

BRONCO PRIDE



PARTNERSHIPS THAT TRANSFORM





BRONCO PRIDE

SPRING 2026

ON THE COVER

FSU's partnerships are making an impact not only in Fayetteville, but throughout North Carolina and even the nation.

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PARTNERSHIPS THAT TRANSFORM

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

At Fayetteville State University, part of our ongoing mission is to create and nurture partnerships that drive growth at every level. These collaborations extend from our campus to the region, state, and nation. We are setting the stage for success today and in the years ahead.

As I mark my fifth year as Chancellor, I am energized by how much we have achieved through collective action. When I arrived in 2021, FSU was recognized as one of the state's most under-resourced institutions. However, we have changed that narrative by building a powerful coalition of supporters. Our \$200 million capital investment from the North Carolina General Assembly represents a historic partnership with state leaders. By working with these officials and private donors, we have secured more than \$500 million in total support.

This level of backing serves as the essential foundation for the transformative, student-centered partnerships featured in this issue.

In this edition of Bronco Pride Magazine, we proudly highlight collaborations with organizations such as the David & Elisabeth Nimocks Foundation, Cisco, and MedPro. These stories represent a much larger network of allies. We are continuously working with leaders in government, education, the military, business, industry, and our local community to move FSU forward. Every partner, whether mentioned here or working behind the scenes, is a vital part of our success.

One of our most exciting ongoing partnerships is with our next-door neighbor, Fort Bragg, the world's largest military installation. We take tremendous pride in being the first university to sign an Education Partnership Agreement with the U.S. Army's XVIII Airborne Corps. This collaboration focuses on national security innovation and provides our students with unique mentorship from esteemed defense professionals.

Building on this spirit of innovation, FSU proudly showcases the expertise of our talented faculty to solve real-world challenges. This commitment is further evidenced by a historic milestone. With support from Congressman David Rouzer, FSU has secured \$345,631 in federal Community Project Funding through the Fiscal Year 2026 Commerce, Justice, and Science Appropriations Bill. This achievement marks the first time in our history that the university has earned this specific type of federal investment. These resources empower our world-class researchers to monitor PFAS, or "forever chemicals," and safeguard public health across southeastern North Carolina.

Our impact extends beyond research into the heart of regional commerce. The Fayetteville-Cumberland Regional Entrepreneur & Business HUB in Bronco Square has been another game changer. Since opening in September 2022, the HUB has served over 7,800 clients, created roughly 968 jobs, and generated more than \$179 million in total economic impact. Furthermore, the Bronco Benefit program continues



Chancellor Allison and Congressman David Rouzer.
Photo by Wesley Fountain.

to grow, providing seamless transfer pathways for students from 15 community colleges across the state. Relationships with Cumberland County Schools also help us build pipelines for future Broncos and place our students and graduates in rewarding teaching careers.

The message is clear. To continue attracting outstanding students, faculty, staff, and researchers, we must continually grow our partnerships. We invite you to join us on this mission. Reach out, get engaged, and be a part of the university's ongoing impact. Continue reading to explore the many ways Fayetteville State University is shaping our world, and consider how you, too, can help advance our work from our campus on Murchison Road.

Indeed, the most successful people and organizations have learned to embrace the power of partnerships. As one grows, so do the others. This progress is good for everyone.

Together, we are stronger. Let's continue building a brighter future, united in partnership with FSU. 🌐

With Bronco Pride,

Darrell T. Allison, J.D.

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Students and staff volunteers prepared the way for an impactful Fintech and Insurtech Conference held on October 30, 2025. Photo by Ezekiel Best.

MAKING THE NEWS

Highlights of great things happening at FSU

BY LINDA GERRON

As the 2025-26 academic year continues, Fayetteville State University is gaining national attention for its strong reputation and its efforts to connect classroom learning with real-world careers. Recent reports showcase a steady rise in recognition of the institution's value, online programs, and new opportunities for students in fields such as financial technology (FinTech), insurance innovation, cybersecurity, and applied artificial intelligence (AI).

This review highlights a few of the major stories featuring FSU appearing in local, statewide, and national media sources.

NATIONAL RECOGNITION AND RANKINGS

Newly released rankings confirm Fayetteville State's strong reputation for value, affordability, support for military-connected students, and online graduate programs.

The university recently strengthened its reputation for affordability by placing No. 2 in North Carolina on the Research.com 2026 Best Value Colleges list. Formally announced in February, the rankings also placed FSU at No. 7 in the South for value and No.

4 statewide for overall affordability. By emphasizing academic achievement and keeping costs accessible, Fayetteville State responds to the growing need for higher education with a strong return on investment.

A notable achievement in healthcare education came last November, when FSU secured the No. 1 ranking for Accelerated Bachelor of Science in Nursing programs in North Carolina for 2026. This honor highlights the rigorous curriculum, expert mentoring, and hands-on experience provided to Bronco nursing students.

The accelerated program lets those who already have a degree in another field finish their nursing education in only 13 months. The program offers over 500 hours of clinical rotations at key partner sites, including Cape Fear Valley Health and the Fayetteville Veterans Affairs Medical Center. By expediting the licensure process, this initiative helps alleviate the nursing shortage in North Carolina.

Graduates routinely excel on the national licensure exam and frequently secure employment before completing their final semester. Accolades from leading organizations underscore the university's role as a key supplier of highly qualified medical professionals in the region.

Fayetteville State's online graduate business program also moved up in national rankings. In January, U.S. News & World Report placed the Broadwell College of Business and Economics online MBA program at No. 90 out of 377 on its Best Online MBA Programs list, positioning FSU in the top 24% nationally. The program also climbed to No. 68 in the Best Online MBA Programs for Veterans, up four places from the previous year.

The institution is also known for its dedicated support for military-connected students, especially given its close relationship with Fort Bragg. In November, Military Times ranked Fayetteville State No. 2 in North Carolina and No. 33 nationwide on its 2025 Best for Vets Colleges list. Among 357 institutions, this



Teena Piccione, former secretary and state chief information officer of the North Carolina Department of Information Technology, delivers a keynote address on cyber security during the Fintech and Insurtech Conference. Photo by Ezekiel Best.

recognition spotlighted FSU's commitment to serving veterans and their families, as well as insights from the associate vice chancellor for Military Academic and Support Services on the university's impact.

Expanding on its reputation for value and veteran support, Fayetteville State achieved further distinction among historically Black colleges and universities for its leading digital programs. In October, Forbes Advisor named the university among the top 10 HBCUs for online degrees. Local news outlets described this as a significant achievement that enhances FSU's standing as a leader in flexible, top-quality education.

Additional ranking sites have echoed these positive results. Niche, for instance, lists Fayetteville State at No. 6 in its Best HBCU Schools in America category, in addition to other honors for online education. While methodologies differ, persistent recognition across platforms highlights FSU's strengths in affordability, digital programs, and support for students balancing academics with work or service commitments.

Students stop by the North Carolina Department of Insurance table at the Fintech and Insurtech Career Fair to speak with representatives about career pathways in the insurance field. Photo by Ezekiel Best.



FINTECH AND INSURTECH ON CAMPUS

A major technology milestone was the FinTech and InsurTech Conference, hosted by the Broadwell College of Business and Economics. The second annual event, held Oct. 30-31, 2025, brought together leaders from academia, industry, and the public sector to discuss the future of digital finance and its infrastructure.

The conference drew nearly 300 participants from 23 universities. Attendees joined a larger community exploring topics such as innovation, regulation, security, and trust in technology-driven markets. Sessions centered on the future of finance and insurance, with a focus on AI and blockchain. These discussions offered Broncos first-hand insight into emerging opportunities and trends.

Keynote addresses featured North Carolina's chief information officer, Teena Piccione, who discussed cybersecurity and technology risk. Former NFL player Marques Ogden delivered a motivational speech highlighting perseverance and recovery after adversity.

The conference provided practical experience and introduced participants to innovative ideas. The agenda included the Deloitte Student Consulting Case Competition, underscoring the university's emphasis on experiential learning and real-world problem-solving.

BRIDGING LOCAL AND NATIONAL NEEDS WITH AI

Artificial intelligence has become a priority at Fayetteville State, with initiatives spanning research, partnerships, and public education.

Last December, Dr. Sambit Bhattacharya, professor of computer science and director of the Intelligent Systems Laboratory, received a \$750,000 award from NCInnovation. The funding advances development of AI tools for battle damage assessment in partnership with the U.S. Army's XVIII Airborne Corps at Fort

Bragg. The technology may also be adapted for health care and emergency response.

Regional news outlets reported on these developments and discussed the broader impact of the research. An article from the Greater Fayetteville Journal detailed the project's military context and emphasized its potential civilian applications, illustrating how the work connects national security, advanced computing, and practical solutions.

NCInnovation also spotlighted Bhattacharya's work, emphasizing its significance for both defense and civilian sectors.

At the community level, the university's AI initiatives include a major education partnership to promote AI literacy in K-12 schools. Last November, Fayetteville State announced a collaboration with AI Learning



Central and Cumberland County Schools to help teachers and students adapt as technology becomes more prevalent in classrooms and workplaces.

Local media offered additional details about the partnership, describing the AI Literacy Bootcamp as a resource to help teachers feel more confident using these tools responsibly. The effort is strengthening early workforce development by equipping educators to guide students in learning, research, and digital skill-building.

In both research and education, the university's AI efforts emphasize practical applications. Fayetteville State collaborates with organizations to transform complex technology into valuable skills and real-world results for communities, employers, and the public sector.



Keynote Speaker and former NFL player Marques Ogden delivers inspirational message at the 2025 Fintech and Insurtech Conference. Photo by Ezekiel Best.

THE FSU BRAND IS GROWING IN PROMINENCE

Collectively, these stories demonstrate the university's rising national profile and continued investment in regional opportunities. The rankings reveal a broader narrative of institutional excellence, showing prospective families that affordability and quality go hand in hand.

Meanwhile, coverage of the FinTech and InsurTech Conference and applied AI research indicate Fayetteville State's commitment to technology leadership. Recent initiatives and studies demonstrate the university's efforts to help Broncos enter emerging fields, engage with employers, and support the broader community's understanding and adoption of new technologies. 🌐

BUILDING A PIPELINE WITH PURPOSE:

FSU and MedPro Partner to Develop Risk Management Leaders

BY KENDALL BALKNIGHT

“FSU graduates stand out because of their resilience, maturity, and breadth of experience.”

— Dr. Burcu Adivar

When Fayetteville State University students take on internships and mentoring experiences with MedPro Group, a national provider of malpractice insurance and risk solutions, they are not simply exploring career options. They are stepping into a pathway that connects classroom learning with corporate leadership in one of the nation’s most stable and essential industries.

Since 2020, FSU and MedPro Group have worked together to

connect Broadwell College of Business and Economics (BCBE) students with careers in risk management and insurance. Building on this foundation, the partnership helps address the shortage of diverse professionals in the field and offers new career paths for our Broncos.

“The partnership between Fayetteville State University and MedPro Group serves as a premier model for developing diverse talent in the insurance sector,” said Dr.

Burcu Adivar, associate dean of the BCBE. “Our goal is to create a seamless transition from the classroom to corporate leadership, so our students have direct access to career pathways in risk management.”

This collaborative approach responds to industry needs. Across the insurance and risk management sector, employers face a growing need for skilled professionals prepared to navigate complex global markets, regulatory





environments, and emerging risks. At the same time, representation gaps persist, particularly in leadership roles. MedPro Group recognized an opportunity to expand the talent pipeline by partnering with a historically Black university whose students bring diverse perspectives, leadership experience, and strong professional preparation.

"MedPro Group is grateful for our partnership with Fayetteville State University and the commitment the

Broadwell College of Business and Economics has shown in preparing students for meaningful business careers," said Andrew Booth, senior vice president of marketing, communications, and learning and development leader at MedPro Group.

From the start, the partnership went beyond recruitment and into academic collaboration. For example, MedPro Group leaders joined the college's Dean's Advisory Board to help shape the



Dr. Burcu Adivar. Photo by Ezekiel Best.

curriculum to meet industry needs and emerging competencies in risk management. This type of faculty engagement with corporate partners ensures students encounter relevant case studies, evolving regulatory frameworks, and practical applications of risk analysis throughout their coursework.

As a result, this collaboration has redefined the academic experience for those pursuing business degrees at FSU. Exposure to professionals in insurance and risk management introduces scholars to career paths they may not have previously considered and reinforces the value of their perspectives within corporate environments.

"The collaboration acts as a career compass," Adivar said. "Students move from general business interests toward specialized roles in risk management and graduate, prepared to launch long-term careers."

Beyond classroom alignment, the partnership focuses on hands-on learning that connects theory with practice. To achieve this, immersion programs allow students to observe daily operations within insurance organizations, while structured summer internships provide direct exposure to professional workflows, project teams, and client-focused problem-solving. Mentoring relationships with MedPro Group professionals

help Broncos navigate career decisions and develop confidence in corporate settings.

Through these layered experiences, participants gain technical knowledge alongside professional skills such as communication, networking, and workplace adaptability. This early engagement with industry partners helps future leaders build a professional identity well before graduation and clarifies pathways into specialized roles.

"We consistently find FSU students to be bright, engaged, and eager to learn," said Randy Walker, inclusion and engagement leader at MedPro Group. "FSU's investment in insurance and risk management education is creating a strong pathway for students into a dynamic and stable industry."

Additionally, the partnership gives MedPro Group access to a diverse, highly prepared talent pool. Many FSU scholars are military-affiliated or first-generation attendees who bring leadership experience, discipline, and resilience, all of which are valued in corporate environments. Their varied life experiences strengthen problem-solving and decision-making within teams, helping them address complex risk scenarios.

"FSU graduates stand out because of their resilience, maturity, and breadth of experience," Adivar said. "They bring perspectives that



Andrew Booth, senior vice president of marketing and communications at MedPro Group.

strengthen decision-making in corporate settings."

The partnership's growth and effectiveness are demonstrated by measurable outcomes. For instance, across partner universities, the broader program has served more than 230 students, with over 60 completing internships and at least 15 securing employment with MedPro Group or affiliated firms. Within FSU, participation in immersion

"We consistently find FSU students to be bright, engaged, and eager to learn."

— Randy Walker, MedPro



Randy Walker, inclusion and engagement leader at MedPro Group.

programs and internship placements has continued to expand, showing sustained student interest and employer confidence.

Together, these outcomes illustrate how intentional collaboration between academia and industry can expand access to careers that have historically been less visible to diverse populations. By introducing insurance and risk management as viable, long-term professions, the partnership broadens career horizons while addressing workforce gaps.

Financial support from MedPro Group further strengthens participation by reducing barriers to experiential learning. Scholarships and stipends enable students to pursue internships and immersion opportunities without added financial strain, ensuring access to career-building experiences regardless of economic background.

In addition to these student-focused benefits, the collaboration also reinforces the institutional role in preparing graduates for

evolving workforce demands. As risk management expands into areas such as cybersecurity, global supply chains, and emerging technologies, partnerships with industry leaders help ensure academic preparation remains current and progressive.

Looking ahead, the FSU–MedPro Group partnership is expected to deepen through expanded immersion experiences, additional credential pathways, and increased collaboration between faculty and industry leaders. Building on previous successes, future initiatives may include specialized certifications and joint exploration of emerging challenges within the insurance sector.

"The trajectory of this partnership is one of continued growth," Adivar said. "We see opportunities to expand learning experiences, strengthen industry collaboration, and prepare students for leadership in risk management."

Through sustained collaboration, Fayetteville State University and MedPro Group are building more than a recruitment channel.

Instead, they are creating a workforce model that aligns academic preparation, experiential learning, and industry engagement to produce graduates ready to contribute immediately and grow into leadership roles.

As industries across the nation seek diverse, highly prepared talent, partnerships like the one between FSU and MedPro Group demonstrate how universities and employers can work together to expand opportunity while strengthening professional pipelines. For FSU students, this means that the pathway from classroom to career is no longer abstract. It is structured, supported, and increasingly accessible.

Through this partnership, Fayetteville State University continues to advance its mission to empower students and prepare graduates to make an impact. By aligning education with workforce demand and cultivating relationships that open doors, the university and MedPro Group are shaping the next generation of risk management leaders. 🌟

FORCES OF INNOVATION AND THE NEW PARTNERSHIP MODEL

BY LINDA GERRON

Fayetteville State University is a dynamic, purpose-driven educational community. It is a leading destination for military-affiliated students, who make up nearly 34% of its population. This is the highest rate among four-year historically Black colleges and universities nationwide and ranks among the top in the University of North Carolina System.

This commitment to serving those connected to the military has earned FSU the No. 2 ranking in North Carolina on the 2025 Best for Vets Colleges list. Members of the Bronco military family, including students, veterans, and their loved ones, find not just a university but a supportive home where their service and life stories are honored. Their presence is an essential part of campus life. This welcoming environment enables targeted programs that align university expertise with the U.S. Army's needs.

Building on this strong foundation, FSU recently formalized its relationship with the XVIII Airborne Corps through a strategic and long-term agreement. This partnership reached a milestone on Feb. 12, 2025,

when both parties signed an Education Partnership Agreement that serves as a platform for research and specialized training. Chancellor Darrell T. Allison described the signing as a move toward intentionality.

"This education agreement enables Fayetteville State University to not only do more through partnership but to be more through partnership," Allison said during the ceremony.

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR GLOBAL IMPACT

The partnership extends beyond Fayetteville. This agreement enables military personnel worldwide to access the university's programs. Soldiers can leverage FSU's research and training resources from any location. It is the first such partnership between the XVIII Airborne Corps and a UNC System institution.

Because of this unprecedented level of access, Lt. Gen. Gregory K. Anderson, commanding general of



Chancellor Allison and Lt. Gen. Gregory K. Anderson celebrate the signing of the Education Partnership Agreement between Fayetteville State University and the XVIII Airborne Corps. Photo by Ezekiel Best.

the XVIII Airborne Corps, views the university as a cornerstone of modern military readiness.

"I could not be prouder of our partnership with Fayetteville State University," Anderson said. "Under Chancellor Allison and his team's visionary leadership, FSU has become a cornerstone of our readiness and sets the standard for academic military relations across the Army. His commitment to educating our soldiers, veterans, and their families directly strengthens our warfighting capabilities and forges a more resilient community for all."

To translate this vision of readiness into practical results, the agreement is broad enough to meet the force's evolving needs. It identifies potential research and training collaboration opportunities across seven distinct information technology arenas, including data science, network engineering, and artificial intelligence. The document also outlines emerging technologies and specific applications in the health domain to ensure the partnership addresses both the technical and physical demands of modern service.



Lt. Gen. Anderson greets FSU military students during a campus tour in 2025. Photo by Ezekiel Best.



Dr. Sambit Bhattacharya, professor of computer science and director of the Intelligent Systems Lab (ISL) conducting AI and robotics research with students Paul Rodriguez and Miriam Delgado. Photo by Ezekiel Best.

INTELLIGENCE AND SIMULATION IN THE LAB

This strategic framework allows academic expertise to meet mission problems through sophisticated technological solutions. Dr. Sambit Bhattacharya, professor and lead researcher at the university, manages a project funded by an NCIInnovation grant that uses artificial intelligence for national defense applications. He describes the XVIII Airborne Corps and the Joint Innovation Outpost, which serves as the Corps' innovation engine, as key government stakeholders in his current work.

At the heart of this collaboration, the project focuses on developing software that simulates kinetic effects in imagery to support training in battle damage assessment. The team also builds models to detect anomalous objects in satellite imagery over oceans. These objects often pose security threats that require rapid identification.

"Success in this partnership over the coming months is subject matter experts from XVIII Airborne experimenting with our AI software at this early stage and giving us feedback on what can be done better," Bhattacharya said.

Beyond digital simulation, advanced manufacturing plays another role in the partnership. The university is exploring 3D printing for rapid prototyping of equipment. One project involves developing a

prototype for a specialized, foldable entrenching tool. Military leadership identified this design as a preferred alternative to standard-issue gear, and researchers are currently developing a prototype based on photographs of the equipment to demonstrate the university's rapid manufacturing capabilities.

REDEFINING ACADEMIC CREDIT AND TECHNICAL TRAINING

Technical training is a key part of this partnership, helping keep the military ready. Maj. Ryan Herrmann, who leads the operational data section for the XVIII Airborne Corps, explained how this work supports his team's technology needs.

"We're leveraging the university education provided by FSU to train our soldiers, much like the Army Software Factory does through its partnership with Austin Community College," Herrmann said.

The decision to replicate this model in North Carolina arose from the crucial need to keep soldiers with their units rather than sending them away for lengthy training. Previously, developers traveled to Austin for training. Now, by localizing instruction at FSU, the Corps preserves readiness without separating troops from their units.

Gregory McElveen, assistant vice chancellor for strategic initiatives, notes the university is tailoring

a curriculum to meet Army Software Factory requirements. This pipeline certifies software developers and product managers and grants official Army skill identifiers.

Beyond immediate technical certifications, the university is also transforming how it evaluates academic credit for military experience. Dr. Mitchel Seal, associate vice chancellor of Military Academic Services, is leading an effort to move toward a model that focuses on how specific military specialties translate into direct progress toward a degree.

At FSU, this forward-thinking strategy enables military experience to count for up to 75% of a degree, especially for senior enlisted members. While the national average for such credit is only about 10-12%, most FSU military students receive approximately 50% credit toward their degree, depending on the student's background and military occupational specialty.

LAUNCHING THE NEXT GENERATION OF EXPERTS

The impact of the partnership is most visible in the careers of students who work as research assistants and interns. Paul Rodriguez, a computer science student and military veteran, used the partnership to begin developing technology that supports real missions. He helped develop a tool to process units for aerial deployments by identifying vehicles that needed maintenance.

"It's definitely an opportunity that you get to see it firsthand, but then you also get to meet the people that help you," Rodriguez said.

He described the experience as exposure to a true development team environment that used Agile methodology, a process in which work is managed in short, flexible cycles to encourage collaboration and rapid improvement. This experience helped him pursue opportunities with greater responsibility; he recently received an offer letter for a follow-up internship with the National Security Agency.



Paul Rodriguez. Photo by Ezekiel Best.



Miriam Delgado. Photo by Ezekiel Best.

While Rodriguez focuses on the logistics of deployment, graduate student Miriam Delgado serves as a student leader on the NCInnovation project, applying machine learning to real-world problems where data is often limited. Her daily responsibilities include annotating data and training models to improve accuracy.

"Collaborating on a project tied to a major military stakeholder has deepened my sense of responsibility and reinforced my goal of building technology that serves meaningful, real-world missions," Delgado said.

Ultimately, this partnership illustrates the strategic alignment between a distinguished public university and the Army's operational needs. By delivering focused training close to home and transforming academic research into national security tools, the collaboration achieves more than expanded regional access. It positions both Fayetteville State University and the XVIII Airborne Corps at the forefront of innovation, ready to meet the challenges ahead. 🌐



A REGIONAL POWERHOUSE FOR BUSINESS

BY NIEEMA WILLIAMS

Since opening in September 2022, the Fayetteville-Cumberland Regional Entrepreneur and Business HUB has thrived in the heart of Bronco Midtown near Fayetteville State University. This success is driven by a strategic partnership between the University, Cumberland County, and the city of Fayetteville, which joined forces to create a centralized resource for upward economic mobility.

Unlike other business centers, the HUB uniquely unifies support across Bladen, Cumberland, Columbus, Harnett, Hoke, Moore, Richmond, Robeson,

Sampson, and Scotland counties. This reach creates one of North Carolina's largest and most accessible business support networks.

While similar business centers exist elsewhere, none previously offered Fayetteville entrepreneurs highly targeted, locally delivered resources. The HUB fills this void by providing regional businesses with central access to advanced professional counseling, technical workshops, and support programs that were previously available only in Raleigh or Charlotte.

The partnership transformed a former campus bookstore into a business development center focused on sustainable growth and measurable results for small businesses. Beyond its physical walls, the center's mission is not only to provide education and resources but also to serve as a gateway to Historically Underutilized Business (HUB) certification. This helps more local companies access government contracts, which is a level of support not previously centralized in the region.

Fayetteville State has long built expertise in small business education through the Broadwell College of Business and Economics. The HUB leverages and expands this knowledge to provide community-wide resources, such as the Veterans Business Outreach Center and the Small Business and Technology Development Center. This makes specialized support uniquely accessible to businesses across the Sandhills region.

Under the leadership of Dr. Tamara Colvin, the HUB has become a primary catalyst for regional entrepreneurial growth. As the director of the center and economic development initiatives, Colvin oversees partnerships across the region and organizes in-person and virtual workshops throughout the year. These programs are open to students, veterans, and entrepreneurs and cover topics including general contracting, partnership agreements, risk management, cybersecurity, human resources law, and procurement.

"You work at your business every day," Colvin said. "When you come to the HUB, you're working on your business."

In addition to educational programming, the HUB provides participants with a unique blend of specialized offerings, including hands-on certification assistance, financial and bonding support, capital access, business development guidance, technology resources, and marketing support. The inclusion of a makerspace equipped with 3D printers sets the HUB apart as a forward-thinking community resource.



Dr. Tamara C. Colvin, director of Fayetteville-Cumberland Regional Entrepreneur-Business HUB. Photo by Ezekiel Best.

These resources meet the needs of today's small business owners. Whether navigating government contracts, managing finances, refining marketing strategies, or pursuing certifications, the HUB functions as a one-stop resource with the accessibility of a true community center.

By Dec. 31, 2025, the Fayetteville-Cumberland Regional Entrepreneur and Business HUB had helped launch 238 businesses and supported 968 new and retained jobs. It also hosted 1,039 training workshops for 20,848 participants and, in less than four years, 7,822 clients secured over \$31.1 million in capital and almost \$148.1 million in government contracts.

The HUB exemplifies how collective action can generate lasting change. By bridging the gap between ambition and opportunity, the partnerships between the University and local government go beyond business creation. It actively reshapes the economic landscape of southeastern North Carolina, ensuring that local entrepreneurs have the tools to succeed for generations to come. 🌐





HOW THE BRONCO BENEFIT PROGRAM IS REWRITING THE TRANSFER STORY

BY LINDA GERRON

For many students, the path to a four-year university doesn't follow a straight line. Increasingly, family, financial, or personal challenges require an alternative beginning to higher education, moving away from the traditional high-school-to-dorm transition.

This was the reality for Eddrelyn Pimentel. When she received a denial letter from Fayetteville State University because her grade point average fell short of admissions requirements, it initially felt like a dead end. Instead of halting her journey, university advisors urged her to pivot by improving her academic standing at a community college. That move later opened new doors.

Motivated by this advice, Pimentel enrolled at Fayetteville Technical Community College. Here, she managed the demanding combination of coursework and parenting

with two young children, all while remaining focused on her goal of returning to FSU. Ultimately, her persistence proved successful: by fall 2025, she transferred as a junior majoring in social work.

Reflecting on her journey, Pimentel credited her smooth transition to the guidance she received. "To be honest, the transfer process was pretty easy, especially if you have a transfer advisor who wants to see you succeed," she said.

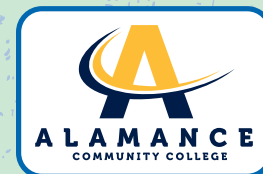
A PATHWAY BUILT BY PARTNERS

Launched in January 2024, the Bronco Benefit program connects FSU with 15 North Carolina community colleges. The shared goal is to make the transition from a two-year to a four-year institution more

BRONCO BENEFIT

A TRANSFER PARTNERSHIP INITIATIVE

FAYETTEVILLE STATE UNIVERSITY



Mebane

Bronco Benefit Program Eases the Transition from Two-year Institutions to FSU



Charlotte



Pinehurst



Hamlet

Colleges Joining Bronco Benefit - Fall 2026

- Blue Ridge Community College
- Cape Fear Community College
- Durham Technical Community College
- Fayetteville Technical Community College
- Guilford Technical Community College

NORTH CAROLINA

Roanoke Rapids



Raleigh



Wilson



Greenville



Goldsboro



FAYETTEVILLE

Kinston



New Bern



Clinton



Morehead

Lumberton



Whiteville





SCC's President Sandy Stewart, and Dr. Rebecca Roush, provost and chief academic officer join FSU's Dr. Sonja Brown, interim provost, and Dr. Cierra Griffin, assistant vice chancellor for Enrollment Management to celebrate partnership in the Bronco Benefit initiative. Photo by Ezekiel Best.

predictable by aligning advising, transfer planning, and academic expectations from day one.

"The Bronco Benefit partnership redefines inter-institutional collaboration," said Dr. Pamela Baldwin, vice chancellor for Strategic Enrollment and Student Success. "When institutions fully commit to shared student-centered goals, they create a truly seamless educational pathway."

For students, that journey begins with practical changes designed to lower early barriers. Eligible participants receive guaranteed admission and a waived application fee, two critical steps that reduce the financial sticker shock and the academic uncertainty that often discourage students from applying.

However, the program's impact reaches far beyond admissions. Significant support occurs as students complete their associate

degrees. The Office for Adult Learners, Transfer, and Military Students lead these efforts by offering unofficial transcript evaluations, personalized advising, and virtual sessions in high-demand majors such as nursing, social work, and psychology.

Brittany Mundy, the office's executive director, describes the program as a holistic, transparent approach. The goal is to build a transfer-receptive culture that helps students graduate and enter the workforce well prepared. To build that culture, Bronco Benefit operations begin as early as a student's first semester at a community college.

Transfer liaisons visit partner campuses regularly to build trust with both students and staff. A primary focus of these visits is the ACA 122 classrooms. Formally known as College Transfer Success, this course is where

students begin planning their long-term academic futures. By engaging students here, FSU representatives provide the early guidance necessary to avoid unnecessary credits and costly delays.

At Wake Technical and Pitt community colleges, these visits serve as an essential link between systems. Andrea Temple-Godfrey, an academic advisor at Wake Tech's Northern Campus, says the partnership is strengthened "by having a specific point of contact at Wake Tech who works directly with Fayetteville State University, a bridge of communication and connection."

To keep this connection active, the university maintains a visible presence across its partner campuses to ensure transfer planning stays top of mind. Patricia Jackson, a university transfer advisor at Pitt Community College, explains that this proactive outreach involves meeting students at multiple touchpoints.

"We have discussions with visitors at our open house and outreach events," said Patricia Jackson. "I educate high school students when I provide presentations from PCC. We have the program on our website to reach out to community members and students. We speak with students at our New Student Orientation and TRIO events."

This high level of engagement across multiple platforms is already

“When institutions fully commit to shared student-centered goals, they create a truly seamless educational pathway.”

— Dr. Pamela Baldwin

yielding significant dividends. According to the January 2026 census, the program’s persistence rate stands at 70%, with most participants continuing toward their degrees after transferring. Enrollment increased from 552 students in the 2024-2025 academic year, the program’s first year, to 724 in 2025-2026, its second year.

THE BLUEPRINT AND THE FINANCIAL BRIDGE

This statewide collaboration did not emerge in a vacuum. Although the Bronco Benefit network includes 15 partner colleges, one nearby institution outside this network played a key role in shaping the program’s model. Fayetteville Technical Community College has a longstanding partnership with Fayetteville State that ultimately inspired the current initiative.

This relationship expanded significantly on Feb. 3, 2022, when Chancellor Darrell T. Allison established the Keen Scholarship. Named for then-retiring FTCC President J. Larry Keen, this tuition-focused award was designed to help graduates continue their education at Fayetteville State.

The one-time award facilitates a seamless transition for full-time

students who have earned an associate degree with a minimum GPA of 2.8. It specifically prioritizes those entering high-demand workforce fields, such as nursing, business analytics, intelligence studies, and cybersecurity.

In the fall of 2024, 28 students used the award to help fund their education. By the fall of 2025, that number had grown to 41 scholarship recipients.

Beyond financial assistance, another impactful element is the daily physical presence of Bronco staff within FTCC’s Horace Sisk Building. Mundy compares it to a full-time embassy, with representatives available every weekday to provide consistent, in-person support.

Inside the building, the partnership is a physical reality throughout the high-way themed corridor known as Bronco Boulevard. Because FSU stands as one of the largest transfer schools for FTCC, its dedicated hallway is positioned at the very front of the building. Against a natural beige base, the corridor is filled with the University’s insignia and street signs that provide a sense of destination for students as they move between classes.

This constant presence changes the psychology of the transfer

process. For a student balancing a job, scheduling a formal appointment can feel like a major barrier. Having an office right on campus makes transfer planning a normal part of daily life.

Dr. Kenjuana McCray, dean of arts and humanities at FTCC, explains that this year-round, daily support is further bolstered by large-scale campus events. One example is the annual Trojans Go Bronco Day, which brings a larger delegation of FSU representatives directly to the community college campus each October to engage with prospective transfers.

According to McCray, combining this consistent on-site guidance with financial support is yielding clear results.

“We have seen a steady increase in students transferring to FSU from FTCC since the inception of the Keen Scholarship and the presence of a liaison on campus,” McCray said. Fall 2024 census data showed 210 students transferred from Fayetteville Tech. That number rose to 325 by Sept. 5, 2025, marking a 55% increase that shows the value of daily support.

Building on lessons from the FTCC blueprint, Fayetteville State further scaled its financial support to other key partners in the network.



FSU's Brittany Mundy, Kersni Stewart, secretary for the Arts & Humanities Division at FTCC, and Sequenna Pennix, director of New Student Orientation and Family Programs at FSU celebrate the grand reveal of the Horace Sisk Transfer Hallways. Photo courtesy of Fayetteville Technical Community College.

The university now offers a full-tuition scholarship to students from Bladen Community College, Sandhills Community College, and Wake Technical Community College.

To qualify, graduates from these schools must meet the same 2.8 academic threshold while earning their associate degree. Maintaining this specific GPA is an intentional choice. The standard encourages academic rigor while remaining attainable for students juggling full-time jobs or childcare.

THE STUDENTS BEHIND THE PROGRAM

Programs and partnerships provide the framework, but real success is found in the students who navigate them. For Pimentel, the denial letter that once seemed like a closed

door became the first step in a carefully planned recovery. The Bronco Benefit program became the guide that ensured her time at community college was a transition, not a setback.

"I have a testimony," she said of her journey. "I feel like if I can get through it and actually succeed, [others] can as well."

The academic climb was far from simple. Even after following the university's roadmap to FTCC, life threw up new obstacles. When her car broke down, the daily cost of ridesharing to campus became unsustainable, threatening her enrollment. Instead of dropping out, the program's flexibility enabled her to switch to online courses to maintain her momentum.

To navigate these shifts, Pimentel leaned on the person-to-person

support that defines the Bronco Benefit experience.

"Ms. Mundy was my go-to for everything," Pimentel said. "She was able to help me lay every challenge out on the table and find a way through. She would say, 'Okay, we can go this direction and do X, Y, and Z,' and having that specific guidance made the entire process feel possible."

For her, the moment the journey finally felt real wasn't marked by a campus event or an orientation. It was a quiet moment of personal validation.

"When I saw my 3.5 GPA," she said. "That was it."

While Pimentel's experience was defined by logistical grit, Gentile Uwase found her greatest hurdles in the search for belonging. Originally from Rwanda, Uwase arrived at Wake Technical Community College with a plan to pursue a nursing career. However, her perspective shifted as she learned more about health disparities. She decided to pursue a career in Public Health, driven by a desire to improve maternal and child health outcomes in her community.

As she prepared to transfer, Uwase initially felt a profound sense of isolation. Beyond the daunting paperwork, she carried a deeper, more personal anxiety. She worried that her accent and her background would mark



Wake Tech President, Scott Ralls, Ph.D., and Chancellor Allison commemerate Wake Tech's membership in the Bronco Benefit program. Photo by Ezekiel Best.

her as an outsider at a four-year university.

The Bronco Benefit program became the link that clarified her future. Connecting with Mundy at Wake Tech replaced the intimidating maze of a large university with direct, personal support.

"I'm not gonna lie, everything was confusing at first," Uwase admitted. "But then I had Ms. Mundy with me. Whenever I was trying to register for classes, find which course to take, or even apply for housing, I would call her, and she would guide me. Having a person who actually guides you through it made everything so much easier."

Now, as a junior living on campus, the intimidation she once felt has been replaced by a sense of ownership of her education.

"I feel like I truly belong here," Uwase said. "The professors make you feel like you are more than just a face in a lecture hall; they make you feel like you are part of a community.

They make you feel like they don't just hear your voice, but that they actually want you to speak."

THE WAY FORWARD

The individual triumphs of students like Uwase and Pimentel serve as both validation and motivation for the next steps at Fayetteville State University. Looking ahead, the university plans to further scale this successful framework by expanding the Bronco Benefit program from 15 to 19 partner institutions by Fall 2026. This growth welcomes Blue Ridge Community College, Cape Fear Community College, Durham Technical Community College, and Guilford Technical Community College into the initiative.

As the network grows, leaders are exploring expanded scholarship opportunities for these additional partner schools. The university is also developing a dedicated track for individuals holding an Associate of Applied Science degree. While this specific credential is a

common choice for workforce-bound students, it traditionally faces significant hurdles during a standard university transfer.

By addressing these barriers, the Bronco Benefit program fundamentally redefines the transfer student experience. The initiative proves what is possible when higher education institutions treat the transition process as a shared responsibility rather than an individual burden.

For the student, this coordinated effort often means the difference between a closed door and a guided second chance. For the university, it is the difference between simply enrolling transfers and actively equipping them to thrive on campus. At the broader regional level, the program stands as a powerful testament to partnership. When schools work together, an unexpected academic detour does not have to derail opportunity. Instead, it can be the catalyst a student needs to earn a degree, launch a career, and transform their life. 🌐

Shane G. Stanley, FSU alumnus and a Cisco customer success specialists division senior leader.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH CISCO PAVE THE WAY

To High Demand Tech Careers — And More

BY JANET GIBSON

The future is now at Fayetteville State University, thanks in part to innovative partnerships, such as a long-standing relationship with Cisco, a global leader in information technology, cybersecurity, and artificial intelligence.

“Cisco has been a great resource and offers ongoing technical support,” said Dr. Bing Wu, a professor in FSU’s Department of Math and Computer Science. “Our students get real-world experience with real solutions.”

"Excellence is rare; mediocrity is rampant. FSU fostered an environment where the former came easily ... FSU created an opportunity, and Cisco was on the other side of the door."

— Shane G. Stanley

According to sources, key aspects of the most recent partnership, which began implementation in 2025, include the following:

- **Curriculum & Certification:** FSU's Center for Defense and Homeland Security offers Cisco-certified training as part of its curriculum, including CCNA and other IT certifications that prepare students for careers in cybersecurity and network administration.
- **Hands-On Training:** Students use Cisco Packet Tracer for simulations and hands-on labs focused on networking basics, internet architecture, and security.
- **Career Development & Internships:** Cisco's Connected Black Professionals group engages with FSU students through events such as HBCU Day, offering networking opportunities, internships, and scholarships.
- **Inclusivity Focus:** As part of Cisco's efforts to support historically Black colleges and universities, the partnership helps bridge the talent gap by offering training to a diverse range of students, including veterans and working professionals.

This collaboration means FSU students receive industry-recognized training in high-demand

technology fields. By working with Cisco, FSU remains at the forefront of technological change, ensuring students are well-prepared for the workforce.

But this is just one of many ways that Fayetteville State and Cisco have partnered over the years. Wu harkens back to 2009 when the University first connected with the company's Networking Academy, described as Cisco's "largest corporate social responsibility initiative." Cisco is recognized globally for its comprehensive e-learning program that enables students to develop valuable information and communication technology skills, thereby improving access to economic and educational opportunities.

Cisco's monetary investment is also impressive. Wu points out that an \$80,000 equipment donation from Cisco in 2024, for example, contributed to a major upgrade to the University's Networking & Cybersecurity Laboratory in 2025. "We also received a Cisco HBCU grant for software training and annual tech support fees," Wu said.

"Cisco also provided [\$20,000] this academic year for FSU's Summer Stay program to assist students who have local summer internships with a place to stay on campus," noted project manager Doneya Perry. Based at Cisco's North Carolina headquarters in Research Triangle Park, Perry coordinates with FSU and other HBCUs with which Cisco partners.

IMPRESSIVE INVESTMENT AND WIN-WIN SCENARIOS

Charlie Mewshaw, the University's interim chief information officer, said a pivotal time in the partnership came in 2022. Cisco committed nearly \$4.3 million over a five-year period to FSU for cybersecurity tools and technical support, making it among Cisco's largest awards to date.

"To address cybersecurity challenges and keep pace with technological advancements in higher education, Fayetteville State University will participate in the Student Freedom Initiative's HBCU Targeted Capacity Building Effort," according to an FSU announcement.

The effort, titled Modernize Digital Infrastructure, helped acquire cybersecurity tools through SFI's partnerships with Cisco and Procellis Technology. In addition, the program ensured that students and staff had access to relevant cybersecurity training and workforce development materials.

"Cisco's partnership isn't just one thing. It's holistic. It has a focus on longevity, and all aspects of the University are able to benefit."

— Charlie Mewshaw

"Cisco's partnership isn't just one thing," said Mewshaw. "It's holistic. It has a focus on longevity, and all aspects of the University are able to benefit."

Eli Gelber, a Cisco solutions engineer, has had a front-row seat in the progression of his company's relationship with FSU. He has been heavily involved in organizing Career Days at FSU, which introduces students to the Cisco culture at the main campus in RTP.

"Over the past 15 years working with Fayetteville State University, I've seen a steady growth in both the strength of the partnership and the quality of talent coming out of the program," he said.

"FSU students consistently bring strong technical skills, curiosity, and a willingness to solve real-world problems. That mindset fits naturally with the kind of innovation we value at Cisco. Many of these graduates step into the workforce ready to contribute right away because they've already been exposed to the kinds of technologies and challenges our customers face. It's a partnership that benefits Cisco, the University, and most importantly, the students who are preparing to build the future of technology."

Shane G. Stanley is an alumnus who benefited early on from the FSU and Cisco connection. He works as a senior leader in the company's customer success specialists division in Sydney, Australia.

Stanley earned his bachelor's degree in biology in 2009 and his master's in biology in 2014, but his career took a different path. The shift makes sense to him, and he recognizes a commitment to excellence in both his alma mater and the company where he has forged a 10-year career.

"Excellence is rare; mediocrity is rampant. FSU fostered an environment where the former came easily," he said. "While formally trained as a biologist, I could leverage the lessons learned and apply them with passion in any career field. FSU created an opportunity, and Cisco was on the other side of the door."



Eli Gelber, Cisco solutions engineer



Jester Williams IV, FSU alumnus and global events coordinator at Cisco

OPPORTUNITIES BEYOND HIGH-TECH

Fayetteville State’s relationship with Cisco extends beyond high-tech careers while still promoting them.

Jester Williams IV '24 knows this firsthand, as he is now enjoying his position as a global events coordinator at Cisco’s Atlanta office.

His introduction to Cisco representatives occurred in 2023, when he attended the Thurgood Marshall College Fund Leadership Institute in Washington, D.C. The meeting led to an internship with Cisco in Chicago and ultimately a full-time position beginning in August 2025.

“Once I got into Cisco, what stood out to me was the inclusivity,” said Williams, who is 23. He adds that he quickly noticed the parallels between Cisco and Fayetteville State ... “the just wanting a better version of yourself.”

Williams’ responsibilities include ensuring Cisco branding remains consistent, managing “swag” items, and overseeing other pertinent event details. Examples include an upcoming “Women in Cybersecurity” conference and many corporate events and career fairs worldwide.

Williams earned his bachelor’s degree in social work with a minor in intelligence studies from FSU, but managing events is a dream come true for him. He explains he began helping organize special events in high school and at FSU, including ones for his fraternity, the Epsilon Zeta Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Incorporated.

“Landing a role at Cisco is fulfilling,” he said. “It’s not like a job, but a fun career, with a very supportive team.” 🌐

THE ABCs OF PARTNERSHIP

FSU's robust relationship with Cumberland County Schools spells a win-win for students and future teachers

BY JANET GIBSON

Seeds are continually being planted to help grow the next generation of Broncos as Fayetteville State University rolls out the welcome long before many students ever think about going to college.

This early introduction, in some cases starting at the elementary level, sets the tone for a relationship that will evolve throughout a student's educational journey.

And if the old saying rings true that you only have one chance to make a first impression, then the Bronco way delivers a big "wow" time and again.

These impactful experiences stem from FSU's wide-ranging partnerships with regional school systems, particularly Cumberland County Schools. Through these collaborations, local youth explore the arts and sciences during special programs, study astronomy in a cutting-edge planetarium, and improve literacy skills at the free Reading Clinic. In this setting, Broncos earn invaluable experience and income as tutors for younger learners. Yet that only scratches the surface of what these partnerships achieve.

Education majors benefit from partnerships through student teaching, classroom immersion, and job

placements. This relationship gives graduates a strong start and helps fill a critical need for teachers.

Building on these initiatives, here are a few additional ways institutional educational partnerships are making an impact in the community and beyond.



Mr. Kabbes at the Planetarium. Photo by Ezekiel Best.



Reading Clinic students, tutors, and College of Education faculty take the stage with Gran'daddy Junebug after a stellar performance. Photo by Ezekiel Best.

SEEING THE MOON AND THE STARS

Joseph "Joe" Kabbes has the kind of laugh that echoes in large spaces, like the premier planetarium at FSU, where he passionately works.

"I just have a blast!" joyfully declares Kabbes, the planetarium and observatory manager and FSU astronomy instructor. He is speaking about the more than 6,000 schoolchildren who visit the planetarium annually "to fly through the galaxies." Many are third graders who are studying astronomy in their regular classrooms.

The planetarium opens its impressionable eyes and ears to the universe – and its possibilities. Kabbes points out that the planetarium's 10 4K projectors, mounted on a 30-foot



Storyteller and author Mitch Capel (center), who performs as "Gran'daddy Junebug" shares an embrace with Jocelyn Smith-Gray, Ed.D., interim associate dean (left) and Chandrika Johnson, Ph.D., dean of FSU's College of Education (right). Photo by Ezekiel Best.

dome, deliver the highest pixel density of any dome in the world.

"We rebuilt the servers to handle the high resolution," Kabbes

said. He added that the result includes "crisp, round stars and a beautiful, dark night sky." Along with a recent renovation, various sound equipment was added to



Students and tutors from the FSU Reading Clinic enjoy the day outside Chestnutt Library. Photo courtesy of FSU Reading Clinic. Photo by Ezekiel Best.

guarantee “an amazing audio experience.”

Several additional opportunities exist to expose young stargazers to the planetarium and FSU, including a free North Carolina Science Festival in the spring and a summer Space Camp for grades 7 through 12.

In addition, Kabbes visits schools and libraries as part of the Bronco Science Road Show program. He also leads a weekend STEAM Team project for area high school students investigating robots and rocketry.

Planetarium programs are also available to the community, including bi-weekly science shows and the popular “Pink Floyd: The Dark Side of the Moon” multi-sensory experience. FSU hosts one of only seven planetariums in the nation to feature this captivating event.

ONE FOR THE BOOKS

“Empowered” is a word often heard as it relates to the Reading Clinic on the FSU campus. Young readers feel empowered by the pride and accomplishment that accompany learning. Parents feel empowered knowing that their children are making progress or thriving in literacy skills. Tutors feel empowered by the invaluable experience they gain as they make a difference in children's lives.

As one parent puts it, “I love this program. My daughter was struggling with reading, but just a few weeks later, I noticed a drastic improvement. She now reads books on her own.”

The Reading Clinic has an application process for children from kindergarten through fifth grade to receive free tutoring, according to Dr. Jocelyn Smith, interim associate dean & chair of the Department of Early Childhood,

Elementary, Middle Grades Reading and Special Education. Currently, there are about 40 youth and 40 tutors.

Tutors who earn stipends are primarily recruited from the College of Education, with additional support from retired teachers and alumni. All tutors undergo comprehensive training in research-based literacy interventions and complete background checks to ensure a safe and supportive environment for students.

Tutoring sessions encompass all essential domains of reading, including phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary – and fun. One such example of the latter, points out Smith, was a performance by renowned storyteller and author Mitch Capel, who performs as “Gran’daddy Junebug.” The students were enthralled and inspired.



During a classroom session, a dedicated tutor challenges students to excel. Photo courtesy of FSU Reading Clinic.



A small group of student enjoy lunch while receiving instruction in math. Photo courtesy of FSU Reading Clinic.

"We value our relationship with Cumberland County Schools."

— Dr. Jocelyn Smith

A BRIGHT FUTURE IN TEACHING

"We value our relationship with Cumberland County Schools," said Smith, explaining the multiple ways FSU's College of Education and CCS maintain a thriving pipeline for teachers. Clinical experiences, student teaching, and job placements serve as primary examples.

Memorandums of understanding are also in place, she said, for school systems in other counties throughout the region and state, including Hoke, Harnett, Lee, Moore, Sampson, Bladen, Wayne, and Wake.

"Our students are truly dedicated to understanding each individual child," Smith said.

The future looks even brighter as a new bachelor's degree in special education launches in the fall of 2026, along with a newly constructed, multimillion-dollar

building to house the College of Education.

Smith stays active in recruiting future education majors at area high schools, especially during career day events. The College of Education also provides professional development opportunities to educators at area schools. A recent conference at FSU featured notable speakers, including an expert in artificial intelligence as it relates to the modern-day classroom.

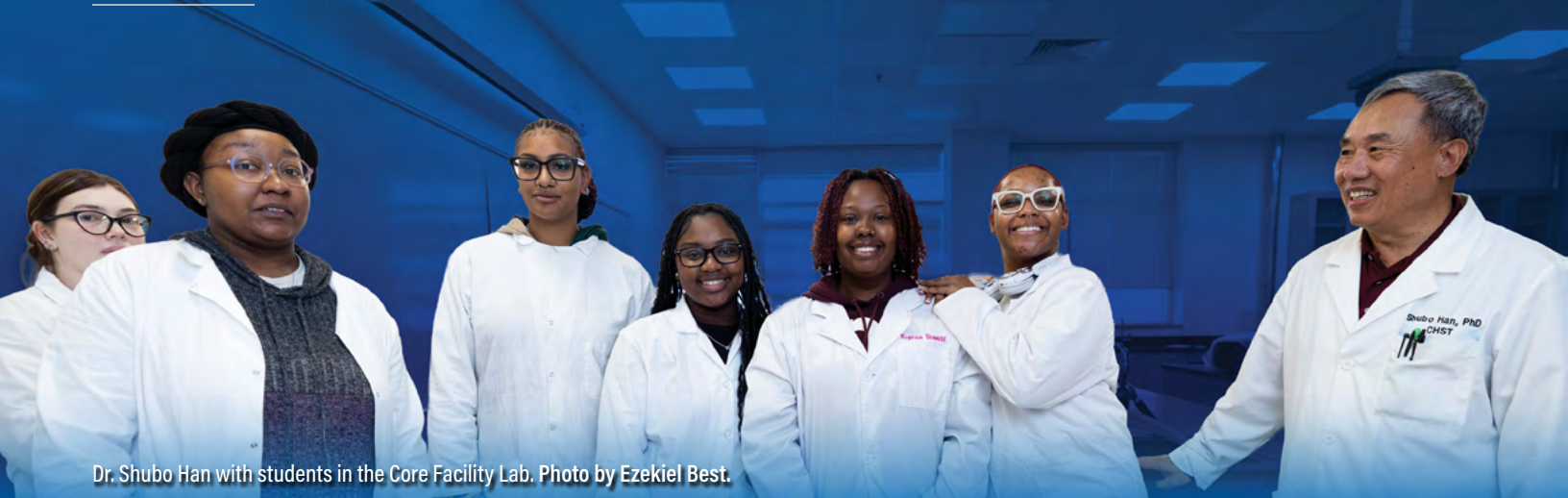
Several Principals of the Year are proud graduates of FSU. Smith points out that Cumberland County Schools serves as a feeder to the institution, as educators pursue advanced credentials such as master's degrees in administration and doctorates in educational leadership.

"The College of Education," she said, "creates a stairwell to the top." 🌍

RESEARCH WITH REACH:

FSU and NC Collaboratory Advancing Water Safety and Health Across North Carolina

BY KENDALL BALKNIGHT



Dr. Shubo Han with students in the Core Facility Lab. Photo by Ezekiel Best.

In southeastern North Carolina, where communities surrounding the Cape Fear River basin continue to confront the legacy of industrial contamination, Fayetteville State University researchers are working to better understand how harmful compounds move through the environment and what that means for public health.

Through its partnership with the NC Collaboratory, a University of North Carolina System-funded research initiative that connects universities with state agencies and communities to address pressing public policy challenges, Fayetteville State University is contributing critical research on per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), often called “forever chemicals.” PFAS are associated with emissions from the Fayetteville Works facility. The collaboration brings together FSU and three North Carolina institutions to study how these compounds travel through the atmosphere and deposit onto land and water surfaces across the region.

“Our work focuses on both areas near the facility and more distant communities to understand how airborne PFAS move and where they accumulate,” said Dr. Shubo Han, professor of chemistry at Fayetteville State University’s Department of Chemistry, Physics, and Materials Science.

The research centers in southeastern North Carolina, particularly communities near the Fayetteville Works site and within the Cape Fear River basin. Although emissions from the facility have declined significantly in recent years under regulatory agreements, measurable PFAS levels are still detected in atmospheric deposition in surrounding areas.

By tracing how these compounds persist and move through the environment, the research provides essential insight into potential exposure pathways, including inhalation and deposition onto soil and groundwater. The findings are shared with the North



"These expanded detection capabilities allow FSU to serve as a regional hub for PFAS analysis..."

— Dr. Shubo Han

Carolina Department of Environmental Quality and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to inform monitoring strategies, regulatory decisions, and long-term public health protections.

"Our findings provide actionable data for residents, regulators and policymakers," Han said. "They strengthen environmental decision-making and help communities better understand potential exposure risks."

The collaboration also positions Fayetteville State University as a major contributor to North Carolina's response to emerging environmental contaminants. Integrating atmospheric science, analytical chemistry, and community engagement, the partnership strengthens statewide research capacity in PFAS monitoring and environmental health.

For Fayetteville State, the work reflects the university's mission as a historically Black university serving communities often disproportionately affected by environmental hazards. The research also supports military and civilian populations across the region, including those connected to Fort Bragg and surrounding counties.

Recent federal investment expands the university's ability to advance this work. In 2026, Fayetteville State secured \$345,631 in federal Community Project Funding through the Commerce, Justice, and Science appropriations bill to upgrade research equipment supporting PFAS detection and environmental monitoring in southeastern North Carolina. The funding marked the University's first receipt of federal Community Project Funding and strengthened scientific infrastructure for faculty and student research.

New instrumentation housed in the Core Facility Lab within the Lyon Science Annex increases detection

sensitivity and enables researchers to generate timely, reliable data on PFAS and related contaminants. The expanded capability supports collaboration with government agencies and regional partners while positioning FSU as a regional resource for environmental analysis and public health research.

"These expanded detection capabilities allow FSU to serve as a regional hub for PFAS analysis," Han said. "They also attract additional research initiatives that broaden the scientific and public health impact of this work."

Beyond scientific discovery, the NC Collaboratory partnership provides FSU students with hands-on training in environmental sampling, laboratory analysis, and data modeling. Students work alongside faculty and external partners, gaining experience that prepares them for careers in environmental science, public health, and regulatory fields.

The research also engages communities directly. Data generated through the collaboration supports local governments in Cumberland, Bladen and Robeson counties, as well as regional utilities and policymakers working to address contamination risks. Public outreach efforts help residents understand ongoing research and its implications for environmental safety.

As the partnership continues, researchers expect the work to strengthen North Carolina's ability to address emerging contaminants and protect public health statewide. By connecting academic expertise, state collaboration, and community engagement, Fayetteville State University is helping build resilient environmental monitoring systems for the future.

Through the NC Collaboratory partnership, research conducted at FSU reaches far beyond the laboratory, informing policy, guiding environmental decisions, and supporting communities across North Carolina. 🌐



FROM AWARENESS TO ACTION:

University Advancement Partnerships Strengthen Student Support

BY KENDALL BALKNIGHT

Fayetteville State University recently highlighted a story about its campus food pantry that inspired immediate action. After learning about the program through institutional channels, the David and Elisabeth Nimocks Foundation contributed \$10,000 to boost food assistance for students, demonstrating how partnerships through the Division of University Advancement can turn visibility into real help.

"I wasn't aware of the FSU Food Resource Pantry until I came across an article in Bronco Pride," said Mary Nimocks Haugh, director of the David and Elisabeth Nimocks Foundation. "Many people may not realize that some students at FSU have limited income, and with the rising cost of groceries, it can be difficult to cover everyday expenses, especially food. Our foundation was proud to support a

grant that helps students through the Food Resource Pantry."

The gift came from teamwork between the division and campus partners dedicated to addressing student food insecurity. By aligning donor interest with Bronco needs, the partnership turned awareness into ongoing support for the Food Resource Pantry.

"University Advancement's work is most effective when we partner with academic and program colleagues to elevate student needs and share that impact with our external communities," said Sandra Yates, associate vice chancellor of development in the Division of University Advancement. "That collaboration helped bring awareness and support from the Nimocks Foundation. It reflects how partnerships across Fayetteville State create meaningful opportunities for our students."



FSU Director of Student Conduct Lisa Wallace and Associate Vice Chancellor for Development Sandra Yates. Photo by Ezekiel Best.



Sandra Yates, Lisa Wallace, and student workers take time to share smiles in the Bronco Food Pantry. Photo by Ezekiel Best.

"...partnerships across Fayetteville State create meaningful opportunities for our students."

— Sandra Yates

At the university, the pantry is a frontline effort ensuring scholars have access to food and basic items while pursuing their degrees. The program provides shelf-stable groceries, personal hygiene items, and culturally relevant food options, and links individuals with campus case management services and emergency assistance.

"The FSU Food Resource Pantry stabilizes students so they can attend class, focus on coursework, and remain enrolled," said Lisa Wallace, director of student conduct and campus coordinator for FSU's Food Resource Pantry. "When students experience

unexpected financial strain or personal emergencies, access to food support can be the difference between staying enrolled and stopping out."

Support from the Nimocks Foundation is expanding the pantry's capacity to serve consistently and to offer greater nutritional support. The grant funds biweekly food purchases and restocking, as well as new options, such as fresh produce distributed at recurring outreach events in the Student Center.

The funding also strengthens nutritional programming and allows the pantry to maintain reliable inventory levels for those facing both short-term crises and ongoing financial challenges. Reliable access to food and essential supplies helps reduce stress, empowering our Broncos to concentrate on academic progress.

Wallace emphasized that philanthropic investment plays a central role in sustaining both

operations and growth. Donor contributions enable food procurement, storage, and program development while strengthening partnerships that reduce costs and expand resources.

"Philanthropic support is the difference between a temporary pause on service and a sustainable program," Wallace said. "It allows us to respond to sudden spikes in need, expand access, and ensure students can stay fed, focused, and on track to graduate."

The Nimocks Foundation's generosity reflects how Fayetteville State connects donor engagement with top priorities such as student persistence and degree completion. By matching philanthropic partnerships to campus needs, FSU expands support systems that eliminate barriers to opportunity for the entire Bronco community. 🌟

Partnerships Fuel Our Progress

Fayetteville State University is aligning with various organizations across multiple industries for the benefit of our students, region, state, and nation.

Bronco Benefit



XVIII Airborne Corps



Cumberland County Schools



Cisco



MedPro



NC Collaboratory



Fayetteville-Cumberland Regional Entrepreneur and Business HUB



David and Elisabeth Nimocks Foundation



AI



Business



Community



Education



Insurance &
Risk Management



IT & Cybersecurity



Military



Public Health



Research



Technology



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ALL ABOUT THE BLUE 2026 HOMECOMING

October 17, 2026
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