fort Bragg. They include active duty personnel, veterans, military spouses, and family members. The FSU-Fort Bragg partnership is grounded in features such as degree programs that can accommodate schedules of military students and military-affiliated scholarships.

Leach spoke of a multifaceted pipeline through which FSU's undergraduates can transition to graduate-level programs, either at FSU or elsewhere. The pipeline includes not only undergraduate-level prep courses but also workshops for students interested in pursuing careers in medicine, law, and other fields. It also features a partnership with East Carolina University which guarantees admission for qualified FSU undergraduates into graduate programs that ECU offers but FSU does not. The programs are in fields such as the fine arts, kinesiology, biology, and network technology.

"We at the University are very intentional in helping our students identify the different types of graduate schools that they're interested in and then working with those students to get to that next level," Leach said. 🌐

STUDENT PROFILES



Traditional Student: Adejuwon Balogun

Balogun's flexibility in balancing academics and other organizational responsibilities is notable and inspiring. He notes that today you must be open to taking chances to achieve the success you want. For Generation Z and younger millennials, the desire to pursue advanced degrees after receiving a bachelor's has increasingly become less ideal for several reasons. For starters, the state of the economy has made affordable education a challenge, while the need to start earning immediately post-grad has increased. There is also a greater need to "test the waters" to ensure that chosen career paths are fulfilling and boost the chances of graduate school admission.

The Global Pandemic shifted workplace norms seemingly overnight. Major changes such as remote work schedules, implementation of new digital technology, the growth and importance of social media, and even the emergence of Artificial Intelligence, have left younger generations entering the workforce with more leveraging power. As a first-gen scholar, Balogun said he felt the need to choose a major based off the potential earning window after receiving his degree. However, after learning more about himself and the collegiate journey, he realized his passion for serving people and communities. He wants to find the career path that will best allow those qualities to coincide with his love for cybersecurity and computer science.

Transfer Student: Isabella Rumbold

This past summer, Rumbold began an internship at Cape Fear Valley Hospital, where she shadowed doctors in trauma surgery, obstetrics, orthopedics, and emergency medicine. "Working with the trauma surgeon, who was also a general surgeon, was my favorite experience," she said. "It gave me insights I didn't have before and confirmed that this is the path I want to take."

Although her grandmother's and mother's nursing careers influenced her, Rumbold knew she wanted to chart her own course. "I always loved the ocean and considered marine biology, but it wasn't flexible for the kind of life I wanted," she explained. "The only other thing I could see myself doing was becoming a doctor. I want a career where I can help people." She also hopes to remain local after medical school. "My grandparents helped raise me, and I don't want to leave them," she said. "I'd like to give back to the communities that have shaped me."

Military-Affiliated Student: Staff Sgt. Shenitra Story

Story likened the treatment she received at FSU to a famous quote by renowned poet, author, civil rights activist and performer Dr. Maya Angelou, which says, "I've learned that people will forget what you said. People will forget what you did. But people will never forget how you made them feel."

Graduate Student: Matthew Thorpe

Thorpe is currently conducting a funded study named Bridging the Gap: Understanding Relationship Strain Among Firefighters and Their Spouses. As such, he's using surveys to examine how job-related stress impacts family dynamics: "The goal is to find out what's causing the strain in the relationship. Is it the shift that they're working? Is it the hours that they're working?" Along with the survey, Thorpe is also developing targeted interventions designed to improve firefighters' mental health and strengthen their relationships. "You've got to help both sides," he said, referring to firefighters and their spouses. Luo and Wall are overseeing this research.

"They have been instrumental in guiding the process and ensuring the work remains both rigorous and practical for application..." Thorpe said. 🌐

MOCK TRIAL, REAL SKILLS: PREPARING THE NEXT GENERATION OF LEGAL MINDS

BY KEN KEUFFEL

For Fayetteville State University's Judge Ola M. Lewis Pre-Law Scholars, the classroom doesn't stop at lectures and textbooks—it extends into real-world practice. That was clear on July 17, 2025, when the program hosted its Annual Mock Trial at the Rudolph Jones Student Center.

The event transformed the space into a courtroom, where students stepped into the roles of attorneys, witnesses, and jurors. Pre-Law Scholars argued both sides of a fictional case, presenting evidence, making objections, and delivering closing statements before a volunteer jury composed of their peers and faculty.

Far more than a performance, the mock trial served as an immersive learning experience. Students sharpened advocacy and critical thinking skills while practicing public speaking, active listening, and teamwork—core strengths that will carry them into law school and professional careers.

The Judge Ola M. Lewis Pre-Law Scholars Program, named in honor of the late North Carolina Superior Court Judge, provides FSU students with mentoring, academic enrichment, and hands-on experiences designed to guide them toward law school and



Judge Ola M. Lewis Pre-Scholars pose with Supreme Court Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson at a community event held on FSU's campus. Photo by Ezekiel Best.



The Fayetteville State University Judge Ola M. Lewis Pre-Law Scholars Program (JOML) successfully hosted its Annual Mock Trial on Thursday, July 17, 2025, drawing enthusiastic participation from students, faculty, and staff across the university. Photo by Benita Powell.

beyond. Events like the mock trial highlight the program's commitment to preparing students not only to succeed academically but also to lead as future legal professionals.

The success of this year's trial demonstrated how experiential opportunities can inspire students, deepen their understanding of the legal process, and build the confidence needed to excel in the competitive world of law. By blending academic study with practical application, FSU ensures its Pre-Law Scholars are not just learning about the law—they are learning to live it. 🌐

NEXT GEN DEFENDERS: FSU STUDENTS AT THE NSA

BY KENDALL BALKNIGHT

This summer, a group of computer science and data science students from Fayetteville State University (FSU) had the opportunity to visit one of the most secure facilities in the country: U.S. Cyber Command and the National Security Agency (NSA) at Fort Meade, Maryland. This opportunity builds on FSU's growing partnership with the US Cyber Command, which began earlier this year when General Timothy D. Haugh, then Commander of the US Cyber Command and Director of the NSA, visited FSU in January to present the university with the Academic Engagement Network (AEN) award.

The visit was more than just a tour; it provided students with a chance to immerse themselves in the world of national security, engage in conversations with leading researchers, and present their original work on artificial intelligence and critical infrastructure defense. This experience highlighted how community partnerships, particularly with the military, create pathways that prepare students for future careers.

The invitation to visit came after FSU was named a top-10 finalist in a national academic competition within U.S. Cyber Command's Academic Engagement Network. The team, led by **Dr. Sambit Bhattacharya**, a professor of computer science and director of the Intelligent Systems Laboratory, included students Paul Rodriguez, Miriam Delgado, Jesse Claiborne, Joshua Lockart, and Bryce Herring. Together, they showcased the growing talent emerging from FSU's computer science programs.

Over the course of two days, the students participated in roundtable discussions about artificial intelligence and cybersecurity, received briefings on national defense missions, toured the National Security Operations Center, and explored the National Cryptologic Museum. Most importantly, they presented their research to

cybersecurity professionals, initiating discussions on how artificial intelligence can enhance the defense of critical infrastructure.

"This visit represents a significant milestone for our programs and demonstrates the caliber of research being conducted at FSU," said Dr. Bhattacharya. "Our students had the opportunity to engage directly with leading cybersecurity professionals and researchers, gaining invaluable insights into national security challenges and potential career pathways."

Such access—where classroom learning converges with real-world application—is what makes partnerships with the military and other community stakeholders so valuable. FSU's proximity to Fort Liberty and its strong ties with military partners offer students unique opportunities to see how their academic work relates to pressing global issues.

According to Provost and Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs Dr. Monica T. Leach, "Their work underscores FSU's commitment to innovative research and preparing students to become leaders in cybersecurity and artificial intelligence."

For the students, the trip was both inspiring and practical. They returned with a clearer understanding of how their skills could translate into meaningful careers, as well as the confidence that their research plays an important role in national discussions about security and technology.

As FSU continues to strengthen its engagement with U.S. Cyber Command, the NSA, and other partners, it is evident that these collaborations go beyond academics—they serve as a launchpad for students to transform knowledge into impactful careers. 🌐



Pictured (from left to right): Bryce Herring, Miriam Delgado, Dr. Sambit Bhattacharya, Paul Rodriguez and Joshua Lockart.

A NEW PATH FORWARD — GROWING AND LEARNING

BY NIEEMA WILLIAMS

Andre Poyser (2025), a senior at Fayetteville State University majoring in Pre-Health Biology, has made an indelible mark on campus since transferring in his junior year. With a passion for service and a drive for excellence, he quickly emerged as a standout student leader—balancing rigorous academics with meaningful campus involvement. He currently serves as Vice President of Bronco Wellness, is a proud Chancellor's Fellow, and represents the Epsilon Beta chapter of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity, Inc. Additionally, Poyser serves as Vice President of Bronco Health & Wellness, a Resident Assistant and a Mentor for the Thurgood Marshall College Foundation S.O.A.R program, a week-long residential summer program housed on HBCU campuses for high school students to explore pathways beyond their K-12 educational experiences. Becoming a Bronco is synonymous with becoming a leader. With a motto as strong as Res Non Verba, which translates to Deeds Not Words, this journey is for those who do. Every choice made, opportunity missed, and risk taken determines how and where you land.

Transferring schools in the middle of your collegiate journey can be challenging. Feelings of uncertainty can make you question if you're making the right choice. Will you see your dreams realized? Will it be the place where you find yourself and make life-long friends? FSU is especially equipped to meet the needs of all our students from any background or level of readiness. FSU proudly boast being one of the most diverse institutions in the nation offering a vast variety of resources for not only traditional learners but for our adult, transfer and military affiliated learners a well. Poyser's choice was influenced by a close friend who attended FSU. After touring the campus, learning about the support systems and resources available for transfer students, and experiencing the positive energy

on campus, the decision was easy, and he began as a Bronco in the Spring of 2023.

At FSU the Office for Adult Learners, Transfer, and Military Students, is a cornerstone of inclusivity on our campus. Providing guidance and championing access, support, and success to a diverse and dynamic portion of the student body. The ATM Office offers ways forward for all our non-traditional learners— the working parent, the retired veteran, the transferring junior. The ATM office is dually charged with not only navigating their students to academic success, but they also ensure their students have a unique engagement experience. Events, workshops and opportunities to network are offered at more suitable days and times; weekends, after 5p.m., off-campus mixers and meet-ups, so this population of students develops a sense of belonging to the full campus community. Andre Poyser says "FSU is so family oriented, you pass the same people every day who eventually become friends. Going to the café, attending S.AC. and S.G.A events and the traditional campus events like Homecoming and Rodeo Week with your classmates and it feels more like family." Poyser is also an outstanding Resident Assistant, and



Dr. Rodney McCrowre '02, Andre Poyser, and Dr. James Tyus '74 at Meharry Medical College School of Dentistry. Photo by Ezekiel Best.

he enjoys being a student support aid in the campus living spaces.

Once Poyser became more familiar with the resources available at FSU, he began to emerge as a student leader. He visited the Learning Center for tutoring through Upswing and signed up for extension grade contracts. His next steps were to get involved in campus life. Poyser took immediate interest and joined Bronco Health & Wellness to help spread good information and awareness to the campus. This organization is often seen hosting creative pop-ups and alternative programming experiences that raise awareness on important health issues. He said, "When I faced some financial hardship, it was my advisor for Bronco Wellness Dr. Dawn Truong, Health Program Manager for Student Health Services, who told me about the Broncos Helping Broncos Student Emergency Fund." Now as the vice-president for Bronco Health & Wellness, he has collaborated with Cumberland County Health Department to administer free STD and STI testing. As an HBCU Ambassador for the Pride to the Side campaign, Poyser hosted campus events to raise awarenesses about the rising rate of sexually transmitted diseases, and how to prevent and combat them. He also helped organize campus blood drives with the American Red Cross, and volunteers at local food pantries with his fraternity. Through each role, Poyser has exemplified leadership, integrity, and true bronco spirit.

Exploring the collegiate journey further, students are also encouraged to seek out experiential learning opportunities such as study abroad, internships, mentorships or shadowing. Poyser's love for biology, STEM and the human body fueled his passion to pursue dentistry. His choice to become a dentist was made before entering FSU but he remarked, "I've really enjoyed my STEM classes here at FSU, they've inspired me to stay on this path. Once I began sharing my plans with my professors and advisors, they began connecting me with local dentist offices to shadow in preparation for this career." Over the summer Poyser realized his dream of becoming a dentist was even closer than he imagined. With the help of **Dr. Rodney**

McCrowre '02, Assistant Professor of Management and Director of Pre-Business for the Broadwell College of Business and Economics, and Dr. Juanette Council '15 (EdD), Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs, all roads led to Nashville, Tennessee, where a unique alumni connection made it possible for him to visit his top-rated graduate school, Meharry Medical College School of Dentistry.

During the visit, Poyser was given an exclusive personal tour of the college from esteemed FSU alumnus Dr. James Tyus '74. Dr. Tyus generously shared the history and foundation of Meharry, highlighting their technological advancements, offering advice about the dental school application process, and describing what student life at Meharry would be like. The opportunity to job shadow and receive mentorship was both inspiring and informative, leaving Poyser feeling more confident in his pursuit of a dental career.

Poyser also credits Dr. Truong for being another influential mentor. He shared his passion for dentistry with her when he was still new to FSU and Dr. Truong sat with him to create a roadmap with campus resources to help guide the final years of his undergraduate journey. The value of college mentorship often goes unrecognized; it's often a silent force working in the background fueled by genuine passion and concern for another's wellbeing and success. Effective mentorship can result in boosted academic performance, increased retention, graduation and persistence rates. Mentorship also strengthens social connections and often opens the door for potential career opportunities through networking. Poyser feels it's important for the university to continue supporting resources, so students have a variety of options to choose from.

Poyser plans to continue volunteering on campus and in the community while encouraging underclassmen and transfer students like him to take advantage of all the wonderful options FSU has to offer. 🌐

SUCCESS

BY KEN KEUFFEL

What does student success (for undergraduates) look like at Fayetteville State University (FSU)? What is the end goal?

Dr. Monica Terrell Leach, the Provost and Senior Vice Chancellor for Academic Affairs at FSU, provided two clear answers: One, graduates are ready either to pursue a career in their chosen professions or to enter a graduate-level program or professional school.

Two, more students graduate in four years or less. This is in line with FSU's Strategic Plan, which has set a goal of increasing the four-year graduation rate to 30 percent by 2027. The related degree efficiency rate would reach 25 (per 100 students) by 2027 as well, and retention rates for full-time, first-time freshmen would increase to 80 percent.

Leach stressed that student success at FSU "embodies everything the student needs to be successful." She spent the better part of a recent interview explaining what that means in practice.

She plugged an initiative called 30/60/90, which is designed to help students graduate on time by encouraging them to complete 30 credit hours per academic year. This entails foundation-funded opportunities for students to attend summer school.



Dr. Leach addresses FSU faculty and staff at the annual Bronco Kickoff held in August.
Photo by TopEndShoots, LLC.



Provost Leach, SGA President Latoya Harper, and FSU student leaders welcome students back to campus during Operation Smooth Move. Photo by Top End Shoots, LLC.

Our goal is providing those transformational experiences for our students to be successful along the enrollment continuum in their pursuit of their undergraduate degree.

— Dr. Monica Terrell Leach



She said that FSU has recently hired more mental-health counselors to help students deal with a host of issues that, if left unaddressed, can decrease their chances for success. The issues in question “run the gamut.” One might be test anxiety, another a situation a student never dealt with at home, namely the sudden presence of a roommate in their lives.

Finally, recognizing that financial aid is a key driver of success, FSU has “squeezed and shifted and reallocated funding and been really creative with realigning our scholarship opportunities for our students,” Leach said. “In doing that, we have been able to offer more funding to a wider number of students.”

The University has also taken steps to make financial-aid packages available to prospective students earlier during their senior years of high school (February or March).

“That has had an incredible impact on students deciding to come to Fayetteville State over other campuses,” she said. “You want to be a first-choice institution as much as you can.”

Leach stressed that donors to FSU can play a pivotal role in helping it “bridge different gaps in students’ needs” – e.g., easing a financial burden, making an internship available or underwriting research opportunities.

“Our goal is providing those transformational experiences for our students to be successful along the enrollment continuum in their pursuit of their undergraduate degree,” Leach said. “It’s about providing them a collective experience, a very intentional experience, to ensure that they are successful and that our investment in them propelled them to be their best self when they graduate from Fayetteville State University.” 🌍

STUDENT PROFILES



Traditional Student: Adejuwon Balogun

Graduating from FSU this upcoming May of 2026, the age-old question is lobbied to graduation seniors "what's next?" Balogun wants to enter the workforce immediately. Jobs in computer science and cybersecurity are currently in high demand and he wants to be certain of his passion before pursuing a master's degree. Already entertaining offers, he is hoping to work with Blue Cross of North Carolina, but he also has his eyes on other companies such as Cision and Lenovo, hoping to participate in rotational development programs to see what company fits him best.

After years of nonstop education, highly driven millennial students like Balogun crave a break from academia and can experience signs of burnout during senior year while approaching graduation. They value a healthy work life balance and workplace culture that will protect their mental health and are willing to try out several companies and positions until they find the right fit. They will filter out undesirable aspects of the position ranging from leadership styles, archaic policy mandates and company culture. With new ways of being empowered upon entering the workforce, you can't keep a good millennial down!

Transfer Student: Isabella Rumbold

Today, Rumbold is excelling as a biology major with a 3.91 GPA, student-athlete, and Chancellor's Fellow. She appreciates the opportunities at FSU, from leadership growth to academic support and her life-changing internship.

"I've grown so much since I came here," she said. "I started timidly, but FSU has given me the confidence to lead and prepare for my future." Her favorite memories include late-night hotel stays with teammates during

their travels, which have created lasting bonds and unforgettable experiences.

Adult Learner: Sierra Whitmore

The sky's the limit for Whitmore who has set her sights on earning her doctorate in microbiology. She is currently looking to apply at N.C. State University, East Carolina University and Duke University.

"I would eventually like to work for a bio-pharmaceutical company and propose a project and hopefully receive funding to work on using natural supplements to combat neurological diseases," she said. Whitmore mentioned one of the best parts of being at FSU is making her family proud of her – because she is proud of them. Her mom, Cathy Robinson, graduated from Florida A&M University and, as a star athlete, is in their Hall of Fame. Robinson's #33 basketball jersey was retired. "She is super proud of me, and so is my little brother, Austin."

Whitmore adds with pride: "I worked really hard to get here."

Military-Affiliated Student: Staff Sgt. Shenitra Story

When she participated in Spring 2025 Commencement Exercises, Story's cap was adorned with Psalm 46:5, which reads, "God is within her. She will not fail." Her sash was adorned with a photo of her sons as little boys, one of the three of them in matching outfits, a photo of them in which she wore her military uniform and one of them with her mom. An inscription on her sash read, "I'm standing here today because you helped me find my way!"

Story said her sons, Naasir and Amare Jones, were unequivocally her motivation for completing her.



Transfer student, Isabella Rumbold. Photo by Ezekiel Best.

what you start, no matter what gets in the way. Life happens, but life goes on, too," she said.

Her older son, Naasir, is in the Army and returned to the states in March after being stationed in Korea for a year. Amare is a high school senior and plays the viola.

"They went through my growing pains and everything with me," Story said. "Both of my boys were able to see me walk, and I was so emotional. They saw their mommy go through all of her ups and downs and still persevere."

Story also became emotional after Griffin approached her during the May 16 ceremony. "She found me at my graduation after I walked and I was just crying," Story said. "She was literally a lifeline for me when I was at Fayetteville State. I think other students consider her a lifeline as well. She is well revered at FSU. Everybody loves her."

Griffin, who has a 6-year-old son, Adonis, with her husband, Jonathan Griffin, said she just had to congratulate Story on her graduation day.

"Ms. Story is a rare type of student in my opinion because she was able to juggle a full-time job, a



Shenitra Story celebrates her success with Dr. Cierra Griffifth at the fall Commencement ceremony. Photo by Ezekiel Best.

part-time job in the Air Force Reserves, a full-time course schedule and serve as president of the Veterans Student Association," Griffin said. "She lived in Raleigh and made an effort to travel to campus when we needed her, to show up and do all of the things she said she was going to do."

"Also, she's a mom," Griffin continued. "We came to the University about the same time, and just to see her grow and graduate, I could not pass up the chance to go hug her. We're close in age, and we understand each other. She's also from Florida, and I call Florida one of my homes. She's just an amazing human being and an amazing professional. I did not want to miss giving her some love on her special day."

Graduate Student: Matthew Thorpe

Thorpe will leave FSU with a clear idea of what he wants to accomplish over the next few years. Broadly speaking, his main goal is to land a job at a North Carolina university – FSU tops the list of possibilities – where he can continue his research on the mental health struggles of firefighters and how they affect their spouses.

The research pertaining to Bridging the Gap, the funded study begun at FSU, "is still in progress, and I view Liberty University as the ideal place to expand and apply it further," Thorpe said. "My current study has already provided me with insight into the complex relationship between job stress and family dynamics, and I intend to continue building on these findings.

"At Liberty, I plan to advance this work by integrating psychological research into organizational leadership and policy, helping to design programs that not only support the mental health of firefighters but also strengthen family systems and improve resilience across departments." 🌱

RECORD BREAKING FUNDRAISING PROVIDES OPPORTUNITIES TO SUPPORT STUDENTS



"Every gift, regardless of size,
represents someone who believes in
our students and our mission."

— Omar Bell



Chancellor Allison (second row, center) celebrates with FSU's SECU Public Fellows interns. The program provides students with hands on experience and mentorship in a diverse range of sectors like local government, non profit, healthcare, technology, education, and marketing organizations. Photo by Nieema Williams.

BY KENDALL BALKNIGHT

Earlier this year, Fayetteville State University announced record-breaking fundraising results for fiscal year 2025, with total contributions reaching \$9,841,790 – the highest amount in university history. This achievement represents a remarkable \$1.8 million increase over the previous record and an 86% increase over the five-year average.

The unprecedented success reflects growing support across all constituency groups, with record-setting participation from alumni, faculty, staff, and students. The university also achieved significant milestones in donor engagement and endowment growth, positioning FSU for continued academic excellence and student success.

"These extraordinary results reflect the unwavering commitment to building a dedicated and strong leadership team acutely fixed to delivering on our 5-year strategic plan in terms of outreach and engagement – as we were near the bottom in many of these same categories just a few years ago," said Darrell Allison, chancellor at Fayetteville State University.

"Without question, our donors and supporters are sensing real momentum at Fayetteville State University. Thus, their record-breaking support enables us to enhance student opportunities, support our exceptional faculty, and continue our legacy of excellence in education and service. I am deeply

grateful to every donor who has invested in our students' futures and our university's mission."

"The results we've achieved reflect the deep connection our alumni, donors, and community partners feel with Fayetteville State University," said Omar Bell, vice chancellor for University Advancement. "These record-breaking numbers tell the story of a university that is not just growing in support but growing in impact. Every gift, regardless of size, represents someone who believes in our students and our mission. This momentum positions us to achieve even greater things for our university and the communities we serve."

These record-breaking results provide essential resources for student scholarships, academic program enhancements, faculty support, and campus improvements that directly benefit students and strengthen FSU's educational excellence.

The success positions FSU to continue its mission of providing transformative educational opportunities while maintaining its commitment to affordability and accessibility for students from diverse backgrounds. 🌟



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