

Alabama Community College Association

Fall Journal



**OUR
STORY
ALABAMA'S
SUCCESS**

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ACCA Annaul Conference Keynote Speaker



Inky Johnson

Join us for an inspiring keynote address by Inky Johnson at the 2025 Alabama Community College Association Annual Conference. Inky Johnson is not just a former college football player; he is a motivational speaker, author, and community leader who has overcome tremendous challenges. His unique life experiences and unwavering resilience make him a compelling figure who will inspire attendees to embrace their potential and pursue excellence. Inky's story is one of triumph over adversity, and he brings a powerful message about perseverance, leadership, and the importance of education. This is an invaluable opportunity for participants to learn and grow from one of today's most impactful speakers.



Learn more about Inky Johnson



Inky Johnson Videos



Register for Conference

2025

Alabama Community College Association
Annual Conference



Montgomery Marriott Hotel & Spa
Montgomery, Alabama

November 23-25, 2025

REGISTRATION:

July 1 - November 7	\$375
Onsite Registration	\$475





CONFERENCE AGENDA AT-A-GLANCE

NOV. 23-25, 2025

RENAISSANCE HOTEL & SPA

MONTGOMERY, AL

SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 23, 2025	
12:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.	Registration
1:00 p.m. – 1:45 p.m.	Association Meetings
1:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.	Newcomers' Meeting
2:30 p.m. – 3:30 p.m.	Chancellor's Awards
3:30 p.m. – 4:30 p.m.	Chancellor's Awards Reception
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 24, 2025	
7:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.	Registration
7:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.	Vendor Expo
7:00 a.m. – 8:00 a.m.	Breakfast
8:00 a.m. – 8:40 a.m.	General Session
10:00 a.m. – 10:50 a.m.	Breakout Session I
11:00 a.m. – 11:50 a.m.	Breakout Session II
12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.	Networking Luncheon
1:15 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.	Breakout Session III
2:10 p.m. – 2:55 p.m.	Breakout Session IV
3:00 p.m. – 3:15 p.m.	Break
3:30 p.m. – 4:25 p.m.	Breakout Session V
4:30 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.	Commission Meetings (Selecting Co-Chairs
8:00 p.m. – 12:00 a.m.	Networking Social
TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 25, 2025	
7:30 a.m. – 9:45 a.m.	Vendor Expo
7:30 a.m. – 8:30 a.m.	Breakfast
8:35 a.m. – 9:30 a.m.	Breakout Session IV
9:45 a.m. – 10:25 a.m.	Keynote Address M.C. Brown, PhD
10:30 a.m. – 11:00 a.m.	Remarks from Chancellor Baker
11:00 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.	Closing Session (Exemplary Program Finalist Announced)
11:15 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.	ACCA Business Meeting (Exhibit Hall A)
11:30 a.m.	Conference Concludes

Message from ACCA President

Donitha Griffin, Ed.D., George Corley Wallace State Community College

Since January, the ACCA Executive Committee has been hard at work advancing A Year-Long Journey—a statewide initiative designed to empower Alabama’s community colleges to continue sharing the stories that illuminate and inspire pathways to success for students, faculty, and staff across our system.

This year’s theme, “Our Story, Alabama Success,” celebrates the incredible journeys and accomplishments that have shaped Alabama’s community colleges and their lasting impact on our state’s growth. It’s about telling our collective story—one of resilience, innovation, and community—and amplifying the voices that define Alabama’s continued success.

In collaboration with the Alabama Community College System, ACCA proudly hosted five regional meetings across the state this fall. These gatherings set the tone for an outstanding academic year—bringing together educators, staff, and leaders to connect, share ideas, and celebrate the transformative work happening every day in our colleges. The enthusiasm, collaboration, and shared purpose that filled each meeting have laid a strong foundation for what promises to be an unforgettable annual conference.

As we look ahead, we are eager to bring that same energy, excitement, and commitment to excellence to this year’s ACCA Annual Conference in November. The conference will unite community college professionals from across Alabama for meaningful conversations, innovative sessions, and valuable networking opportunities. Whether you are attending for the first time or returning as a longtime member, you will leave inspired, reenergized, and ready to continue shaping Alabama’s success story.

Together, let’s make this fall a celebration of progress, connection, and the remarkable impact of Alabama’s community colleges. We look forward to seeing you at the conference—where our story continues to unfold.



Alabama Community College Association

Second Vice President Nominations



Dr. Crystal Reed
Dean of Academic Affairs
Northwest Shoals

- 21 years in higher education within the Alabama Community College System
- Former Dean of Students, Assistant Dean of Student Success, and Mathematics Faculty
- Leader in student success initiatives, HEERF federal grants, and TargetX platform implementation
- President of the Alabama Deans of Student Affairs Association, Greater Shoals Rotary Club, and Vice President of the Shoals Scholar Dollars Executive Committee
- Education: BS & MS, Secondary Math Education, UNA | Doctorate in Higher Education Administration, UA



Leah Bigbee
Dean of Workforce
Jefferson State

- 10+ years of experience in corporate engagement & workforce development
- Former leadership roles at UAB and Generation USA
- Graduate of Leadership Birmingham, Shelby County, and St. Clair County
- Current President of the Workforce Officers of Alabama (WOA)
- Education: MPA, UAB | BA in English, UAB

Voting closes Oct. 31 at 5:00 p.m.



Password: ACCA2025
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ATN Impacts Alabama

Alabama Technology Network (ATN) is an entity of the Alabama Community College System (ACCS). It serves as Alabama's center for the Hollings Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP), part of the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST).

Located across the great State of Alabama, Alabama Technology Network is part of 15 Community Colleges and 3 University Campuses. With 56 employees, ATN's mission is to provide workforce training, technical assistance, and engineering services to incumbent workers statewide.

ATN offers the most extensive training and service offerings for business and industry, including five primary delivery areas: continual improvement, industrial maintenance and technology, food industry, environmental health and safety, and leadership and management development.

A report published by Lightcast, the leading provider of economic impact studies and labor market data, found that in FY2023-24, ATN provided a sizable net positive economic impact to the State. This analysis shows that in fiscal year (FY) 2023-24, ATN's operations spending, together with the enhanced productivity of businesses ATN supported, generated \$392.3 million in added income for the Alabama economy.

Lightcast also reported ATN's support enabled businesses to retain 2,485 jobs and create 566 new jobs in Alabama, with an estimated \$298.2 million in worker earnings. Additionally, ATN helped companies save \$59.4 million in unnecessary costs and investments, allowing them to reinvest in growth areas such as new products, equipment, workforce training, and process improvements. As a result, companies invested \$93.3 million into expanding their operations, demonstrating ATN's significant impact on job retention, cost savings, and business growth across the state.

In 2024, ATN managed to serve 287 different companies with 452 contract projects statewide.

From 2015 through 2024, the following are client-reported economic impacts:

- 1,741 Independent Client Surveys Completed
- 4,686 New Jobs
- 18,996 Retained Jobs
- \$2.9B Increased & Retained Sales
- \$636M in New Client Investments
- \$929M in Cost Savings & Avoidance

Totals

- 25,423 Jobs
- \$4.5B Client Impacts

ATN takes pride in delivering exceptional customer service and serving as a trusted local partner for businesses. We specialize in implementing innovative solutions, developing and training employees, and improving workforce processes to help companies thrive. With a commitment to excellence and reliability, Alabama Technology Network ensures businesses have the resources and support they need to succeed.

Contact us today at (334) 293-4671 or www.atn.org.



Bevill State and C3 Launch Career BOO\$T Program to Strengthen Workforce in Northwest Alabama



Bevill State Community College

Bevill State Community College (BSCC) and C3 of Northwest Alabama, Inc. (also known as the Northwest Alabama Economic Development Alliance) are proud to announce the launch of Career BOO\$T, a new tuition reimbursement program designed to support workforce development and economic growth across Fayette, Lamar, and Marion counties.

Career BOO\$T is the latest initiative under C3's TIME (Tech Innovation Means Employment) program, which focuses on fueling tech and innovation opportunities in Northwest Alabama. The program aims to strengthen the local workforce by encouraging enrollment in high-demand technical fields and helping reduce barriers for students pursuing careers in skilled trades.



Funded through a \$25,000 Innovate Alabama grant, Career BOO\$T offers \$1,500 in tuition reimbursement to qualifying graduates who complete approved technical certificates or degrees at Bevill State's Hamilton or Fayette campuses. Eligible programs include high-priority career fields such as welding, electrical, and mechatronics, areas identified as critical to the region's current and future workforce needs.

"This partnership is a powerful example of how collaboration between education and economic development can directly impact lives and communities," said Dr. Joel Hagood, President of Bevill State Community College. "Career BOO\$T will help ease the financial burden for our students while strengthening the talent pipeline for local employers. We are proud to work with C3 to drive progress for Northwest Alabama."

"We're excited about Career BOO\$T! It's an investment in our people. We hope it encourages students and workers to explore high-demand advanced manufacturing and rural tech fields while reducing financial hurdles. Career Boost shows that the Northwest Alabama EDA region is a great place to launch rewarding careers and businesses. We're proud to partner with Bevill State on this initiative and can't wait to see its positive impact on our workforce and economy," stated Tom Wisemiller, President & CEO of C3 of Northwest Alabama, Inc.

The Career BOO\$T program directly addresses skilled labor shortages, boosts workforce readiness, and aligns with the shared goal of cultivating a vibrant, innovative environment for local talent and employers. In addition to the tuition reimbursement, the funds may also help offset costs associated with entering the workforce, such as purchasing gear and tools required in some technical careers.

C3 plans to pursue additional funding partners to expand the Career BOO\$T program in the future. The initiative not only supports individual success but also aims to stimulate long-term economic prosperity and reinforce Northwest Alabama's reputation as a place where people want to live, work, and grow their businesses.

This partnership between Bevill State Community College and C3 is a strategic step toward fostering a pipeline of skilled professionals and creating new opportunities across the region.

Bishop State Partners with U.S. Navy to Build Workforce for Submarine Production

Bishop State Community College



BUILDGIANTS
A L A B A M A



Bishop State Community College is building a unique partnership with the U.S. Navy that ties directly to national security. The initiative, led by the college's Workforce and Economic Development department, will prepare students for careers in submarine production, a growing industry that is critical to both the nation's defense and the Gulf Coast economy.

The partnership began after a regional stakeholder meeting in June 2024 that brought together leaders from K-12 schools, community colleges, and local businesses and industries. During that meeting, Navy officials outlined what they called the "naval imperative." Simply put, China has more submarines than the United States, and America must increase production capacity to keep pace.

"By 2028, the Navy must deliver one Columbia-class submarine and two Virginia-class submarines each year," said Akareem Spears, Dean of Workforce and Economic Development at Bishop State. "These are national security priorities, and we're fortunate to be part of the solution."

Through this program, Bishop State students will gain hands-on training in skills directly tied to submarine production, including ship fitting, pipe fitting, non-destructive testing, metrology, machine tool technology, and even 3D metal printing.

"We're investing in new technology, such as welding robots and 3D metal printers, while also expanding programs we already have in place," Spears explained. "This isn't training for training's sake. Our goal is to prepare students for high-wage, high-demand jobs."

The curriculum will follow the Navy's Maritime Industrial Base standards, which differ from Bishop State's existing welding and maritime training programs. This ensures students are trained specifically for the rigorous requirements of submarine construction.

With Austal USA, one of Mobile's largest employers, already deeply engaged in shipbuilding, the program positions Bishop State as a vital partner in meeting workforce needs.

"This partnership shows Bishop State is a workforce training leader in our region," Spears said. "We were the first to respond to the Navy's proposal, and that demonstrates our ability to be flexible and deliver what industry partners need."

Plans are underway to renovate facilities at the Carver instructional site, converting an existing building into an additional workforce development maritime training site. Spears envisions the program expanding to serve not only Mobile but also Alabama, Mississippi, and Florida.

For Spears, the excitement lies in building something new that has both local and national impact. "It's challenging and complex, but that's what makes it worthwhile," he said. "Success for us looks like an 80 percent completion-to-employment rate and eventually growing into a new facility that can serve the entire region."



Calhoun Breathes New Life into Healthcare with Launch of Respiratory Therapy Program



Calhoun Community College

Calhoun Community College has officially launched its first Respiratory Therapy Program, marking a major milestone for both the college and the North Alabama community. With demand for respiratory therapists growing rapidly across the nation, the program arrives at a critical time to prepare students for a rewarding and impactful career in healthcare.

For instructors Emily Russell and Christy Goodwin, leading the program is more than a job. “What excites me about Calhoun launching its first Respiratory Therapy Program is the chance to help shape the future of a profession that has meant so much to me personally,” said Russell. “Respiratory therapists play an essential role in patient care, and by establishing this program at Calhoun, we are not only preparing the next generation of therapists but also directly serving the needs of our community.”



The path to accreditation was rigorous but worthwhile. According to Goodwin, “Having a successful site visit with no follow-up or corrections required was incredibly validating for our team.” With that milestone achieved, the program is off to a strong start, giving students a foundation rooted in both clinical skills and patient-centered care.

Both Russell and Goodwin bring impressive credentials to the classroom, including the Asthma Educator-Certified (AE-C) certification as asthma educators. This allows them to emphasize the importance of patient education alongside clinical training. “The AE-C credential focuses heavily on teaching strategies,” Russell explained. “It helps our students learn not only how to manage pulmonary diseases, but also how to educate and empower patients. By integrating these skills into their education, our students are better prepared to improve outcomes.”

In addition to teaching, Goodwin plays an active role in advancing the profession on state, national, and international levels. She serves on the American Association for Respiratory Care International Committee, where she helps expand respiratory therapy practice worldwide. “This global perspective enhances our Calhoun program by keeping me current with worldwide developments in respiratory care,” she said.

Goodwin also advocates locally as a Political Action Committee Representative for the Alabama Society for Respiratory Care. “Advocacy is critical because it ensures our voices are heard, our expertise is recognized, and the profession can continue to grow,” she shared, recalling her visit to Washington, D.C., where she met with Alabama Representative Dale Strong to discuss the importance of respiratory therapy.

With Calhoun’s first cohort underway, Russell and Goodwin are optimistic about the program’s future. “I want to continue building a program that helps students be confident in their ability to provide high-quality care and make a meaningful impact in their communities,” Russell said.

Goodwin added, “I hope to see our students become leaders and advocates within their healthcare teams, inspiring others and advancing the profession throughout the region.”

By launching the Respiratory Therapy Program, Calhoun has taken a vital step forward in addressing healthcare needs across North Alabama while equipping students with the skills, compassion, and confidence to help patients breathe easier, one life at a time.

Building Connections and Opportunities: Jamie Thornton's Work with Student Life

Central Alabama Community College



At Central Alabama Community College, student life is an integral part of the overall college experience. Few people have a bigger role in that work than Jamie Thornton, Administrative Assistant to the Dean of Students and Student Life Coordinator. In her dual position, Jamie provides key administrative support while also leading efforts that bring students together across CACC's four campuses.

As Student Life Coordinator, Jamie helps guide nearly 20 clubs and organizations. These groups provide students with the opportunity to connect, grow, and participate in activities that enhance their college experience. She also serves as the sponsor for the Student Ambassadors, a team of student leaders who represent the college at events, welcome future students, and set an example for their peers. Jamie works with them on planning, hosting, and developing leadership skills that will carry over into their careers and communities.



"Jamie has an extraordinary and lasting impact on our students," said Cindy Entrekina, Dean of Students. "Her ability to inspire and encourage student involvement creates an environment where everyone feels welcomed and truly valued. Beyond her remarkable organizational skills, Jamie skillfully balances a multitude of responsibilities without ever losing sight of the individual needs of each student. She also goes above and beyond in supporting club sponsors, providing them with the guidance and resources they need to help their groups succeed. Her sincere care and commitment create a positive, team-oriented environment that significantly enriches the whole student experience."

Her administrative work is just as important. Jamie supports the Dean of Students by keeping student life organized and moving forward, balancing details behind the scenes with visible support for students and organizations.

Colleagues say Jamie's greatest strength is her ability to invest in students. Whether she is encouraging a first-year student to join a club, helping an organization plan an event, or guiding the Student Ambassadors at a large campus function, she approaches it with patience and enthusiasm.

"Jamie represents what we want people to see in CACC," said Scott Hardy, Director of Institutional Advancement, Government Affairs, and Public Relations. "Her leadership in student life has boosted engagement, and that helps us tell our story as a college. When students are active and involved, it shows that CACC is a welcoming place where they can belong. It also helps us stand out in the community as a fun and even 'cool' place for students to go to college."

For Jamie, the reward comes in watching students grow. Whether it is a quiet student finding their voice in Student Ambassadors or friendships formed through clubs and organizations, she sees how student life adds value to the CACC experience.

Her work reminds the CACC community that college is about academics and personal growth, but also about relationships and opportunities. With her leadership, student life continues to thrive across all four campuses.

Pirate Support Every Step of the Way: Creating Pathways for Student Success at CVCC

Chattahoochee Valley Community College



At Chattahoochee Valley Community College, student success is more than an aspiration; it is a daily commitment. The College is focused on making higher education accessible and ensuring that students have the necessary resources to stay on track academically, personally, and professionally.

Much of that support begins in the classroom. From one-on-one tutoring services to workshops that reinforce study skills, CVCC ensures that students have the academic foundation they need to thrive. When coursework extends beyond traditional settings, the College's Canvas Support Service in Owen Hall Library provides step-by-step guidance on everything from uploading assignments to navigating discussion boards. A Laptop Lending Program further strengthens access, allowing every student to stay connected to their studies regardless of personal technology challenges.

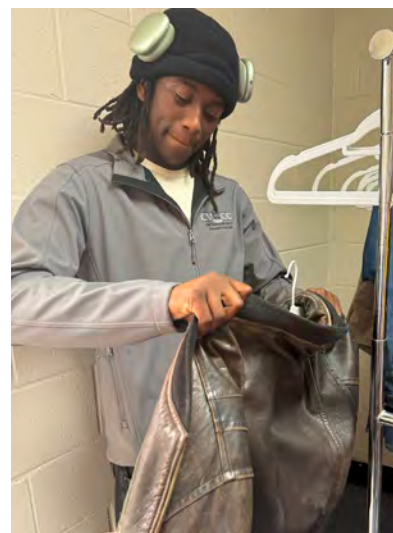
But CVCC understands that success requires more than academics. Emotional well-being plays a vital role in learning, and the College's mental health support services give students a safe and confidential space to seek help during difficult times.

CVCC is also committed to serving those who have served our country. The College's veteran support services help military-affiliated students and veterans transition into college life. Assistance with benefits, guidance through academic processes, and a supportive campus community create an environment that enables veterans to focus on achieving their educational and career goals.

Equally important are the resources that address life's day-to-day challenges. Through Pirate Pantry and Pirate Thredz, students can access food and clothing at no cost. These services help alleviate the financial strain that often accompanies college life, enabling students to focus on their studies instead of worrying about basic needs. CVCC recognizes that success in the classroom is directly tied to stability outside it.

Together, these services form a strong network of support that extends beyond academics. They reflect CVCC's mission to meet students where they are and to provide resources that help them move forward. Whether it is tutoring, technology access, counseling, veteran services, or everyday essentials, the goal is the same: to remove obstacles so that students can succeed.

At CVCC, support is built into the student experience. By addressing academic, emotional, financial, and personal needs, the College reinforces its belief that every student should have the opportunity to achieve at the highest level. That is why CVCC emphasizes Pirate Support Every Step of the Way.



Coastal Alabama's Workforce Development and Adult Education departments work together to upskill incarcerated females in Clarke County

Coastal Alabama Community College

Coastal Alabama Community College is charting new opportunities this fall as it combines the resources of its Workforce Development and Adult Education departments to offer an all-female training class for the Clarke County Jail. The class, which includes online coursework and hands-on training, will allow completers to receive an Alabama Community College System (ACCS) credential in mini-excavator and skid steer operations.



“This quick credential is designed to open doors quickly to career opportunities in industries such as construction, manufacturing, and forestry,” said the College’s Dean of Workforce Development, Dr. Josh Duplantis.

Uniquely, this initiative is aimed at providing women within the correctional system the tools to find meaningful employment and create a fresh start upon release.

“We are combining and flexing any available resources to serve a unique need and to empower citizens through education,” said Dr. Duplantis.

The credentials are not new to Coastal Alabama as the College maintains an active ACCS Skills for Success program across its six-county service area. Skills for Success is specifically focused on providing free, rapid-delivery training programs to build confidence and to enhance workforce abilities of its students.

“This is a program that I believe in because I believe that people deserve a second chance” said Joseph Metz, Skills for Success Coordinator at Coastal Alabama Community College. “A lot of times, people don’t know where to start, and this is a perfect starting point.

The Clarke County Jail initiative is a collaborative effort that would not be possible without strong community partnerships. Metz credits Clarke County Sheriff Dewayne Smith, Coastal Alabama Director of Adult Education Dr. Courtney Diaz, and Coordinator for Adult Education for Coastal Alabama’s Clarke County zone, Stuart Lee, for their commitment to bringing this program to life.

“Without them buying into this program and being willing to think outside of the box to stack resources, none of this would be possible,” Metz said.

By combining skills development with rehabilitation, Coastal Alabama Community College is committed to setting a standard for innovative education in the state and to ensure that second chances can turn into lasting change.

Precision in Practice: Inside Drake State's Machine Tool Technology Program



Drake State Community and Technical College

The Machine Tool Technology program, under the leadership of Instructor Calvin Rosseau, stands as a cornerstone of excellence at Drake State Community and Technical College. The program provides students with comprehensive, hands-on training in manual and CNC machining, blueprint reading, and precision measurement. Through a range of industry and educational partnerships, students gain valuable real-world experience that prepares them to meet the demands of today's advanced manufacturing workforce.

One of the program's key collaborations is with Alabama A&M University, where Drake State students work alongside AAMU engineering students to design and develop a Formula SAE racecar. Prior to this collaboration, AAMU had its parts manufactured outside of the United States, which made it difficult to make changes or correct manufacturing errors. This partnership eliminated the bottleneck of overseas manufacturing, while offering Drake State students a unique opportunity to apply machining skills within an engineering and design context.



The NASA HUNCH (High School Students United with NASA to Create Hardware) Program further enhances the student experience by allowing participants to produce aerospace-quality components for NASA. Through this collaboration, the college contributes to national spaceflight readiness efforts while promoting STEM education and outreach within the community.

What truly distinguishes the Machine Tool Technology program is Instructor Rosseau's project-based teaching approach, which immerses students in real-world applications from the start of their training. As a result, graduates emerge not only technically proficient but also confident, adaptable, and prepared to excel in a rapidly evolving industry. Through programs like these, Drake State continues to strengthen its role as a leader in workforce development and technical education in the state of Alabama.

ESCC Student Support Services grant renewed

Enterprise State Community College



Student Support Services (SSS) at Enterprise State Community College has been awarded a \$2.9 million grant to continue its over 45-year history of providing student support on campus.

ESCC's Student Support Services (SSS) program recently received funding from the United States Department of Education to continue offering student support for five more years on the College's Enterprise and Ozark campuses. SSS is designed to provide opportunities for academic development and motivate students towards successful completion of their postsecondary education.



Kaliyah Johnson has participated in the SSS program since her freshman year at ESCC.

"Student Support Services has helped me grow into a better student by providing tutors who are readily available in multiple subjects," Johnson said. "The workshops they offer have also helped me become more financially stable. SSS has truly made me feel like part of a family that is dedicated to seeing their students succeed not just academically, but in every part of our lives also. I am so grateful to be a part of SSS and for everything they have done to support me on my journey."

Johnson will serve as the Student Government Associate (SGA) President for the 2025-26 academic year. She is also an active member of Circle K. She was recently one of four students who represented the College at the Alabama Deans of Student Affairs Student Leadership Institute in Birmingham.

Johnson is completing her associate degree with a focus on business. She hopes to work in healthcare management in the future.

SSS has been providing support services, which includes tutoring, counseling, and cultural activities, to ESCC students since Fall 1978. The program serves at least 275 students each semester.

"The SSS program at ESCC has a long history of positively affecting students' lives by giving them the tools they need to be successful while they are here and long after they leave, whether they are continuing their education or starting their career," ESCC President Danny Long said. "We're proud to have this program at the College, and we look forward to seeing the continued impact this program makes on our students and community in the future."

While there is a qualifying process to access services, students are encouraged to research the program to see if they are eligible to participate. For more information, visit the SSS office, located in the Student Center; call 334-347-2623 ext. 2265; or visit escc.edu/ssc.

Gadsden State: Honoring a Century, Building the Next

Gadsden State Community College

In 2025, Alan Smith was appointed president of Gadsden State Community College, stepping into the role with years of experience across multiple leadership positions at the institution. His appointment marks an important moment not only for Smith but for Gadsden State itself, as the College celebrates its 100th year of transforming lives through education and service.

“It is an incredible honor to serve as president during this historic year,” Smith said. “Gadsden State has been a cornerstone for this region for a century, and I look forward to continuing the proud legacy for years to come.”

This centennial year provides a chance to reflect on a legacy that began as Alabama’s first state-operated trade school and has since grown into a five-campus community college serving thousands of students each year. Gadsden State’s story has always been one of adaptation—shaping programs to meet the needs of students while fueling growth for local communities and the regional economy.

Smith’s prior roles at Gadsden State—including Dean of Workforce Development and Vice President of Capital Projects, Community Relations, and Workforce Development—have given him a unique perspective on the College’s impact. From overseeing multimillion-dollar investments in career and technical education to fostering strong partnerships with K-12 schools, business, and industry, he has been deeply connected to Gadsden State’s mission of preparing students for meaningful careers. Those experiences now guide his vision as president.

“Our students are at the heart of everything we do,” Smith said. “Each decision we make—from new facilities to expanded partnerships—is about creating opportunities for them to thrive.”

Every chapter of Gadsden State’s 100-year history reflects the heartbeat of its region. From early training in brick masonry and carpentry to today’s advanced manufacturing, healthcare, and academic programs, Gadsden State has remained aligned with Alabama’s evolving workforce needs. Partnerships with local leaders and industries ensure graduates are equipped for high-demand, high-wage careers that sustain families and strengthen communities.

With a wide range of programs in academics, health sciences, and workforce development, Gadsden State is positioned to support students from all walks of life. Whether pursuing transfer pathways, technical training, or in-demand career fields, students find opportunities to succeed in the workforce and build meaningful lives for themselves and their families.

“Education at Gadsden State is about more than degrees—it’s about service to the community,” Smith emphasized. “When we prepare students to succeed, we also strengthen the communities, businesses, and families that depend on them.”

As Gadsden State honors its centennial, the focus is not only on the past but on what lies ahead. Under President Smith’s leadership, Gadsden State is poised to continue preparing the workforce of the future, supporting its communities, and driving growth and progress across the region for generations to come.



Building Pathways to Success: ISTC Reentry Division



J.F. Ingram State Technical College

At J.F. Ingram State Technical College (ISTC), the journey of transformation doesn't end at graduation—it begins anew. The College's Reentry Division is dedicated to helping justice-involved individuals transition successfully back into society through job preparedness training, interview assistance, and post-release job placement support.

Established in 2017, the Reentry Division was created to enhance ISTC's ability to assist graduates after release from prison. Job Placement Coordinators work directly with individuals to help them secure meaningful employment by connecting them with community resources, employers, and industry partners. By leveraging the skills and certifications earned at Ingram, graduates can achieve lasting stability and self-sufficiency.

ISTC graduates are at work across Alabama—in manufacturing, construction, electrical, welding, and other high-demand industries—using the skills they gained through Ingram's comprehensive training programs. Each success story represents more than just a job secured; it's a family strengthened, a community enriched, and a life transformed.

ISTC continues to build strong partnerships with employers, community organizations, and state agencies to create sustainable employment opportunities for its graduates. Businesses seeking skilled, motivated workers are encouraged to connect with the College's Job Placement Division to learn more about hiring ISTC graduates or supporting the ISTC Foundation.

J.F. Ingram State Technical College has been fully accredited by the Council on Occupational Education for more than 40 years. Established by the Alabama Legislature, ISTC remains the only accredited postsecondary institution in the nation solely dedicated to providing career and technical education to justice-involved students.

Through its unwavering commitment to transforming lives, strengthening the workforce, and fostering generational change, ISTC continues to redefine what's possible through education and opportunity.



Jefferson State to Open New Workforce Education Center

Jefferson State Community College



Jefferson State Community College will open a new Workforce Education Center this fall on the college's campus in Birmingham to expand training opportunities and meet the evolving workforce needs of Central Alabama.

The center, which has received tremendous community and corporate support, is a hub for high-demand skilled trade training, featuring flexible laboratory and classroom spaces that can be adapted for a wide range of educational programs.

"The new Workforce Education Center will help transform the landscape of workforce training in the greater Birmingham area," said Jefferson State President Keith Brown. "The center will allow the college to expand training for a variety of in-demand skill trade areas and provide meaningful opportunities for the area."

The center will offer fast-track, non-credit craft and skilled training programs in essential fields creating a pipeline of skilled talent for in-demand jobs. The center is adjacent to the college's lineworker training area and will accommodate the lineworker training program, HVAC technician training, electrical training, and training for multi-trade crafts.



"The Workforce Education Center is more than a building; it's a dynamic hub for opportunity in skilled trades," said Jefferson State Dean of Workforce Development Leah Bigbee. "Its versatile design ensures we can adapt quickly to the needs of our business partners while providing our students with the best possible path to a rewarding career."

The center's multi-purpose design offers unique adaptability for workforce training. While structured short-certificate programs are offered, the space is also specifically designed to accommodate customized corporate training.

"Companies can partner with us to create tailored curricula, from advanced troubleshooting for their existing workforce to specialized safety certifications," said Bigbee. "Whether it's a specific skill needed for a new project or an ongoing need for a new hire training program, our team can work with a business to design and implement a training solution that directly meets their needs. This adaptability extends to any skilled or craft training needs that may emerge, making the center a vital resource for the ongoing development of the region's workforce."

Jefferson State's Workforce Education skills training is designed to quickly train individuals for immediate employment. The full portfolio of non-credit training covers healthcare, IT, manufacturing, craft training, and business sectors and is ever evolving to accommodate the needs of employers in the state of Alabama. For more information on available training, go to jeffersonstate.edu/fasttrack.

Investing in People: Lawson State Leads with Learning



Lawson State Community College

Higher education is facing serious headwinds—from shifting student needs and financial uncertainties to the impact of mass retirements and new technology that changes everything.

Lawson State Community College isn't waiting to see what happens next. Instead, the college is investing in its greatest resource—people—with comprehensive professional development that prepares them to navigate challenges while innovating and leading with confidence.

"Our emphasis is on keeping skill sets sharp and expanding knowledge in meaningful ways," said President Dr. Cynthia T. Anthony. "In academic environments, learning should be institutionalized. We must model lifelong learning behaviors to inspire others and maintain excellence."



Several recent training opportunities did just that. The college hosted the law firm Hand Arendall Harrison Sale for a half-day supervisors' workshop on FMLA regulations and parental leave guidelines, followed by a full-day session on Emergenetics, which combines brain science and psychology to uncover how individuals naturally prefer to think, behave, and lead.

"One of the key takeaways has been increased self-awareness of personality styles, which in turn enhances social awareness," said Elma Bell, HR director at Lawson State. "Understanding one's own communication style allows for more strategic and effective interactions with colleagues."

For some, the experience has helped them better understand their colleagues' leadership styles, ultimately making it easier to work together and move the college forward. Other recent sessions, planned in partnership with the college's professional development committee, reexamine and strengthen how administrators work with direct reports, faculty, and staff members across all departments. Recent examples include staff-led workshops on business office operations, using AI with integrity, and OSHA training for facilities and maintenance staff.

"Sometimes you have to reset your preset," Coach Ken Carter told Lawson employees at one of the college's summer 2025 professional development series. "You have to be willing to look at things differently, and to approach challenges with a new perspective," said the author and famed basketball coach who was portrayed by Samuel L. Jackson in the 2005 film "Coach Carter."

A few days later, Dr. Jame'l Hodges, Edward Waters University VP of Student Success, brought additional motivation with his focus on exceptional customer service—for students and families, and for internal colleagues, too.

The learning continues with the Lawson EDGE (Encouraging Development and Growth for Excellence). The new professional development and mentoring program, set to launch soon, will focus on foundational leadership skills. One of its key goals is to foster continuous learning and improvement.

"We want to prevent stagnation and at the same time, invest in a culture of growth," said President Anthony. "That means diving into topics that are relevant and forward-thinking. Beyond having enormous potential, campus leaders often possess an abundance of knowledge, skills, and abilities," she said. "It is up to us to help leverage those strengths to guide and serve others effectively."

Students THRIVE When They Are Connected to Community: LBW is creating a new model for student support in Alabama



Lurleen B. Wallace Community College

When students feel supported, encouraged, and connected to their community, they don't just survive—they THRIVE. LBW Thrive is a student support program designed to help students in Alabama reach their full potential by completing post-secondary credentialing and becoming economically independent. LBW Thrive is harnessing the power of community to stand with students and empower them to believe in their potential. LBW Thrive is a grassroots approach to student success—one where every student has the support needed to succeed, no matter where they come from.



At the core of LBW Thrive is its one-to-one model.

Students in the program are paired with volunteers from the community known as Thrive Guides. These Guides act as a trusted ally throughout the student's senior year of high school by reminding them to complete tasks and connecting them to resources. Thrive Guides encourage high school seniors to persist, build their confidence, and remind them that they belong in college, no matter their background. But perhaps most importantly, they serve as a constant source of motivation and encouragement, ensuring that students don't give up when things get tough. For many, this connection to their community is just as important as academic support.

Once students are enrolled in a post-secondary institution, they can continue to receive support from Thrive Coaches. These Coaches help students adjust to college life, stay on track with their coursework, and connect to resources that will ensure they finish strong.

LBW Thrive partners with local high school guidance counselors, career coaches, and Alabama Community College System (ACCS) Success Coaches. These professionals help Thrive ensure that students have access to the resources they need, including academic advising, career exploration, and college preparation.

LBW Thrive is building connections within the community that last long after high school graduation. Thrive Guides and Coaches are volunteers from local businesses, organizations, and even the students' own neighborhoods. These mentors understand the unique challenges students face and are dedicated to walking alongside them through every step of their journey.

As LBW Thrive prepares for its pilot year in 2025-2026, the program is poised to make a real difference in the lives of students in Covington County. With the backing of the community, the guidance of dedicated Thrive Guides and Coaches, and a focus on student success, Thrive's impact will go beyond enrollment numbers; it will create a lasting culture in which students don't just become graduates—they become the next generation of leaders, innovators, and changemakers.

MMI's Shanaya Hinton: Two-Time All-American

Marion Military Institute



MMI Athletics recognizes freshman Shanaya Hinton for becoming our first two-time NJCAA All-American track & field athlete, especially since earning All-American status twice in the same year. Performance number one was at the NJCAA Indoor National Championships in Lubbock, Texas, where she entered the triple jump ranked 12th nationally. After her final jump of the competition, Shanaya moved into 3rd place with a distance of 12.01m, earning her first All-American medal. Performance number two occurred in Hutchinson, Kansas at the NJCAA Outdoor National Championships, where she finished in 4th place with a 12.09m triple jump—a personal best.

Cadet Hinton hails from Monroeville, Ala., and is a graduate of Hillcrest HS in Evergreen. After Marion, she plans to continue her track & field career at a four-year university with a veterinary program. Her favorite thing about MMI track & field is having supportive teammates.

“We are super proud of Shanaya becoming our first All-American in Track & Field since the sport’s inception three years ago,” says Head Coach Chad Balentine. “We’re even more proud she was able to repeat her performance and reach All-American status in the Outdoor Track & Field season as well. She has put in the hard work and dedication to her craft and is now reaping the rewards of her work ethic. Shanaya having finished 3rd in the Triple Jump at Indoor Nationals and 4th in the Triple Jump at Outdoor Nationals are huge accomplishments; however, we know even greater achievements await her in the future, both athletically and academically. She is a wonderful teammate and a joy to coach. We are grateful to have her in the MMI family!”



Building Relationships through Innovation: NACC's Dr. Scott Byrum



Northeast Alabama Community College

For faculty members at Northeast Alabama Community College, it is not only about what you know, but also about who you are. This philosophy is embodied by Dr. Scott Byrum, Chemistry Instructor and Chair of the Natural Sciences Division, who recently began his fifth year as a full-time instructor at Northeast. Dr. Byrum's approach to teaching in a unique blend of innovation, empathy, and a belief in the power of relationships.



Dr. Byrum's passion for chemistry was sparked early on by an eighth-grade teacher who mentored him, pushing him to think about science differently. After being a high school teacher for some time, he pursued a graduate degree in hopes of instructing at the next level. He is a proud alumnus of NACC and felt a pull to return "home" to the college. "I was fortunate to begin as an adjunct instructor for the college in 2003, and when the opportunity to return to Northeast full-time arose, it felt like coming back to family," he shared.

His teaching philosophy is built on three pillars: honesty, fairness, and consistency. He aims to make chemistry accessible to all students, bringing the subject to life through storytelling. He says this instructional method helps students connect the material with their everyday experiences. "My goal is to make content meaningful," he explained. "When students can relate life to the subject matter, they're more engaged and motivated."

Recognized by NACC President Dr. David Campbell for his innovative approach in the classroom, Dr. Byrum pushes boundaries in science education. One example of this is the project "Mustangs in Motion," an initiative that connects NACC with local high school Dual Enrollment students on a more personal level. As part of this program, Dr. Byrum and his team visit local high schools, providing dual-enrollment teachers and students with necessary equipment, lectures, and support to strengthen their chemistry courses.

Another hallmark of his innovation, Dr. Byrum developed the Interstellar Studio. This repurposed room on NACC's campus is now equipped with cutting-edge technology that enhances his online courses. In this space, Dr. Byrum addresses student questions in real-time, teaches live, records lectures, and provides a more "hands-on" style of instruction that would otherwise be absent in an online course. "It brings the course to life for those online students," he said.

With an approach of "instruction for all," Dr. Byrum is mindful of students who may find his subject intimidating. "I've seen students discover they are capable of pursuing careers they never considered before, and that's always rewarding," he said.

For Dr. Byrum, the most fulfilling part of teaching at NACC is building relationships. "The more we know our students, the better we can help them succeed. At NACC, it's all about creating opportunity, providing pathways, and supporting every student's journey."

‘Why I fell in love with Adult Education’: NWSCC’s Gloria Butts shares her story



Northwest Shoals Community College

For nearly two decades, Gloria Butts has been a guiding force in the Northwest Shoals Community College (NWSCC) Adult Education program, helping students find second chances and new beginnings.

Butts began her career with NWSCC in 2007 as a tutor in the Youth Success Program, working with students in the Adult Education classroom. When the need arose for a part-time Adult Education instructor, she jumped at the opportunity. By 2013, she had joined the program full time.

“Some of our son’s classmates began attending the class — and suddenly, the need for second chances became deeply personal,” Butts said.



Butts knows that every student has a story. Many leave high school for reasons such as family responsibilities, financial hardship, academic struggles, lack of support, boredom or medical issues. Every day, she works to help her students rebuild trust in education — and in themselves.

“Teaching the academic subjects for the GED and High School Diploma Option is never boring,” said Butts. “In our classroom, we cover five different subjects — and no, I don’t know everything about all of them! But that’s the beauty of it: we learn how to figure things out together. My students are incredibly intelligent and challenge me every single day.”

Adult Education graduate Kelsey Osorio credits Butts with helping her achieve her educational goals.

“Mrs. Butts is the best teacher I have ever had in my whole life,” said Kelsey Osorio, 2025 NWSCC Adult Education Program graduate. “She has a way with words that motivated me to do my best. I always felt like she wanted it just as much as I did. “

Butts’ dedication has not gone unnoticed. In 2022, she was named NWSCC Adult Education Team Member of the Year. Two years later, she was honored as a recipient of the Alabama Community College System Chancellor’s Award of Excellence, Class of 2024.

“I am blessed to witness students develop and grow beyond this classroom,” Butts said. “It is a joy to see them walk the halls and succeed in their college and technical classes. And that is why I fell in love with Adult Education.”

Reid State Students Put Skid Steer Skills to Work Through Workforce Development Project

Reid State Community College



A great impact of the projects funded through ACCS Workforce and Economic Development Division can be seen at Reid State Technical College. This summer, two students who completed the college's Skid Steer Operator Training program put their skills to work in a real-world setting.

"We had two students who worked with us this summer in June and July. They had to have gone through the Skid-Steer Operator Program. They helped the instructor get ready for the next class and helped with a project to clean up the football practice field,"

— David Cole, Executive Director of Workforce Development

The program continues to grow. At least 30 students were served over the past year, with plans to increase enrollment to 50–60 students for the 2025–2026 academic year.

"We will be using this to train as many students as possible and work with more schools in the future," Cole added.

Reid State is not only reinforcing classroom learning but also preparing students for meaningful employment in their communities! Go Reid!



Shelton State Elevates Service Culture Through Professional Development



Shelton State Community College

This summer, Shelton State Community College took another step forward in strengthening its culture of service by investing in collegewide training and teambuilding for all full-time faculty and staff. Through a partnership with the Paskill Agency, employees participated in workshops held in June and August at the nearby Alabama Fire College, designed to foster a purpose-driven service culture.

President Dr. Jonathan Koh has made service a central focus for Shelton State, describing it as the hub of continuous improvement. "Service is our one big thing," he said. "It's how we take care of students, how we take care of each other, and how we strengthen our community."



Dr. Koh's vision is shaped by what he calls the three P's: processes, people, and programs. Processes are being streamlined to ensure efficiency and ease for students, with warm handoffs and transitions replacing transactional interactions. The focus on people emphasizes building strong relationships across the College and within the community, including students, employees, alumni, and partners. Programs are being designed with intentionality, offering guided pathways, proactive advising, and resources that help both students and employees reach their goals.

Together, these three Ps undergird a larger "P" -- Purpose: creating a sense of belonging. "By showing care in every interaction, we make students feel seen, help employees feel valued, and build trust with our partners," Dr. Koh said. "That sense of belonging leads to success for everyone."

To put this vision into practice, Shelton State launched Service in Action, an initiative that empowers employees to expand their social networks within the organization while finding ways to improve their work. Workshop discussions encouraged individuals and departments to identify opportunities for improvement by implementing minimum standards of service—such as responding to emails within 24 hours, greeting visitors quickly, and providing timely feedback to students. These simple actions help to create an environment where active listening and caring engagement are felt in every interaction.

The initiative also emphasizes breaking down silos. Through intentional committee work, fostering teamwork, and celebrating successes, Shelton State is building a stronger internal culture that supports its external mission.

Looking ahead, Dr. Koh's goal is for Shelton State to become a national model of excellence in higher education. "We are relentless in our focus on delivering excellent education and support because we are deeply passionate about transforming lives and communities," he said.

With service at the center of its work, Shelton State is not only improving the student experience, it is cultivating a culture of care, collaboration, and excellence that reaches every corner of the College and the communities it serves.

Snead State Community College Administrators Create Leadership Pathways Through Service

Snead State Community College



At Snead State Community College, administration is more than managing operations or overseeing programs. It is about modeling servant leadership that creates pathways for faculty, staff, and students to grow.

“When our administrators serve in the community, we gain a better understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing our students and their families,” Snead State President Dr. Joe Whitmore said. “That perspective helps us shape policies and programs that not only support students but also prepare them for success after they leave Snead State.”

One example is Dr. Whitmore’s service as president of the Marshall County Economic Development Council Board of Directors. His work in strengthening economic opportunities in the region connects to Snead State’s efforts to educate and train students to pursue high-demand careers.

Financial Aid Director Amanda Gentry bridges community work with campus life through her service with the Boaz Chamber of Commerce, the Miracle League of Albertville, and the College’s Canterbury Club.



“I am always proud to represent Snead and let my community know this school is full of people who live in and love our communities and the people in them,” said Ms. Gentry.

Director of Institutional Effectiveness and Research Janna Bonds has served on boards for United Way, CAJA, and the Marshall Medical Centers Foundation.

“All of these opportunities have allowed me to contribute to the well-being and development of our community through board leadership, nonprofit support, and advocacy by positively impacting healthcare, family services, and community resources across Marshall County,” said Ms. Bonds.

Vice President for Academic Affairs Dr. Vann Scott and Vice President for Student Services Jason Cannon have also worked with United Way, chambers of commerce, and local school systems. Their involvement provided insight that aids the college in aligning with workforce, educational, and service priorities.

“By serving in these roles, I’ve been more aware of how Snead State fits into the big picture, serving not only our students but our community overall,” said Mr. Scott.

Director of Admissions and Recruiting Tristin Callahan serves on the new Albertville Innovation Academy’s Teaching & Training Advisory Committee.

“I enjoy seeing the AIA teaching and training students grow as future quality educators especially during their practical experience days in the classroom. Many of these students will attend Snead State for the first two years of their education degrees, and I am thankful to be a very small part of their journey,” said Ms. Callahan.

“These examples illustrate a few of the ways Snead State’s administrators embrace community service as an extension of their professional work. Their leadership outside the college informs their decision-making and equips us to lead students in becoming leaders on campus, in the community, and within the workforce,” said Dr. Whitmore.

Equipping Students with Life Skills: Southern Union Resident Assistants Attend Mental Health Training



Southern Union State Community College

Southern Union State Community College Resident Assistants traveled to Florence, Alabama, for a professional development trip focused on mental health awareness and team-building, part of the college's commitment to preparing students for success beyond the classroom.

The trip, led by Residence Hall Coordinator Mr. Kyle Powell, was designed to strengthen the ability of RAs to support their peers while also fostering personal growth. Resident Assistants play a unique role on campus, serving not only as community leaders but also as the first point of contact for many students experiencing struggles. Recognizing this responsibility, Southern Union ensured its RAs received specialized training in student mental health.

During the training sessions, the group learned strategies for recognizing signs of distress, listening empathetically, and connecting students to appropriate resources. Just as importantly, they gained confidence in their ability to advocate for mental wellness within the residence halls.

The team also had the chance to tour the University of North Alabama, where they were able to see firsthand how other institutions support student life. To wrap up the trip, the group tackled an escape room challenge.

The students who took part in this training included Kevin Kennedy, William Durden, Griffin Smith, Dashawn Thomas, Haven Lester, and Avee Chappel.



Kiearra Rodgers: A Journey of Purpose, Perseverance, and Academic Excellence at Trenholm State



Trenholm State Community College

At Trenholm State Community College, student success stories are woven from hard work, resilience, and the courage to dream beyond circumstance. Few embody that spirit more powerfully than Kiearra Rodgers, a dedicated student who was recently featured in Trenholm Talk's "Current Student Spotlight." Her story reflects both determination and gratitude — a journey defined by personal growth and the pursuit of excellence.

Kiearra's commitment to her education has not gone unnoticed. She was recently honored as one of Trenholm State's two representatives on the 2025 All-Alabama Academic Team, a prestigious recognition celebrating outstanding community college students across the state. Through her dedication and leadership, Kiearra earned scholarship awards totaling \$61,250, a testament to her academic achievement and personal integrity.

In her Trenholm Talk interview, Kiearra spoke openly about the challenges she has faced balancing school, work, and family responsibilities. Yet rather than viewing those obstacles as setbacks, she sees them as stepping stones — each one strengthening her perseverance and purpose. "There were moments I questioned if I could really do it," she reflected, "but I had to remind myself that every challenge was preparing me for something greater."



Kiearra emphasized that her experience at Trenholm State has been about more than just earning a degree. It's been about growth through connection — the professors who encouraged her, the peers who inspired her, and the campus community that made her feel seen and supported.

She credits Trenholm's faculty and student services with helping her navigate her academic journey. "Trenholm feels like a family," she shared. "Everyone wants to see you succeed, and that support means the world when you're juggling so much."

Her involvement in campus activities and leadership opportunities helped her build confidence and communication skills that extend beyond the classroom. Whether collaborating on group projects or volunteering in the community, Kiearra has developed a sense of leadership grounded in empathy and service.

When asked about her future goals, Kiearra's answer reflected both ambition and heart. She hopes to use her education to uplift others, especially young people who may face similar challenges. "I want my story to show that it's possible," she said. "If I can do this — if I can keep going even when it's hard — then someone else can too."

Her long-term vision involves creating opportunities that build bridges for future students — ensuring that success and higher education are accessible for everyone, regardless of background.

Through her achievements and her humble outlook, Kiearra Rodgers represents the best of Trenholm State Community College — academic excellence, leadership, and resilience. Her recognition on the All-Alabama Academic Team and her remarkable \$61,250 in scholarships highlight not just her own success, but the power of dedication, mentorship, and community support.

Kiearra's story is a reminder that the road to achievement isn't always smooth, but it is always worth traveling. Her journey continues to inspire fellow students, faculty, and the entire Trenholm family to keep striving, keep believing, and keep building futures filled with purpose.

Amplifying Student Voices: Angila Brannon and the Wallace Social Media Ambassador Program



George C. Wallace Community College

When Angila Brannon joined Wallace Community College-Dothan in 2010 as Public Relations and Marketing Clerk, she brought with her a wealth of creativity from her background in graphic design at the local newspaper. Over the years, she has become a cornerstone of Wallace's marketing efforts as she creates social media and design projects that tell the story of the College in an engaging and authentic way.

One of Angila's notable contributions to Wallace's social media has been her leadership in developing the Wallace Social Media Ambassador Scholarship Program. Launched in 2022, the program began with partial scholarships. Under Angila's guidance, it soon grew into a full-scholarship opportunity for ambassadors to share the Wallace student experience through social media while gaining valuable leadership skills as representatives of the College.



The program has made a clear impact. Wallace's Facebook account is now one of the largest in following across the Alabama Community College System, a direct result of the thoughtful and consistent content strategy Angila has cultivated with her ambassadors. But perhaps more important than numbers are the student experiences she has helped shape.

"Being a social media ambassador has opened the door to countless opportunities," said Gabrielle Taylor, a 2025 social media ambassador. "I've attended exciting events, experienced the behind-the-scenes world of planning, and connected with inspiring people."

"Mrs. Angila has made a tremendous impact on my college journey," Gabrielle continued. "She is truly one of the most optimistic and uplifting people I've ever worked with. Collaborating with her and my peers has shaped my life in such a positive and meaningful way."

Wallace colleagues know Angila for her eye for detail, creative flair, and steady dedication to student success. She works behind the scenes to capture moments on camera, design materials that highlight our programs, and mentor ambassadors as they share the Wallace story from their own perspective.

Her work with the Social Media Ambassador Program has not only given students a platform but also enhanced the way Wallace connects with its community. "The ambassadors aren't just scholarship recipients," said Angila. "They have a front-row seat to the best student success stories here at Wallace. And really, who better to help us share our story?"

Wallace State Graduate a Semifinalist for Cooke Undergraduate Transfer Scholarship

Wallace State Community College



Deborah “Pepper” Hoover, Chair of the Department of Nursing Education at Wallace State Community College, continues to set the standard for excellence in nursing education across Alabama and beyond. Hoover’s visionary leadership has propelled Wallace State’s nursing program to national prominence, earning three prestigious designations as a Center of Excellence by the National League for Nursing (NLN)—a rare and distinguished honor.

Hoover, a registered nurse with a Master of Science in Nursing and a former certified Family Nurse Practitioner, has served as chair since 2010, following two decades as a faculty member. Her tenure has been marked by innovation, collaboration, and a relentless commitment to student success. Under her guidance, Wallace State has implemented groundbreaking initiatives such as joint enrollment pathways and interprofessional education models, which have been showcased at national conferences and published in academic forums. She is currently leading the program through its reaccreditation and approval processes with the Accreditation Commission for Education in Nursing and the Alabama Board of Nursing.



Her influence extends far beyond the classroom. Hoover was appointed to the Alabama Board of Nursing by Governor Kay Ivey and served on the NLN Center of Excellence Review Panel, helping shape the future of nursing education nationwide. She is also a member of the Nursing Deans and Directors’ Council of the Alabama Community College System and the Alabama Council of Administrators of Professional Nursing Education Programs (ACAPNEP).

Hoover’s accolades include induction into the Alabama Nursing Hall of Fame, becoming the only community college nursing faculty to be admitted to the Hall of Fame; the NISOD Excellence Award; and the Innovation of the Year Award. She has been recognized by the Cullman Regional Foundation, the National Institute for Staff and Organizational Development, and numerous academic and community organizations for her contributions to healthcare and education.

“Pepper Hoover exemplifies the spirit of service, scholarship, and leadership that defines the mission of Alabama’s community colleges,” said Wallace State President Dr. Vicki Karolewics. “Her work has transformed lives, elevated standards, and inspired generations of nurses.”

As Wallace State celebrates its continued recognition, most recently as an Aspen Rising Star award winner, Hoover’s legacy stands as a testament to what visionary leadership can achieve in the world of nursing education.

Coaching for Completion: How WCCS Success Coaches Are Guiding Students from Enrollment to Achievement



George Corley Wallace State Community College

At Wallace Community College Selma (WCCS), student success starts with a plan and a dedicated coach. Through the college's Success Coach Program, WCCS is transforming the student experience by providing personalized support from the moment students enroll.

Success Coaches are assigned to students early in the process, offering one-on-one guidance in academic planning, financial aid, time management, and overcoming personal challenges. This holistic approach has proven particularly effective for first-generation students and those navigating college life for the first time.



In Fall 2024, the WCCS team launched Coaches Day Out, an engaging initiative that sent Success Coaches into local high schools to meet with dual enrollment students face-to-face. The goal was to establish rapport, answer questions, and ensure a smooth transition to the semester. Coaches equipped students with essential tools for success and emphasized that they are not alone on this journey.

“Coaches Day was a huge success! Each of our coaches hit the ground running, visiting high schools across our service area. They jumped right in to help students log in to their classes and alleviate those first-day jitters. By meeting students where they are, our coaches demonstrated the importance of being proactive rather than reactive!” said Darlene Rudolph, W.A.Y.S. Director/Student Success Coordinator.

Students have responded positively; those who engage with Success Coaches are more likely to register early, persevere through challenges, and stay on track toward graduation. The program also supports key campus events like New Student Orientation, FAFSA Nights, and career readiness workshops.

In a region with historically low college completion rates, WCCS is redefining student support, one relationship at a time. By prioritizing mentorship and accessibility, the Success Coach Program exemplifies how community colleges can create a meaningful impact far beyond the classroom.

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