

COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HEALTH PROFESSIONS

# CHRONICLES

COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY

FALL 2025

Celebrating  
History...



# A MESSAGE FROM THE DEAN

Dear Friends of the COEHP,

Welcome to the inaugural issue of the College of Education and Health Professions Chronicles! It's a pleasure to introduce this new biannual magazine that highlights the incredible work our faculty, staff, students, alumni, retirees, and partners do throughout the year.

In this first issue, I want to emphasize how excited we are to share our college's role in strengthening the region's education and healthcare systems—two pillars of any thriving community. Through innovation and forward-thinking, we ensure that both remain excellent.

As you read through this edition, you'll discover stories spanning our education and health professions programs. Our new Professional Development Lab School at Dimon Magnet Academy, a model of holistic, community-engaged education, kicked off its first year in July 2024. In the health professions, we also remain committed to community service, with events like our Autism Fair in the spring and robust partnerships with local hospitals and school districts, Ft. Benning, and inspiring groups like the Miracle Riders.

Our Centers of Excellence—including the Coca-Cola Space Science Center and Oxbow Meadows Environmental Learning Center—continue to lead the way in STEM education. Additionally, we are thrilled to highlight that the Oxbow Meadows Environmental Learning Center is celebrating its 30th anniversary this year. You'll also find exciting updates on our Columbus Regional Mathematics Collaborative, which is evolving but will continue to offer resources and workshops for teachers and students. The Center for Quality Teaching and Learning continues to recruit and support teacher candidates and new teachers with high quality mentoring and individual professional development opportunities from initial enrollment through graduation, certification, and induction.

The strength of our college is also built on the contributions of our retirees and alumni, whose impact helps make us one of the best Colleges of Education and Health Professions in the region. Many of our retirees and alumni return to support our academic programs and centers for academic excellence, whether by offering their time, sharing their expertise, or even making generous financial contributions to fund student scholarships and programs. It is a testament to the lifelong commitment and passion that our community members have for our mission.

Special thanks to our co-editors, Dr. Ellen Roberts and Dr. Stephanie Adams, and to the entire editorial board for their dedication, creativity, and hard work. They've poured their hearts into these pages, and I'm excited for you to read all about the great things we're doing.

Happy reading!

*Margie*

**Margie Yates**

**Dean of the College of Education and Health Professions**



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The COEHP Chronicles Editorial Board pays tribute to the work of Dr. James Brewbaker and his many years of service as editor of both *Education & Health Quarterly* and *Innovation*. Thanks, Jim, for setting the standard for the rest of us.



# CELEBRATING HISTORY EXPANDING HORIZONS

BY DR. ELLEN ROBERTS

You will notice from the front cover that the theme for this first edition of the College of Education and Health Professions Chronicles is “Celebrating History – Expanding Horizons”. Pictured on the cover are photos of Jordan Hall, completed in early 1977, and Frank Brown Hall (2017), current home for most of the College and its intended home for the foreseeable future.

This issue will further acquaint you with people and accomplishments that have helped to shape the COEHP and bring it to a place of high standing in the community and across the state and to make you aware of initiatives and directions for the future.

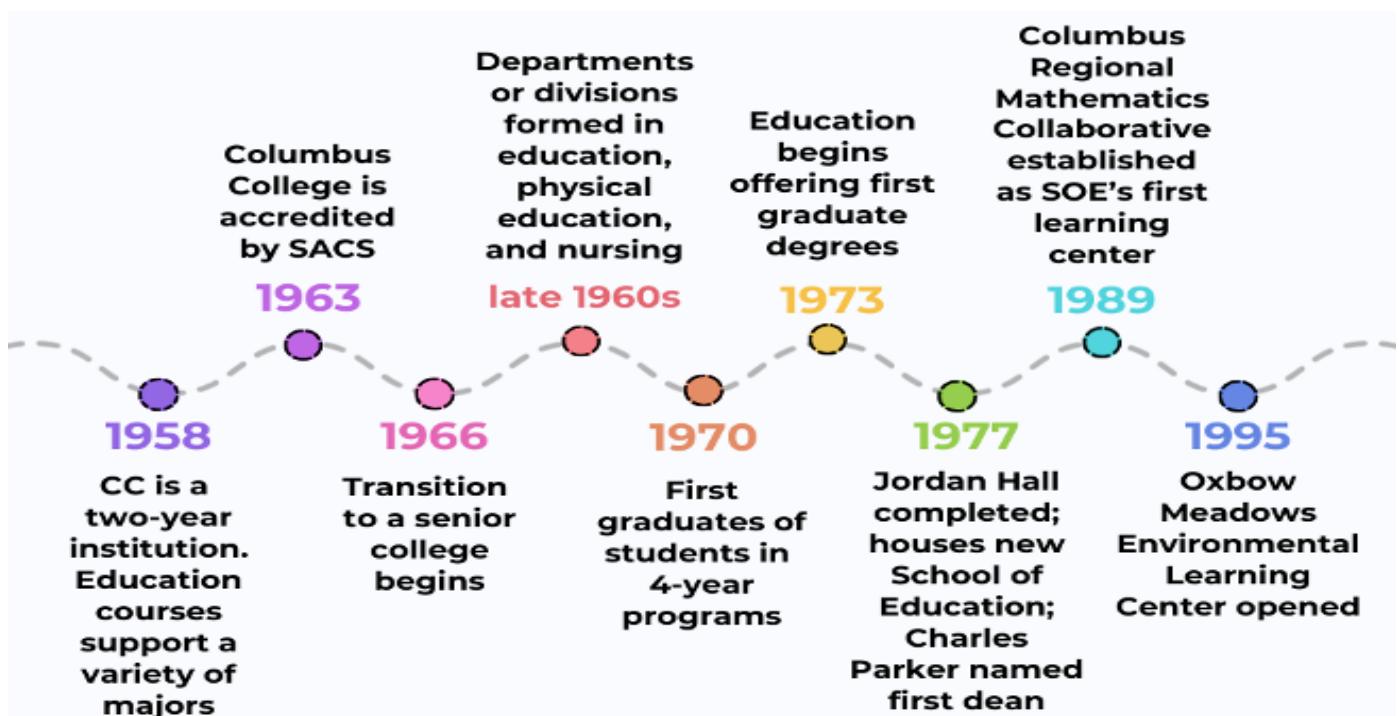
## History and Organization of the College of Education & Health Professions

### The Early Years: 1958-1976

As a two-year institution beginning in 1958, course work was designed to prepare students for a variety of majors to be completed at other institutions. Included in those degree fields were the B.S.Ed. in Education, the B.S.Ed. in Education with a Major in Physical Education, a B.S. in Nursing, and (through a one-year program) a Hospital Nursing Program (R.N.). There were initially three education courses and four physical education courses; there were no courses in nursing at that time. One academic dean provided leadership, and there were initially just 15 faculty members, including President Thomas Y. Whitley.

In December of 1963, Columbus College was accredited, with no reservations or conditions, by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. In April of 1965, the Regents approved Columbus College’s application to transition to a senior college, with transition to begin in September, 1966, and the first class to graduate in June, 1970.

## TIMELINE OF COEHP HISTORY: 1958-1995



As the number of faculty began to grow and new degree programs were offered, changes in organization took place, leading to grouping into departments and divisions. By the late 1960s, there were academic departments or divisions in education, physical education, and nursing, each with their own heads.

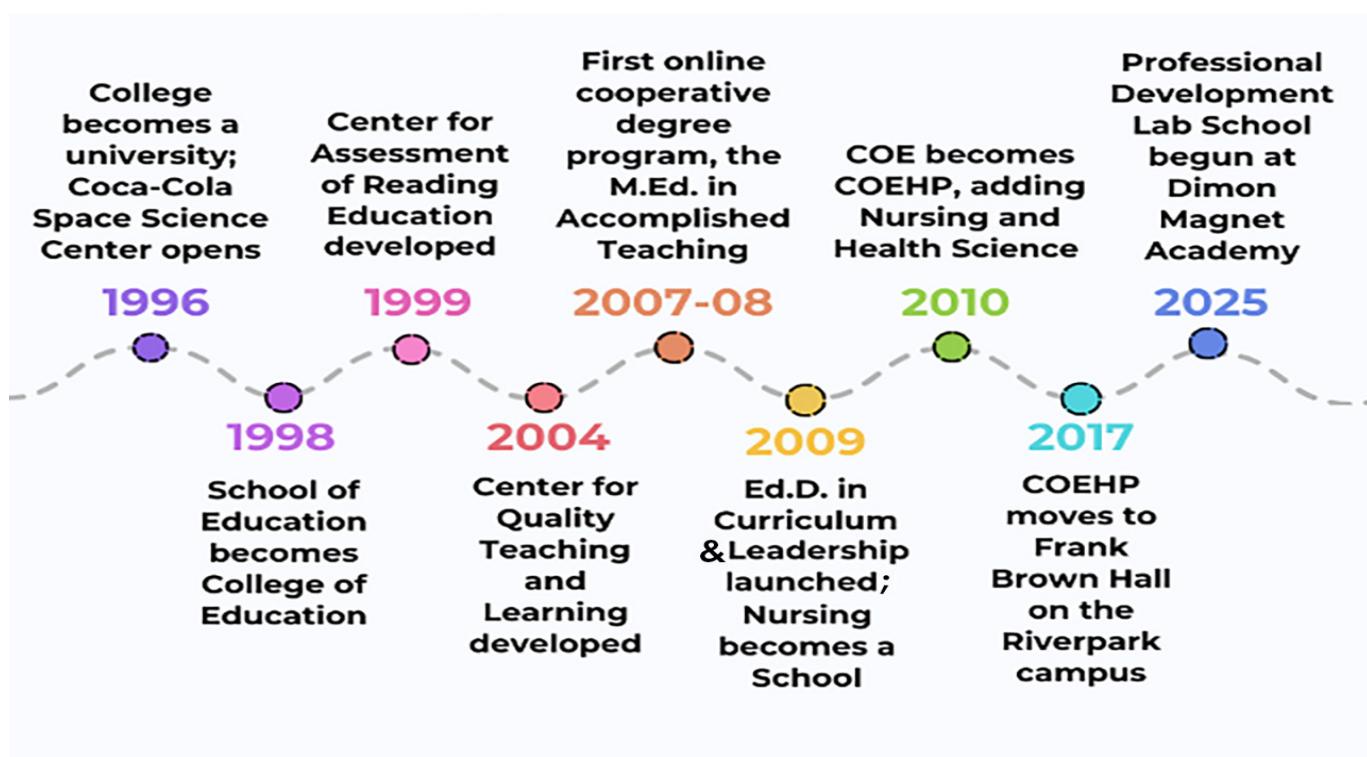
### **The School of Education: 1977-1996**

Jordan Hall, located on the main campus of Columbus State University, was for many years the home of both the School of Education (first and second floors) and the School of Business (third floor). What became a School of Education (SOE) in 1977 had departments in Clinical Programs, Curriculum and Instruction, Developmental Studies, Educational Foundations, and Physical Education and Leisure Management (PELM). PELM was housed at the time in the Woodruff Gym and Gym Annex. Charles Parker was named the first dean of the SOE. The School offered programs at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, the latter beginning in 1973, including, in 1983, a cooperative doctorate in Educational Leadership, offered with Georgia State University.

The 1990s saw changes to the undergraduate and graduate programs, as both growth and superior quality were sought. Teacher Education programs continued to be accredited through the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). Community Counseling was accredited by the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). Students in teaching fields were approved for certification through the Georgia Professional Standards Commission. Columbus College was the only four-year college in the governor's 17-county economic Region 5, emphasizing its importance in providing education to the region. The SOE's first learning center, the Columbus Regional Mathematics Collaborative, was established in 1989. The Oxbow Meadows Environmental Learning Center (featured elsewhere in this issue) opened in 1995.

1996 began a period of significant change when Columbus College was renamed and became Columbus State University. CSU at this time opened its third learning center, the Coca-Cola Space Science Center. Like Oxbow Meadows, the CCSSC demonstrated the community's commitment to partnership in supporting the mission of the university and a willingness to expand geographically to the downtown and south Columbus areas away from the main campus.

## **TIMELINE OF COEHP HISTORY: 1996-PRESENT**



**Deans of the  
College of Education and Health Professions**

**Dr. Charles Parker, Dean**  
School of Education  
1977-1981

**Dr. Joseph Johnson, Dean**  
School of Education  
1982-1988

**Dr. Arthur Justice, Dean**  
School of Education  
1990-1997

**Dr. Thomas Harrison, Dean**  
College of Education  
1997-2005

**Dr. David Rock, Dean**  
College of Education & Health Professions  
2006-2010

**Dr. Barbara Buckner, Dean**  
College of Education & Health Professions  
2011-2014

**Dr. Deirdre Greer, Dean**  
College of Education & Health Professions  
2014-2022

**Dr. Margie Yates, Dean**  
College of Education & Health Professions  
2022-Present

Note: Gaps in years reflect periods in which there were  
Interim or Acting Deans.

**The College of Education: 1997-2009**

CSU's change to university status was followed in August of 1998 by designating the Schools of Arts & Letters, Business, Education, and Science as Colleges. Also at that time, the academic calendar of the university changed from having four quarters to two semesters and a shorter summer session. In 1999, the College of Education developed a Center for Assessment and Reading Education (CARE), currently the Reading Instruction, Support, and Education Center (RISE).

Change continued to be rapid as the College of Education expanded geographically and academically. In 2003, when the Abbott Turner College of Business moved to its new location, the College of Education expanded to use all three floors of Jordan Hall. The Center for Quality Teaching and Learning was developed in 2004 to recruit and support students entering the teaching field. Education programs began rapid expansion to include, in 2007-2008, approval of the college's first cooperative online degree program, the M.Ed. in Accomplished Teaching. Many other online programs soon followed. In 2009, the COE launched its first stand-alone doctoral program, the Ed.D. in Curriculum and Leadership. The doctoral program has been significant in providing local and regional educators with opportunities to advance their careers in curriculum, educational leadership, and higher education at multiple levels.





**Dr. Thomas Harrison**



**Dr. David Rock**



**Dr. Margie Yates**

***“The COEHP has a history of strong leadership, including from former deans like Thomas Harrison, David Rock, and current dean Margie Yates, all noted for bringing about innovation and significant partnerships. Education and health professions students and the community have benefited in so many ways from their forward-thinking approaches to leadership.”***

**Dr. Ellen Roberts**

#### **The College of Education and Health Professions: 2010-Present**

Reorganization of the colleges took place in 2010 and included an expansion of the College of Education to include the health professions. As the College of Education and Health Professions (COEHP), the college welcomed the School of Nursing as a department of the college and Health Science to merge with the Department of Physical Education and Exercise Science. Nursing and Health Science have enhanced the college in significant ways, most notably by bringing large undergraduate programs into the college and through the addition of successful and much-needed graduate programs in their fields.

In 2017, the COEHP joined other colleges and programs on the Riverpark campus by moving to Frank Brown Hall, former home of the Columbus Ledger-Enquirer. Named for the university's third president, Frank Brown Hall now houses most but not all of the COEHP's departments and programs.

Current academic departments include: the Department of Teacher Education, Counseling, and Leadership; the Department of Kinesiology and Health Sciences; and the School of Nursing. Elsewhere in this issue and in upcoming issues, readers will learn more about the programs, leadership, strengths, special events, and contributions of each. Information about learning centers, about which the COEHP takes great pride, follows.

# DISCOVER COEHP THROUGH THE OUTREACH CENTERS

BY DESTINEE ROUSE

What if your college classroom extended beyond four walls into community education, a wildlife habitat, or even a science center & space observatory?

At the College of Education and Health Professions, learning doesn't stop at the lecture hall; it expands into the heart of the community. Through a dynamic network of outreach centers, including the Coca-Cola Space Science Center, Oxbow Meadows Environmental Learning Center, the Columbus Regional Mathematics Collaborative, and the Center for Quality Teaching and Learning, students are empowered to grow as professionals while making a real-world impact. These hubs of innovation and service offer hands-on experiences that sharpen skills, foster meaningful connections, and turn education into active engagement.

## Center for Quality Teaching and Learning

The mission of the Center for Quality Teaching and Learning is to recruit, help develop and retain educational candidates and to improve overall student achievement by cultivating and promoting the knowledge, skills, and dispositions required for 21st century educators. We have developed strong partnerships with our school system partners, especially the Muscogee and Harris County systems. We are responsible for placing teacher candidates each semester out into the schools for both practicum work as well as for the culminating semester of student teaching. Our team of highly qualified Clinical Faculty members guide these candidates as they matriculate through their program.



During this journey toward teacher certification, candidates are afforded many opportunities for growth. In addition to the required courses in the programs, candidates are afforded opportunities to hear from current educators in the field through the Muscogee County School District Harvard Fellows Program as well as workshops with nationally recognized educators. Additionally, once a candidate graduates and is employed in one of our partner system schools, we help mentor these beginning professionals through the induction phase of the certification process.

We also work directly with high schools that offer the Educator as a Profession Pathway to encourage those participants to continue to pursue this goal of teaching our young people. In addition, we have also begun to work with middle schools in establishing teacher clubs. We do this by offering many opportunities for those students to visit our campus and participate in activities that highlight the many rewards of this profession.

Roger Hatcher, Director of the Center for Quality Teaching and Learning shared, "At CQTL, the team is dedicated to the recruitment, retention and future success of the educators in our community."



## Oxbow Meadows Environmental Learning Center

Oxbow Meadows Environmental Learning Center is an outreach center focused on providing environmental education and hands-on programming to local schools and families across the community of Columbus, Georgia. Oxbow Meadows is a collaboration between Columbus State University and Columbus Water Works and consists of live animal exhibits, displays, and

nature trails that are accessible to citizens and tourists alike. The Center includes a classroom-laboratory, an 86-seat auditorium, the Natural History Discovery Center, indoor and outdoor exhibits of living reptiles and fish, a stream habitat supporting various plants and animals, a pollinator garden, bee hives, and environmental art.

Oxbow Meadows' mission is to support student success of Columbus State University students across the colleges, offers volunteer and service opportunities, as well as provides pre-service certification in environmental curricula.

Oxbow Meadows also aims to foster stewardship of the environment by engaging visitors in citizen science and by being economic stewards to ensure continued free access to the grounds and exhibits. Oxbow Meadows develops community connections through educational programming to a wide and diverse audience and connects with the broader community through a diverse set of community partners providing opportunities to connect deeper with nature and support lifelong learning. Dr. Michael Dentzau, Executive Director of Oxbow Meadows, emphasizes that the center "provides experiential learning focused on the environment and nature for the community, local school systems and Columbus State University students."



## The Columbus Regional Mathematics Collaborative

The Columbus Regional Mathematics Collaborative (CRMC) is a community outreach group that has been serving the Chattahoochee Valley for over 30 years. Established in 1989, the Urban Mathematics Collaborative project via the Ford Foundation awarded CRMC to improve, develop, and provide resources for math education for K-16 teachers, students, and administrators within a 65-mile radius of the urban center that is Columbus, Georgia.

The CRMC is dedicated to promoting lifelong learning through math, encouraging parental and community engagement, and supporting the professional growth of all teachers. CRMC is particularly active in outreach resources, including:

**P.I.E. - Make it Count Project:** This initiative aims to improve math fluency among second graders by establishing a strong foundation for ongoing mathematical development. In partnership with Partners in Education and the Muscogee County School District, schools are paired with volunteers who visit second-grade classrooms to facilitate engaging and enjoyable activities designed to strengthen math skills.

**Notes to Nerds:** This is the monthly newsletter. CRMC recognizes that math education can be an inspiring and impactful profession. In today's world, the dedication of educators can be physically and emotionally demanding. This newsletter's purpose is to provide a space for teachers to relax, reflect, and find inspiration through the remarkable work they do.



Looking ahead, the CRMC will continue to expand its reach and impact through strong leadership and programming under Dr. Basil Conway. Dean Margie Yates shared:

“In the spirit of ‘making a difference,’ I am pleased to share that Dr. Basil Conway has agreed to serve as the Columbus Regional Mathematics Collaborative Coordinator for the 2025–2026 academic year. In this role, he will support professional development, coordination, outreach, and resource management. The Mathematics Collaborative will remain open for faculty, staff, and students needing access to resources and manipulatives, and Dr. Conway will also coordinate several on-campus workshops each semester for teachers. In addition, we will continue to host the annual Mathematics Masters Tournament in the spring. I greatly appreciate Dr. Conway’s willingness to serve in this position. His expertise and experience will be a tremendous asset, and I know he will do an excellent job.”

The Columbus Regional Mathematics Collaborative remains an important organization that helps make math education fair and interesting for everyone in the Chattahoochee Valley. With many years of experience, CRMC not only supports teachers and students but also brings the community together through creative programs and helpful training. Its dedication to continuous learning makes sure that math is approachable, engaging, and inspiring for all.

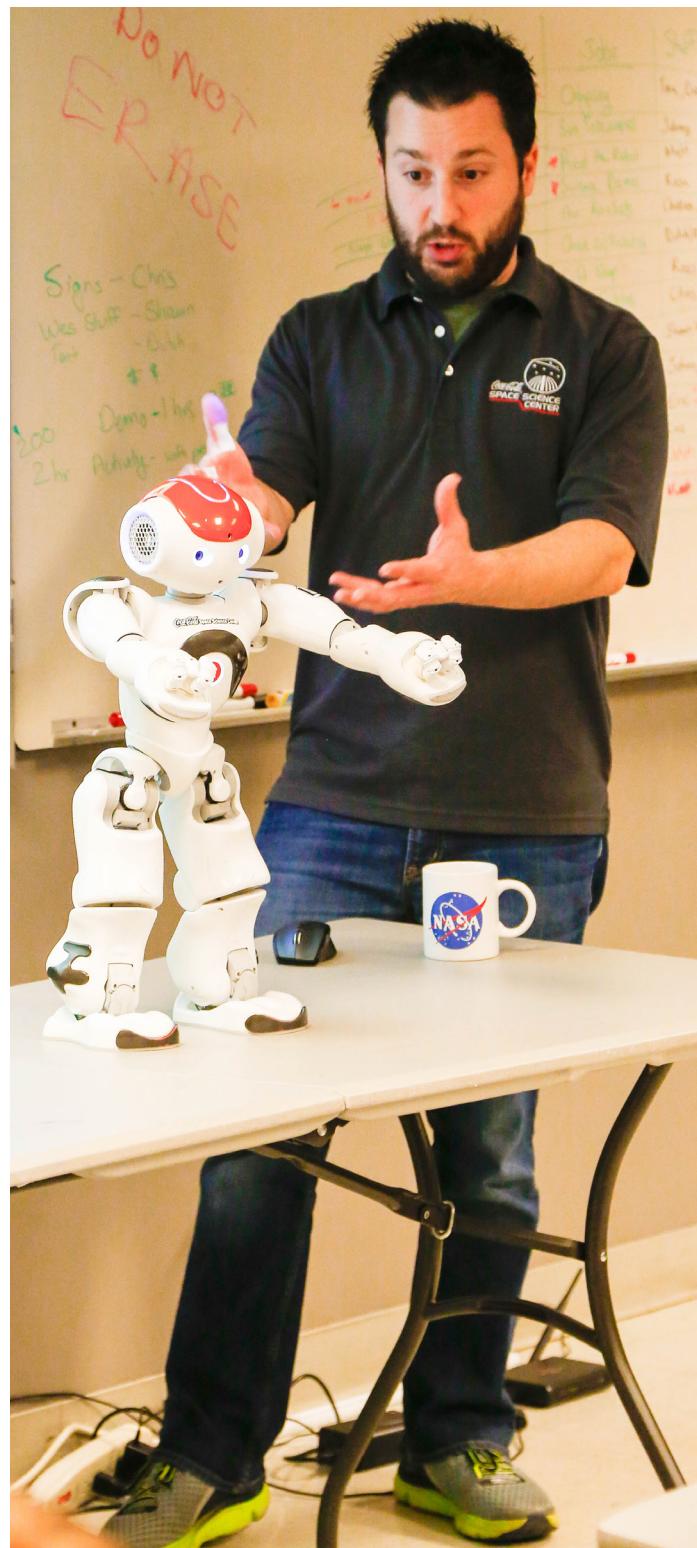
## Coca-Cola Space Science Center

Opening on June 16, 1996, the Coca-Cola Space Science Center (CCSSC) serves as Georgia’s only science center and museum facility dedicated to providing experiences for students and public visitors in astronomy and space science. Visitors include walk-in patrons, K-12 school groups from across the region, corporate and community organizations, and the university community. In FY 25, the CCSSC served 53,328 individuals, both on site and from Outreach Activities. It is expected that the number will increase with the new facility that will house CCSSC, CSU Robotics Engineering, and Muscogee County School District robotics.

Since its inception, the CCSSC has employed CSU students to gain experience academically as well as presentation and public service skills. A 2025 survey revealed that, of the former interns that were located, 69.85% are employed as scientists, engineers, and

technologists, 9.59% are employed in space related jobs (NASA/Marshall Space Center/ Teledyne/Axiom, Blue Origin, etc.), and 16.18% are currently serving as Science and Technology teachers. Only 4.41% of that group are employed in non-STEM fields.

In March 2025, the GA DOE partnered with the CCSSC to host a STEM Day. The purpose of the event was to encourage Georgians to engage in STEM activities and to encourage students to learn about potential STEM careers. Over 740 people attended and visited the 24 exhibitors.





The robotics program sponsored by the CCSSC is growing exponentially. Federal funding allowed the purchase of 861 Spike Prime and Spike Essential robots as well as robotic expansion kits. Those robots were distributed to 51 Muscogee County School District schools (K-12) as well as CSU's college of Education and Health Professions and the Robotic Engineering program. Thus far 320 teachers have completed professional development (PD) in the building, programming, and use of robots. Teachers are given contact information for the robotics PD instructors so that they may be contacted should the teachers have any questions. In August of 2025, the professional development will be expanded to include students in the education degree program. Teachers use robots for both classroom use and for robotic competitions.

After completion of the PD, teachers produce lesson plans which include: directions for robot building, programming, the educational standard addressed, and ancillary materials. Those lesson plans are submitted to the CCSSC and are uploaded to a library which is available to all teachers who have completed the PD. A survey was conducted among robotics trained teachers, to which 62% responded. Those teachers all indicated that they had either used the robot lesson plans in the classroom or had plans to do so.

The CCSSC remains dedicated to inspiring the next generation of scientists, engineers and science educators, while engaging the community and entertaining thousands of visitors from around the world.



# OXBOW MEADOWS CELEBRATES 30 YEARS!

BY ASHLEY HERBOLICH

Oxbow Meadows Environmental Learning Center celebrates 30 years of environmental education, stewardship, and providing access to nature. The center continues to be pivotal for the community of Columbus, Georgia. Currently, Oxbow Meadows serves as an access point to nature and environmental education through informal learning endeavors. From landfill to learning, Oxbow has a rich history to explore.

## Early History

In the 1940s-1950s, the area was mined for sand and clay. Surrounding areas, including where Westville Historic Homes now sit, hosted Native American settlements of Creek or Muscogee tribes. By the 1970s, the entire bend of the Chattahoochee River served as Columbus' municipal landfill. The city dumped municipal solid waste, garbage, plastics, glass, metal, and non-hazardous construction debris until it was closed in the early 1970s. At that time, the site was capped and monitored for residual waste and potential contaminants. Environmental monitoring systems were established, following Georgia Environmental Protection Department standards for now-closed landfills. Some remnants of the landfill, including a tractor trailer, countless tires, and large metal objects that remain, are covered by plant life. While visiting Oxbow, you can still spot features like methane gas vents or capped slopes, which hallmark the landfill history from more than 30 years ago. While the land has been changed and revitalized, the history and memories of past uses have not been entirely erased.

## The Early Vision

Through the vision of former Columbus Water Works President Billy Turner, the plans for Oxbow



*Columbus Water Works President Billy Turner with Oxbow Meadow's first Executive Director Dr. George Stanton*

Meadows Environmental Learning Center began. Turner noticed as he travelled across the United States that many water companies were connected to educational centers. Turner and Columbus Water Works collaborated with then Columbus College and Dr. George Stanton to bring his vision to life. The city rezoned roughly 1,800 acres of adjacent lands to where Oxbow Meadows Environmental Learning Center now stands, including the former sand pits and mining burrows, investing a total of approximately \$1.5 million dollars over six years. Billy Turner later tied the recently created Columbus Riverwalk to the learning center that focused on water conservation and regional ecosystems allowing community members, especially students, to connect firsthand with the

Chattahoochee Valley. Turner's strategic investment showcased environmental literacy, public stewardship, and sustainable reuse that launched Oxbow Meadows into the community-centered learning environment it is today.

# Oxbow Over the Years



## Creating a Rich Environment

Columbus Water Works was instrumental in acquiring and restoring the former landfill site to its current state as an educational initiative and natural area. The first building of the nature center was finished in October 1995. By the year 2000, plans had emerged for a marina and associated development of over 100

acres adjacent to the natural land, including trails and storage facilities. The restoration of the land emphasized wildlife conservation, natural history education, and resilient and sustainable land reuse – changing the function from its industrial past into a functional conservation space. The restoration included creating wetlands and wildlife ponds, introducing native plants, and attracting native wildlife including American River Otters, American Beavers, Great Blue Heron, Great Egrets, Kingfishers, Snapping Turtles, numerous species of aquatic pond turtles, American Alligators, and a diverse population of invertebrates.



Former Columbus State University President Dr. Timothy Mescon cuts ribbon for grand opening of second building with City of Columbus officials.

Over four miles of trail system weave through wetlands, ponds, hardwood forests, and pollinator- and bird-rich zones. The Discovery Trail is just under one mile (~0.8 mi) leading from the Audubon Bird Garden to Wrens Pond. Thanks to the Chambers family, additional loops were created in 2023 through the expansion of the Walt and Frank Chambers Birding Trail. Anhinga Alley, Cormorant Circle, Beaver Boulevard, Meadowlark Land, Kestrel Court, Woodpecker Way, and Birkhead Loop all showcase varied habitats and views of water features that are accessible to all Columbus residents as well as the many tourists that visit. A Tree-top Canopy Trail has offered bird's eye views, suspended 35 feet above ground on two platforms overlooking the wetland. During winter when the canopy lacks foliage, the Tree-top Canopy provided a view all the way across the Chattahoochee River to neighboring Alabama!



Toddler investigates insects during a Little Naturalists early childhood program fostering curiosity and exploration..

Through the years, Oxbow Meadows has benefited from the leadership of several outstanding directors. Dr. George Stanton was instrumental in founding the center and serving as its first leader from 1995-97. Dr. Becky Champion then assumed the role of director, allowing the new center to flourish through her ability to build relationships within the community. Dr. Champion also co-produced the interactive learning film, “Waters to the Sea™: The Chattahoochee River,” that won an international Panda Award in 2004. After a decade of leadership, her resignation brought Dr. Stanton back to the center as Interim Director from 2012-13. Since 2013, Dr. Michael Dentzau has served as the Executive Director of Oxbow Meadows. Dr. Dentzau has continued to expand STEM programming and further developed partnerships, in addition to providing measurable outcomes in environmental education to both school children and pre-service teachers.



*Former Oxbow Meadows directors, Dr. George Stanton and Dr. Becky Champion.*

Oxbow Meadows hosts over 35,000 visitors annually, providing free or low-cost, donation-based admission, and offers field trips to public, private, parochial, and home schools groups, community events, family programming, community outreach, and interactive, hands-on learning opportunities for all.

## Pivotal Partnerships

Oxbow Meadows Environmental Learning Center is an outreach center of Columbus State University and has as a focus educational programming and STEAM events. It also hosts CSU classes with professors from across colleges. Oxbow works closely with the UTeach program, offering internships, volunteer opportunities, and assistantships in which students have the opportunity to gain hands-on experiences teaching topics from biology to earth sciences. They also gain skills in animal husbandry and care that many science and zoological organizations require. Oxbow Meadows gives high school and college students the opportunity to advance skills needed for their future careers.

Pre-service teachers are trained in environmental education curricula and strategies aligned to state and national standards. Project Learning Tree, Project WILD, Project WET, and Population Education are integrated into requirements for Teacher Education within the College of Education and Health Professions.

Natural areas across Oxbow Meadows Environmental Learning Center extend beyond the indoor animal enclosures and exhibits. The southern extension of the Riverwalk, unpaved trails toward wetland ponds, and the Audubon Bird Garden offer visitors of all ages access to nature. The Columbus Audubon Society leads bird-related events and hikes for the community at no charge. This serves to inspire novice birders and to hone the expert’s skills and knowledge. There are over 200 species of local and migrant birds that stopover in and around Oxbow Meadows, making it a hotspot for birders of all abilities.





CSU Biology Professor Dr. Michael Newbrey teaches CSU Elementary Education undergraduates about biology on the Wetland trail.

The Chattahoochee Valley Beekeepers Association is also a pivotal partner in education and outreach events with Oxbow Meadows Environmental Learning Center. Through their volunteerism, Oxbow Meadows houses and maintains a dozen honeybee hives on the property. The Chattahoochee Valley Beekeepers host monthly membership meetings at Oxbow Meadows, in addition to leading demonstrations on honey extraction at the annual Honey Harvest special event every July. The Chattahoochee Valley Beekeepers Association also hosts adult and children's beekeeping courses in the Spring, inspiring the next generation and encouraging them to become sustainable citizens that have positive effects on the local ecosystem.

Columbus Water Works is a co-founder and continual supporter of Oxbow Meadows Environmental Learning Center, providing land, funding, and programming in collaboration with the City of Columbus. Oxbow Meadows Environmental Learning Center has many additional partnerships across the community and region, including:

- St. Augustine Alligator Farm, which provides expertise on husbandry and conservation education;
- EarthQuest, that showcases and teaches children and adults about birds of prey, such as hawks, owls, and falcons;
- Southeastern Reptile Rescue, led by former Oxbow employee Jason Clark; and organizations that provide funding, volunteer recruitment, and support for outreach programming, including EarthShare of Georgia and United Way of the Chattahoochee Valley

Partnerships within Columbus State University have grown over the years as well. Oxbow Meadows Environmental Learning Center works closely with students and staff from the Departments of Servant Leadership, Earth and Space Science, Biology, Theater and Dance, Art, and the Honors College, among others. In addition to partnerships with Columbus State University, Oxbow has partnered with UTeach

alumni at Kendrick High School to create a STEM after-school club. Executive Director Dr. Michael Dentzau and Assistant Director Dr. Lauren Johnson bring expertise, shuttle transport, and field trip opportunities through CSU-led sessions across the sciences. Oxbow has also partnered with several local middle schools, including Eddy and Baker Middle Schools supporting STEAM Day events. There are countless elementary partnerships that include in-school and after-school enrichment and outreach programming. Oxbow Meadows has also partnered closely with local Title 1 schools, including South Columbus Elementary School and Key Elementary School, providing fifth graders with hands-on experiences in science.

## Current and Future Community Engagement

Over its 30-year history, Oxbow Meadows Environmental Learning Center, through field trips and outreach programming, has hosted over 100,000 school children. Oxbow Meadows hosts citizen science days throughout the year including the regional Great Southeast Pollinator Census and the worldwide



Director Dr. Michael Dentzau as Dumbledore for summer camp with Environmental Educators Ashley Herbolich and Victoria Neundorfer Hall.

Backyard Bird Count, as well as Volunteer Workdays for high school and college students and community members, giving individuals and groups opportunities for service learning. Oxbow supports internships, research, and educator training. It is preparing and inspiring the next generation of environmental scientists, informal and formal educators, and stewards to tackle the next era of ecological and environmental challenges.

Private and corporate donations support environmental education, hands-on science, and ecological learning to thousands of students, teachers, and families, many of which may not otherwise have access or interest in connecting to

nature. Oxbow Meadows inspires lifelong learning and allows visitors of all ages to view native wildlife they may not see up close and personal. Visitors can compare native snapping turtle species, learn about the aquatic diversity of Alabama and Georgia species, and safely view American Alligators and the ecosystem they are part of. Individuals, families, and groups can participate in the Adopt a Critter program, symbolically adopting an animal ambassador or species of their choice. Donations also support the restoration and preservation of local ecosystems, for example the implementation of the Trash Goat along Lindsey Creek through crowdfunding. Oxbow's current endeavor includes fundraising efforts to mark this milestone year that would provide improvements to the outdoor Turtle Pond exhibit. It both houses native species and provides an up close and personal experience with pond life. The expansion would give school children, families, and CSU students an opportunity to observe tadpoles, fish, and several invertebrates to learn about aquatic diversity.





**Thanks to the following for making Oxbow Meadows a great place to work, visit, and learn:**

**Dr. Michael Dentzau, Executive Director**

**Dr. Lauren Johnson, Assistant Director**

**Ashley Herbolich, Environmental Educator & Public Programs Specialist**

**Victoria Neundorfer Hall, Environmental Educator & Media Specialist**

**Jacob Reuschling, Animal Keeper**

**Cami Benton, Guest Services Assistant**

# CASPER

**"An Experiential Learning Activity for Health Science and Kinesiology Students"**

BY DR. REBECCA TOLAND, MSW, MPA, CHES

Health-related issues fluctuate from year-to-year, week-to-week, and day-to-day. Such changes can impact the health of communities in numerous ways, for example, a pandemic, a rise in the prevalence of drug overdose, or violence. When developing prevention programs and health educational materials, it is essential to conduct needs assessments to target and effectively communicate the significant health issues of concern. Some health-related issues can be classified as acute, while others are chronic. Therefore, a community needs assessment should be created based on the type of health issue identified through community partner grassroots initiatives, health organizations, and current health-related trends being investigated nationally and in surrounding areas.

A CASPER, or Community Assessment for Public Health Emergency Response, was developed as an epidemiological tool to gather community data quickly and at minimal cost (Schnall, Nakata, & Bayleyegan, 2019). In partnership with the Department of Public Health (DPH), students enrolled in Health Science



*Dr. Rebecca Toland and Health Science students during CSU Tower Day.*

and Kinesiology courses participated in a CASPER survey related to vaccination rates for the COVID-19 virus. The CASPER survey objectives were:

- To assess COVID-19 vaccine hesitancy in 31903 and 31907 zip codes and to compare the highest and lowest vaccination rates in Muscogee County, as well as provide educational materials and resources for COVID-19 prevention.
- To practice CASPER methodology and epidemiological data collection protocol.

The target goal was to collect 250 surveys. The CDC employs a two-stage cluster design to create the sampling frame. First, the clusters were randomly selected within the zip code, followed by the systematic random selection of households within those clusters. For random selection, the total number of households in a cluster is divided by seven, and then a random starting point is selected. From the random starting point, the team should travel to every other house for the interview. The faculty divided the students into two groups, each consisting of three students from the Health Science and Kinesiology programs. The DPH staff instructed students to use the cluster maps, CASPER instructions, consent script, tracking form, COVID-19 educational materials, surveys, and incentive bags.

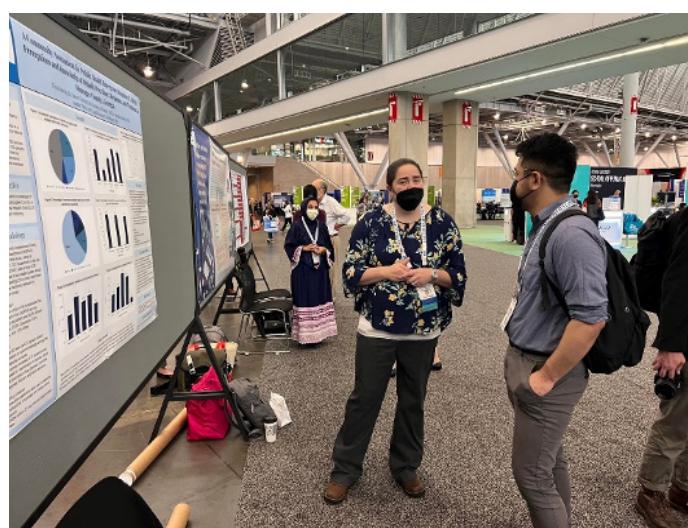
For experiential learning, participants engage in an activity or have a hands-on experience and then reflect on what happened and how they felt about it. Students then evaluate the process and seek to understand the experience. Finally, they apply what they have learned to future situations" (Varthana, 2024). Students who participated in this CASPER met the four stages of experiential learning. Survey data collection involved asking community stakeholders a series of questions designed to identify barriers to vaccination, such as misconceptions, access challenges, and cultural concerns. The results were then analyzed to provide actionable insights for

targeted educational campaigns. In addition to methodology, students learned the importance of ethical considerations during fieldwork, such as respecting privacy and obtaining informed consent. Furthermore, they gained immediate experience in navigating challenges in community-based assessments, including language barriers and participant reluctance, enhancing their understanding of epidemiological practices and public health outreach.

Lastly, students analyzed the data collected and created posters to present their findings at Columbus State University's Tower Day and professional conferences. Below are images taken during the CASPER and students presenting their work.



CSU Tower Day presentation..



Mrs. Rowan presenting CASPER data at the APHA National Conference.

# WHEN A DREAM BECOMES A REALITY: INTRODUCING COLUMBUS STATE UNIVERSITY'S PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT LAB SCHOOL

BY DR. PAM WETHERINGTON



At the beginning of the 2025-26 academic year, Columbus State University's College of Education and Health Professions (COEHP), in partnership with Muscogee County School District (MCSD) and Columbus Technical College (CTC), launched the community's first Professional Development Lab School (PDLS) at Dimon Magnet Academy. But what exactly is a Professional Development Lab School?

The lab school model, primarily connected to universities and colleges, has served as a site for teacher training, research, and testing cutting-edge teaching practices. The Professional Development School model is built around partnerships between a teacher preparation program and a P-12 school designed to help prepare teacher candidates and provide professional development to enhance student learning.

The COEHP has long embraced key elements of both the Professional Development School (PDS) and lab school models. But, when Dr. Margie Yates became Dean of the COEHP in 2022, she envisioned a more holistic, scalable model - one that would bring together every department within the college alongside strategic partners like Muscogee County School District (MCSD) and Columbus Technical College (CTC).

"Our college has always done great work to prepare our students while partnering with the community to serve and uplift our key stakeholders. But I wanted us to go further, and more importantly, I wanted us to go further together – truly, a model that would reflect "For the Community, By the Community." Dr. Yates shared.

That vision gained momentum with the full support of Columbus State University President Dr. Stuart Rayfield, whose leadership helped bring institutional alignment and visibility to the initiative. Driven by her passion to unite education, workforce, and community, President Rayfield worked closely with Dr. Yates to engage partners and turn the concept into an institutional priority.

One of the earliest and most enthusiastic champions of the idea was Dr. David Lewis, Superintendent of Muscogee County School District. His belief in the model was immediate and personal:

“Absolutely, yes! I have long been a proponent of this concept, but most lab schools are hosted on the campus of the university and too often lack the real-world experience that their pre-service teachers are likely to encounter after graduation,” Lewis said. “This partnership with Columbus State University marks a bold step forward in preparing the next generation of educators. By immersing pre-service teachers and support staff in an authentic, supportive environment alongside the faculty and staff at Dimon Magnet Academy under the strong leadership of Principal Emily Wilson, we are not only strengthening the pipeline of future educators but also enriching the daily learning experience for our students. It is truly a win-win!”

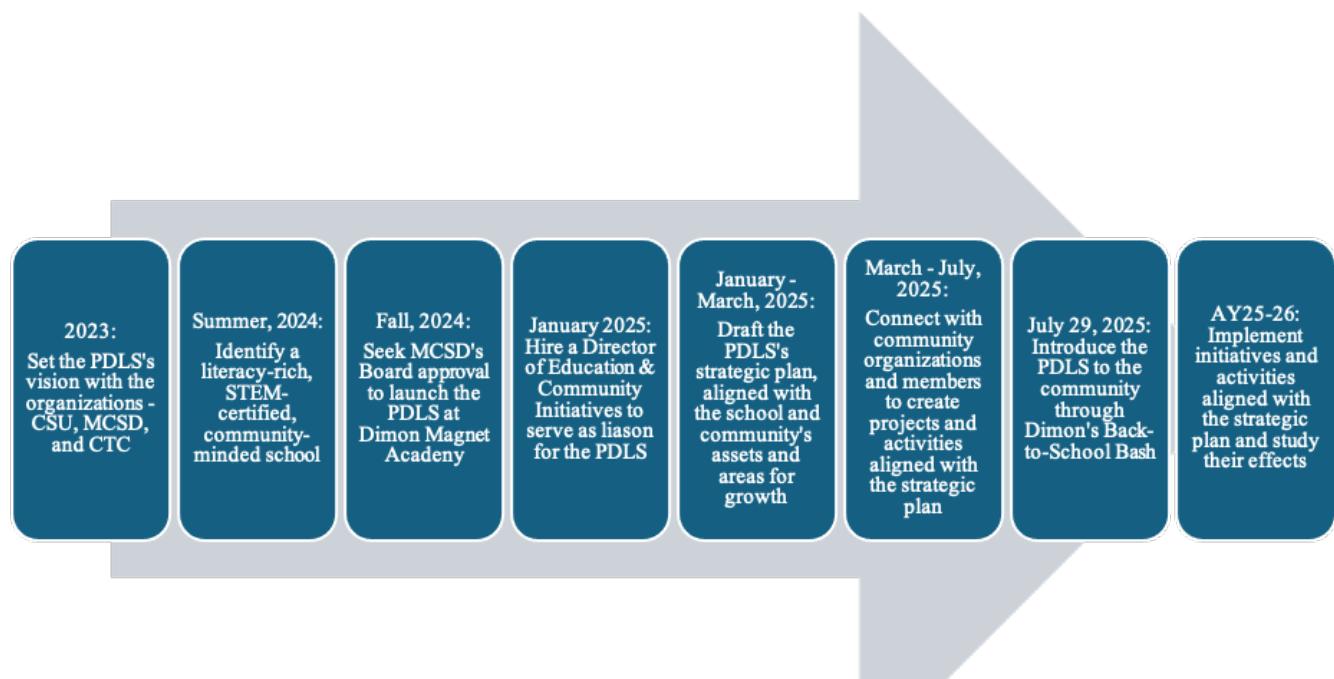
That sentiment was echoed by Dr. Martha Ann Todd, President of Columbus Technical College, whose institution plays a vital role in workforce development and early childhood training.

“When Dr. Yates came to talk with me about the PDLS concept and the potential for Dimon Magnet Academy, it was exciting to explore the possibilities for partnership between CTC, MCSD, and CSU in this project,” Todd shared. “Columbus Tech provides programs and training for early childcare givers and paraprofessionals, and being able to take those learning opportunities into the Dimon community was one of the very first thoughts we had. Even more importantly, I knew that CTC’s partnership in this effort would allow the college to build deeper relationships with the school community and deliver meaningful training opportunities directly to students and families. Saying yes to this partnership was easy—and absolutely the right thing to do for our students, our families, and the broader community.”

**And just like that, the dream began to take shape into becoming a reality!**

*Special thanks to Dr. Jan Burcham and all other CSU faculty and staff that were key contributors throughout the years to help shape the development of the Professional Development Lab School!*

Check out the timeline below that outlines the steps that were taken for the PDLS to successfully launch at the beginning of the 2025-26 academic year.



# DESIGNED FOR THE COMMUNITY BY THE COMMUNITY

BY DR. PAM WETHERINGTON

## PDLS Vision

*Through a collaborative effort with Muscogee County School District and Columbus Technical College, Columbus State University's Professional Development Lab School at Dimon Magnet Academy enriches the community so that every student thrives.*

## PDLS Mission

*The PDLS serves as a central hub for the community, prioritizing education and wellness. Together, we create opportunities for every student to thrive while serving, equipping, and empowering the community through research-based practices. To accomplish this, we will focus on: Student Engagement & Achievement, Family & Community Engagement, Experiential Learning, and Academic Inquiry*

Behind every transformative initiative is a team of dedicated leaders...leaders that understand that change requires shared vision, deep trust, and collective action. United, these nine key leaders, representing CSU, MCSD, and CTC, have created the foundation for Dimon Magnet Academy's Professional Development Lab School to be successful so that every student at Dimon Magnet Academy thrives while serving, equipping, and empowering the community through research-based practices.

# MEET THE PDLS LEADERSHIP TEAM



## **Dr. Stuart Rayfield, President of Columbus State University**

Dr. Rayfield's long-standing connection to CSU reflects her unwavering belief in the university's role as a catalyst for transformative, community-driven change.

## **Dr. Margie Yates, Dean of CSU's College of Education and Health Professions**

Dr. Yates is dedicated to transforming educational systems through purposeful partnerships, forward-thinking leadership, and a shared vision for excellence.



## **Dr. David Lewis, Superintendent of Muscogee County School District**

Dr. Lewis partners with higher education institutions, industry, and families to build aligned, student-centered systems. He remains committed to innovation, continuous improvement, and preparing students for lifelong success.

## **Martha Ann Todd, President of Columbus Technical College**

Martha Ann Todd builds responsive, high-quality programs that support economic mobility, community development, and lifelong learning. .



## **Roger Hatcher, COEHP's Director of the Center for Quality Teaching and Learning**

Mr. Hatcher is dedicated to building strong learning communities through practical tools, reflective practice, and continuous professional growth.

**April Hopson, Vice President of Academic Affairs and Adult Education at Columbus Technical College**

April Hopson strives to empower learners through quality education, personalized support, and strong regional partnerships.



**Emily Wilson, Principal of Dimon Magnet Academy**

Emily Wilson is committed to nurturing curiosity, building confidence, and creating pathways for student success.

**Dr. Pam Wetherington, COEHP's Director of Education and Community Initiatives**

Dr. Wetherington fosters excellence in education through research, innovation, and meaningful partnerships.



**Mary Shocklee, Assistant to CSU's Professional Development Lab School**

Mary Shocklee helps create a supportive, well-organized environment where students and teachers excel.

**Powered by this unique partnership, we believe:** The PDLS at Dimon Magnet Academy is the perfect example of what's possible when higher education, K-12 schools, and communities come together with a shared belief: a belief that every student deserves a personalized educational experience, and that change begins when we work together, for the community, by the community.

# Partners with a Purpose

BY DR. HILLARY ELLERMAN



**When partnerships are rooted in shared vision, extraordinary things can happen.**

The Professional Development Lab School (PDLS) at Dimon Magnet Academy isn't just an innovative concept for a school, it's a collaborative effort across the community, to elevate a school and its families. Four organizations, each with a distinct mission, have come together with one shared purpose: to ensure every student at Dimon thrives.



Columbus State University: CSU brings a deep commitment to teacher preparation, healthcare, research, wellness, and service to the Chattahoochee Valley. Through the PDLS, CSU students engage in field-based and clinical experiences across multiple disciplines, offering real-time feedback and support to prepare for their future professions while also equipping and empowering the community.



Columbus Technical College (CTC): CTC equips adult learners with hands-on training in high-demand fields such as information technology and skilled trades (e.g., welding, HVAC). At the PDLS, CTC's faculty will offer family literacy nights and coursework in workforce readiness for Dimon's families. The result? A bridge between technical education and community transformation.



Muscogee County School District (MCSD): As the anchor district, MCSD provides leadership, policy support, and direct connections to families and resources. MCSD's investment in the PDLS reflects a bold commitment to innovation and a comprehensive approach to child, family, and community development.



Dimon Magnet Academy (DMA): The heart of the partnership, Dimon Magnet Academy, provides the daily space where students, families, educators, and future professionals intersect. With its strong focus on STEAM, literacy, and community engagement, Dimon is the cornerstone for what this partnership can and will achieve.

**Together, these partners are not simply collaborating - they're co-creating a model that other communities can learn from and replicate. The PDLS is living proof that when purpose drives partnership, everyone wins.**

# DREAMS BEGIN HERE: DIMON MAGNET ACADEMY

BY EMILY WILSON AND GENA DAVIS

Dimon Magnet Academy (DMA), often called the “hidden gem” of Muscogee County, sits quietly in the Dimon Woods community where generations have lived, learned, and grown together. While its 1960s exterior may seem unassuming, inside you’ll find vibrant hallway displays, classrooms alive with problem- and project-based learning, and a thriving outdoor learning space. The Dimon Learning and Healing Garden—featuring 18 raised beds, two ponds, a greenhouse, a butterfly atrium, and an outdoor classroom—serves as both a STEM laboratory and a hub for community partnerships, offering hands-on experiences in earth science, ecology, health, and agriculture that enrich student learning and strengthen school–community connections.

For more than 55 years, Dimon Magnet Academy (DMA) has served over 22,000 K–5 students, earning a legacy of academic achievement and innovation. As the first state-certified STEM school in Muscogee County (2017), DMA integrates its mission—addressing food insecurity—into authentic, problem-based, literacy-focused learning where every student collaborates to analyze, solve, and test real-world challenges. Distinguished by dedicated faculty, experiential learning, strong community partnerships, and a culture of continuous improvement, DMA fosters academic excellence and engaged citizenship. Current priorities include strengthening foundational literacy skills, enhancing family engagement, and addressing school readiness gaps in communication, conflict resolution, and persistence.



Through strategic, scaffolded experiences at each grade level, DMA nurtures curiosity, creativity, and achievement while preparing students for lifelong success.

**Kindergarten and first grade students inform the school about plant growth trends that support optimal growing conditions while supplying the Dimon Gem Food Locker with vegetables for their garden.**



*Kindergarten students nurtured these thriving garden beds, proving their green thumbs and teamwork skills are growing strong!*

*Smiles and salads! These kindergarteners prepared fresh salad kits with veggies harvested straight from their garden.*

*First grade students explored the science of plant growth by researching, journaling, and building models to teach their peers how gardens grow.*

**Second grade students support the vitality of the garden environment through attracting and supporting native pollinators in the Dimon gardens. They also increase the pollinator population through raising their own butterflies in the Butterfly atrium twice per year.**



*Second grade students dig in to prepare garden beds, laying the foundation for pollinator-friendly plants that will thrive in the Dimon Learning and Healing Garden.*

*A young gardener carefully waters seedlings, learning how plants and pollinators work together to create a healthy garden ecosystem.*

*Students gather in the Butterfly Atrium, where they raise and release butterflies as part of a science lesson in pollination and life cycles.*

Third grade students supplement the soil in the Dimon gardens through tumbler, stall, and trench composting. Many of the materials utilized in their compost is repurposed from scraps from student lunches in the Dimon cafeteria.



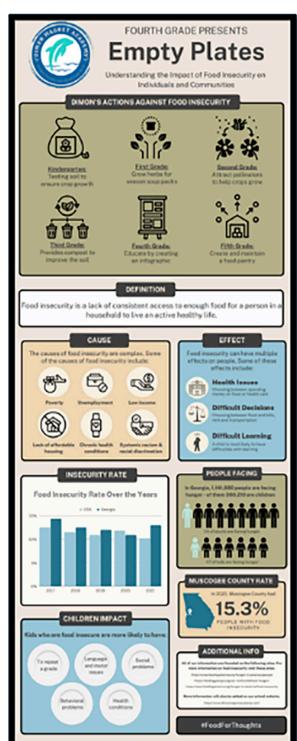
Third grade students roll up their sleeves in the school garden, working together to turn soil and prepare for new plantings—learning teamwork, responsibility, and the science of growing along the way.

CSU President Dr. Stuart Rayfield stops by to learn how Dimon's 3rd graders lead composting efforts using tumblers and student-sourced food waste.

One of Dimon's dedicated volunteers, Ms. Royer, guides 3rd grade students through the composting process—turning cafeteria scraps into nutrient-rich soil for their garden beds.

Fourth grade students cultivate resources through educating the community about the problem of food insecurity and food scarcity. They learn about design elements and mass media as they create infographics and web designs to maximize the reach and the impact of gaining awareness and support of the cause.

Graphic designer, Natalie Alexanderson, teaches Dimon's 4th grade students how to transform research into compelling visuals—guiding them step-by-step in creating an infographic that conveys a powerful message about food insecurity and captures the attention of readers.



After all of their hard work, the finished product!

All culminating in the capstone project that fifth grade students complete in Dimon's Gem Food Locker. For this project, students work to support the community through addressing food insecurity by providing supplementary meals bi-weekly over the weekend to over 65 Dimon families. They also provide a quarterly "Box of Blessings" food boxes to any community member in need.

*Fifth grade students work assembly-line style to pack meal kits for Dimon's families.*



*A "Box of Blessings" and a smile—Dimon students learn that even small acts of service can make a big impact in the community.*

*With Dimon's AKA partners, the students team up to load food boxes into vehicles, ensuring deliveries reach families in need—rain or shine.*

What's remarkable is how all of these projects build upon one another. Each year, students add another layer to their understanding, culminating in a fifth-grade experience that ties together science, literacy, social studies, technology, and community service. The content standards are not just checked off—they're lived. At Dimon, leaders don't just teach STEM—they are providing meaningful learning experiences that prepare students to unlock their potential. And this is done in partnership with the village that has become an essential part of the PDLS identity. They are not just collaborators; they are family. Together, everyone is cocreating a place where learning is meaningful, connected, and rooted in real-world experiences. Dimon is truly a hidden gem—shining brighter everyday thanks to the power of community.

*"Dimon is a place where students are learning, leading, problem-solving, and making a difference in their own community. Our school's greatest strength lies in our people: passionate educators and partners who believe in our mission. At the same time, we recognize the real challenges our students face, particularly around school readiness, literacy, numeracy, and building stronger connections between home and school. That's why the Professional Development Lab School partnership is so powerful. It brings together the best of K-12 education, higher education, and technical training to support all aspects of student success. Through this work, we're building bridges. Together, we're committed to charting the path toward engaged, responsible citizenship by equipping students with the power of knowledge, the awareness to recognize community needs, a heart of kindness to care to make a difference, and the skills needed to develop tangible solutions to large scale community issues." - Emily Wilson, Principal, Dimon Magnet Academy & CSU Alumna*

# AT DIMON, WHERE DREAMERS LEARN AND LEADERS GROW

BY DR. PAM WETHERINGTON

At CSU's Professional Development Lab School (PDLS) at Dimon Magnet Academy, COEHP students are gaining more than experience; they're shaping their professional identities through meaningful, hands-on practice. Whether leading one-on-one reading interventions, co-facilitating STEAM activities, providing health and wellness services, or supporting Family Literacy Nights alongside community members, CSU students are learning how to collaborate across disciplines, building relationships with students and families, and promptly responding to the community's needs. This is the real deal – Learning in Action!

*Here, learning doesn't stay in textbooks. It comes to life in ways that are authentic, exciting, and purposeful for Dimon and CSU's students!*

Dimon's 4th grade students are conducting a science experiment with teacher education student, Taelynn Eggleston, as part of a STEAM challenge. "Watching the students design and test their own solutions during the STEAM challenge was incredible. Students were asking questions, making predictions, and cheering each other on. That's the kind of learning I want to create every day in my future classroom with my students!"

CSU teacher candidate, Chalyse Workman, supports students as they document their observations in STEM journals during a hands-on science investigation. Through the PDLS model, students are encouraged to think critically, reflect deeply, and make real-world connections in every subject area. "STEM journaling helps students really process what they're learning. I love watching them make sense of what they see and put it into their own words."



Gena Davis, Dimon's former Lead Special Education Teacher and current Academic Dean, described CSU's student teachers as "blessings to our classrooms." She recalled how her student teacher, Clara Eysel [pictured], became an essential part of her resource room—building strong relationships, differentiating lessons, and engaging students with hands-on activities like sorting facts and opinions. Davis noted that Clara's presence energized students and allowed them to co-facilitate learning in ways she couldn't do alone, leaving a lasting impact on both the classroom mission and the children they served.



School of Nursing and Health Science students partner with Valley Healthcare (VHC) to promote family health and community wellness. [CSU's School of Nursing students pictured from left to right: Nakia Ford, Alejandro Corredo Cotrino, Kelley Latham, and Precious Johnson; pictured far right, VHC's Raquel Ward]



*In every classroom, hallway, garden bed, and greenhouse something meaningful is happening for everyone, including CSU's Leadership Team!*

Emily Wilson, Dimon's Principal, showcased to CSU President Stuart Rayfield the ways students use the greenhouse for sustainable gardening and real-world STEM learning. All grade levels plant seeds for their raised beds, grow produce to compare controlled and outdoor environments, and use the wicking bed and compost tumblers to create soil amendments. These activities encourage inquiry-based learning, with students analyzing variables like temperature and growth rates through hands-on experimentation.



Dr. Margie Yates, Dean of the College of Education and Health Professions, learns how Dimon's 3rd grade students are using digital tools to communicate their mathematical reasoning and problem-solving strategies.



***Our COEHP students are engaged in experiential learning that is deeply connected to real work with real impact for the community.***

*Be sure to check out the COHEP Chronicle's next release, as we'll be sharing more about our students' experiences at the PDLS, across multiple disciplines (e.g., counseling, health science, nursing), and how these experiences are supporting their professional growth while also serving Dimon's staff, students, families, and community!*



# BUILDING DREAMS ONE PROJECT AT A TIME

BY DR. PAM WETHERINGTON

It may seem like the school year just began, but when you're busy building momentum, the days move fast!

From day one, the Professional Development Lab School (PDLS) at Dimon Magnet Academy has been purposefully busy, launching initiatives that increase student engagement and achievement, increasing family and community engagement, providing additional experiential learning opportunities for our COEHP students, and prompting academic inquiry so that efforts are data informed. And we're just getting started!

**Check out what we've already kicked off this year and what's on the horizon!**

Back to School Bash & Community Block Party at Dimon

Professional Development Series: Dimon's Literacy Excellence

Monthly Family Literacy Nights

Individualized Support in Literacy & Mathematics

Health & Wellness Rounds

Art Makes You Smart with Bo Barlett

One-on-One Mentorship

# Kicking Off Academic Year 2025–26

## ● **Back to School Bash & Community Block Party** – July 29, 2025

A community-wide celebration featuring food, games, music, giveaways, and a joyful introduction to the PDLS at Dimon Magnet Academy. The event also serves as the official launch of this innovative partnership between Columbus State University, Columbus Technical College, and Muscogee County School District.

## AY 2025-26 Highlights

● **Dimon's Literacy Excellence** In collaboration with Dimon's Academic Coach, Amy Evans, CSU's teacher education faculty are facilitating professional learning communities focused on the science of reading, genre-based writing instruction, and a campus-wide morphology protocol to boost vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension across all grade levels.

● **Individualized Support** CSU students are working one-on-one and in small groups to deliver targeted instruction in reading and math—using high-yield strategies, progress monitoring, and teacher-guided lesson frameworks aligned with Tier 1 instructional priorities.

● **Monthly Family Literacy Nights** In partnership with Columbus Technical College's Early Childhood Education faculty and students, these monthly “Dine & Discover” evenings offer family-friendly strategies, games, and resources that families can use at home to build literacy in fun and practical ways.

● **After-School Tutoring** In partnership with CSU's Work Study Program, CSU students provide targeted literacy and math support as well as enrichment opportunities for Dimon's students, combining high-impact instruction with mentorship to strengthen academic skills, confidence, and engagement beyond the regular school day.

● **Health and Wellness Rounds** Through partnerships with CSU's School of Nursing, Counseling Program, Health Science Program, and healthcare provider, Dimon students and staff receive access to weekly wellness visits, mini health lessons, and professional learning on social-emotional learning and restorative practices.

● **Art Makes You Smart with Bo Bartlett** In collaboration with the American realist and modernist visionary, Bo Bartlett, and CSU's Bo Bartlett Center, students engage in visual storytelling projects aligned to Dimon's STEAM theme, culminating in a school-wide gallery event to showcase student voice and creativity.

● **Mentorship** In partnership with CSU's Servant Leadership Program, we launched a student mentorship initiative pairing CSU students with Dimon students in need of social-emotional connection and enrichment through shared interests and engagement.

## Coming Soon at the PDLS!

◆ **Data Analysis and Discovery** (Spring 2026): Cycles of inquiry to examine instructional data and adapt strategies.

◆ **STEAM Summer Enrichment Camp** (Summer 2026): Multi-week summer programming focused on exploration, innovation, and critical thinking

## WANT TO HELP BUILD THE DREAM? HERE'S HOW YOU CAN GET INVOLVED:

### Volunteer

Assist in After-School Tutoring, Literacy Nights, and/or Summer Program

### Mentor

Offer Mentorship One-on-One for Students or Professional Development Session for Staff

### Collaborate

Thought Partner or Develop a New Project that Advances the PDLS' Priorities

### Donate

Provide Classroom Supplies, Books, Snacks, or Tech to Support Programs

### Advocate

Share the Impact and Invite Others to Support or Participate



Whether you're a CSU retiree, student, or faculty member or a local business and community champion, there's room for you in the PDLS movement!

**Join us as we reimagine what's possible for our community!**

For more information about and/or to get involved in the PDLS, contact Dr. Pam Wetherington, Director of the PDLS Initiative, by calling 706-507-8514 or emailing [wetherington\\_pamela@columbusstate.edu](mailto:wetherington_pamela@columbusstate.edu).

*Each project is grounded in research, shaped by community voice, fueled by the belief that we have the expertise and momentum to equip and empower a community so that everyone thrives. At CSU's PDLS, this is where dreams truly become a reality!*  
**- Dr. Pam Wetherington, Director of Education & Community Initiatives, COEHP**

# CSU DOCTORAL STUDENT AMANDA ZARATE NAMED 2025 MCSD TEACHER OF THE YEAR

BY DR. JENNIFER LOVELACE

The Muscogee Educational Excellence Foundation (MEEF) has proudly named Amanda Zarate, a theater teacher at Wynnton Arts Academy, as the 2025 Muscogee County School District (MCSD) Teacher of the Year. Each of the district's 54 schools selects a Teacher of the Year to represent their campus in MEEF's annual recognition program, and Zarate emerged as the district-wide honoree.

Amanda began her doctoral studies at Columbus State University (CSU) in 2023, driven by a desire to deepen her impact through education. In her admission essay, she wrote, "Education is the door to a wonderful world that some have yet to open. I hope to gain tools that will allow me to open doors for others." Her journey to the classroom is as inspiring as her teaching. Before entering education, Amanda served as an Army tank track mechanic—a role that instilled in her a strong commitment to values such as loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage. These principles now form the foundation of her teaching philosophy.

After her military service and honorable discharge, Amanda enrolled at CSU to pursue a Bachelor's degree in Theatre Education. In 2017, she began her career at Wynnton Arts Academy as a drama teacher, play and musical director, and social media content specialist. She returned to CSU in 2019 to earn her Master's degree in Theatre Education.

Zarate was selected from a pool of 54 school-level honorees for her exceptional ability to connect with students. Josh Reynolds, Chair of the Selection Committee, praised her for creating a classroom environment where students feel "seen, heard, and inspired." He added, "Amanda meets each student where they are—with compassion, creativity, and confidence. It's clear she's built a space where students feel safe to express themselves and are empowered to grow."

Her impact extends far beyond academics. Students and colleagues describe her as a beacon of empathy and energy—someone who brings theater to life while nurturing the emotional and creative development of every child she teaches. Her recognition as Teacher of the Year not only celebrates her excellence in education but also highlights the transformative power of unconventional paths and heart-centered teaching.

Tasha Mormon, the 2023 MCSD Teacher of the Year, remarked, "Amanda goes far beyond the stage, using theater as a vessel to teach her students everything from communication and collaboration to confidence and critical thinking." Originally from Illinois, Amanda came to Columbus as a soldier stationed at Fort Benning. Though she initially planned to teach at the high school level, she now cherishes the joy and affection she receives from her K-5 students, saying she loves "all the hugs."

In addition to teaching, Amanda writes and directs at least eight plays or musicals each year, all while raising her family and pursuing her doctorate at CSU. When she's not working, she enjoys spending time with her son or curling up with a good book.

MUSCOGEE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT



# COEHP RECIPIENTS OF FACULTY EXCELLENCE AWARDS

BY DR. JAN BURCHAM

Every year, Columbus State University shines a spotlight on the outstanding contributions of its faculty at the Employee Recognition Awards Ceremony. For 2024–2025, four faculty members from the College of Education and Health Professions were honored for their exceptional work and dedication. This recognition celebrates not only their individual achievements but also the spirit of excellence that defines the college. Their success is a proud reminder of the passion, talent, and impact CSU faculty bring to students and the community every day. The four COEHP award recipients are highlighted below.

**Faculty Research and Scholarship Award** - The Faculty Research & Scholarship Award honors exceptional efforts in research and scholarship, celebrating the importance of these activities—especially their contribution to faculty intellectual growth. It implicitly acknowledges the role of research and scholarship in enhancing a faculty member's teaching and service capabilities.



## 2024-2025 Winner: Patricia Patrick, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Research, Department of Teacher Education, Leadership, and Counseling

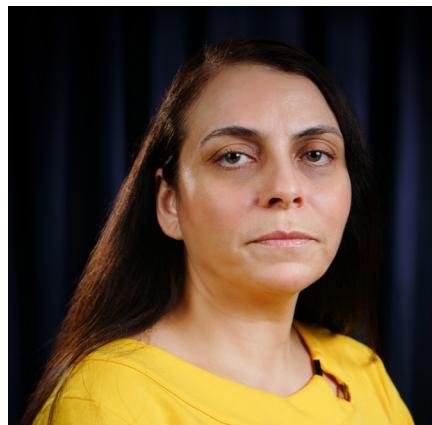
When Dr. Trish Patrick received the CSU Faculty Research and Scholarship Award, the honor carried a profound sense of validation. “I felt like people were finally saying, yes, your work matters,” she shared. For Dr. Patrick, who has dedicated her career to research, teaching, and global collaboration, the recognition represented more than a professional milestone—it was an acknowledgment of years of persistence, scholarship, and meaningful contributions to her field.

Her academic journey has taken her far beyond the traditional classroom. Through multiple Fulbright and State Department grants, Dr. Patrick has conducted research in Indonesia, collaborated with educators in China, and engaged in conservation work around the world. From observing endangered species in their natural habitats to leading workshops for science teachers across cultures, her experiences have shaped a career defined by exploration, discovery, and impact. “I’ve been fortunate to do things that few others have done,” she reflected, underscoring the breadth of her professional and personal experiences across more than 40 countries.

Equally significant is Dr. Patrick’s commitment to preparing the next generation of scholars. At Columbus State, she is leading innovative work at the intersection of qualitative research and artificial intelligence, guiding graduate students to use AI tools ethically and critically. Her approach emphasizes the importance of maintaining academic integrity while embracing new technologies as instruments of inquiry. In doing so, she not only advances her own field but also equips her students with the skills and perspective needed to thrive in a rapidly evolving research landscape. This award is a proud reflection of her remarkable achievements—and a testament to the excellence and innovation that define the College of Education and Health Professions at Columbus State University.

**Faculty Service Award** - The Faculty Service Award recognizes exceptional professional service to the university, the profession, and the community. Service is defined as contributing expertise from the faculty's primary discipline to valuable university, community, educational, environmental, business and economic initiatives.

**2024-2025 Winner: Saoussan Maarouf, Ed.D., Associate Department Chair, Elementary Education Program Coordinator, and Associate Professor of Elementary Education, Department of Teacher**



Dr. Saoussan Maarouf's recent recognition with the CSU Faculty Service Award is both a personal honor and a reflection of the College of Education and Health Profession's collaborative spirit. Known for her leadership and dedication as a program coordinator, Dr. Maarouf attributes her success to the culture of support within the college. "Our environment is very open and encouraging," she explained. "When we bring forward ideas, we receive the resources and backing needed to see them through." That environment, combined with her philosophy of leading by example, has enabled her to create meaningful experiences for both students and colleagues.

Her service extends well beyond the walls of Columbus State University. Each semester, she advises more than 130 students with a commitment to responding promptly, supporting them through both academic and personal challenges, and ensuring they feel guided and cared for. Dr. Maarouf has also cultivated deep partnerships with local schools, including New Mountain Hill Elementary, where her students plan and implement projects such as STEAM Day activities. These collaborations give future educators the chance to translate theory into practice, while also strengthening ties between the university and its community partners.

For Dr. Maarouf, the award is not a culmination but a continuation of her philosophy that service is the heartbeat of academic life. She remains committed to expanding partnerships, engaging faculty and students, and modeling what it means to lead with dedication and care. "I've been doing this work for years, and I will continue to do it," she said. "When service is meaningful, it benefits faculty, students, and the entire college." Her recognition shines as an example of the impact that one faculty member's commitment to service can have on a whole community—and it stands as a proud moment of celebration for the College of Education and Health Professions and Columbus State University.

**Teaching Excellence Award** - The Teaching Excellence Award honors faculty committed to teaching, student success, and innovative instructional practices. It celebrates faculty for utilizing classroom activities designed to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills, as well as global and multicultural understanding; employing effective teaching strategies to enhance student learning; and fostering academic success through interactions with students outside the classroom.

**2024-2025 Winner: Shelby Barson, MSN-NE, CCRN, Assistant Professor of Nursing, School of Nursing**



Shelby Barson, recipient of the CSU Excellence in Teaching Award, has quickly distinguished herself as an innovative and dedicated educator in the College of Education and Health Profession's School of Nursing. Since joining the faculty, she has developed creative and impactful teaching strategies designed to prepare students for the realities of nursing practice. From organizing a disaster simulation that challenged students' decision-making skills in an earthquake scenario to integrating community-based service-learning projects, Barson's approach ensures that her students move beyond theory to practical, real-world applications of their knowledge.

Her teaching also embraces cutting-edge tools, including the use of virtual reality to immerse students in clinical experiences they would not

encounter locally, such as responding to a tuberculosis outbreak. Paired with collaborative classroom activities, case studies, and concept mapping, these experiences foster critical thinking, teamwork, and adaptability—essential skills for future healthcare professionals. Barson emphasizes active learning, encouraging her students to “get up and get moving,” while also instilling the importance of working together in a field where patient care always requires collaboration.

Though she modestly describes herself as still a “novice educator,” Barson’s contributions tell a different story. Her creativity, passion for teaching, and ability to connect her critical care background to her students’ growth have made a lasting impact. As she prepares to continue advancing her teaching career, the CSU Excellence in Teaching Award stands as a powerful testament to her dedication and promise. It is a proud moment for the School of Nursing and for the College of Education and Health Professions at Columbus State University, celebrating the achievements of a faculty member whose work is shaping both students and the future of healthcare.

**Creative Endeavors Award** - The Creative Endeavors Award honors faculty whose creative work enhances their discipline and enriches the intellectual and artistic life of the campus community. It celebrates the value of these activities, particularly in fostering students’ and faculty members’ scholarly and creative growth. While the award is given without consideration of the recipient’s teaching or service skills, it implicitly acknowledges the importance of creative endeavors in enhancing a faculty member’s teaching and service abilities. The award also allows the university to identify and reward faculty contributions to creating, extending, or enhancing knowledge, skills or aesthetic products.

**2024-2025 Winner: Erick Richman, M.S., Senior Lecturer & Wellness Program Coordinator, Department of Kinesiology & Health Sciences**



Mr. Erick Richman has distinguished himself through his innovative teaching and commitment to preparing students for success both in the classroom and beyond. His award-winning course, *Leading Better Conversations on Health, Fitness, and Media*, grew out of his work redesigning the Lifetime Wellness curriculum and his passion for helping students develop skills that transcend traditional academics. By focusing on how language shapes conversations about health and well-being, Mr. Richman created a transformative experience that challenges students to think critically, communicate effectively, and connect with resources that will serve them throughout their lives.

At the heart of the course is a bold departure from conventional assessment: instead of essays and exams, students engage in the “UN Essay” project, where they explore creative, personally meaningful ways to address the question, *How do we lead better conversations?* Projects have ranged from musical compositions to community initiatives, each one reflecting the student’s unique strengths and aspirations. Mr. Richman’s approach not only alleviates the fear of failure but also fosters resilience, self-reflection, and confidence—skills that students carry forward into their personal and professional lives.

Looking ahead, Mr. Richman is developing a new River Course, *Communication for Health Professionals*, which will equip future practitioners with essential skills for navigating workplace dynamics, patient relationships, and self-regulation. His forward-thinking work exemplifies the College of Education and Health Profession’s commitment to educational innovation and student empowerment. We celebrate Mr. Richman’s dedication, creativity, and impact, and we look forward with pride to the continued difference he will make in the lives of our students and the broader community.

# COURAGE, COMPASSION, AND THE CROWN:

## MISS CSU HONORS HER JOURNEY FROM PEDIATRIC CANCER SURVIVOR TO FUTURE NURSE

By Dr. Aimee Vael  
Dr. Cheryl Smith

**When Tori Svenson was crowned Miss CSU in 2022, the moment carried a deeper meaning than pageantry. For this junior nursing student, it symbolized healing, perseverance, and purpose.**

Diagnosed with cancer at just seven years old, she had already competed in seven pageants as a child. But after her diagnosis, life changed.

“Miss CSU was my first pageant since being diagnosed,” she reflected. “It felt like I was reclaiming something cancer had taken away from me.”

Years later, now enrolled in the School of Nursing, she stood on the CSU stage with renewed strength—not only as a contestant but as an advocate for pediatric cancer awareness and a future nurse devoted to caring for others.

Her academic journey is one she never took for granted. “There was a time I didn’t know if I would ever get the chance to go to college,” she said. “Being here, pursuing my nursing degree, is something I’m deeply thankful for.”

The night she won Miss CSU, her sorority sisters filled the audience with cheers and unwavering support. “Seeing them there reminded me I’m never alone. Whatever comes next, I know I have people beside me.”

One of those people is William, her pageant director and close friend. “He guided me not just through the pageant process, but through moments of self-doubt. His mentorship and belief in me made all the difference.”

As a CSU title-holder, she used her platform to bring awareness to children diagnosed with cancer every day in the U.S. Her story fuels her passion—and her career path.

“I’m becoming a nurse because I want to help kids the way my nurses helped me,” she said. “They did more than administer medications and monitor vitals. They made me feel like a kid again. They played games, they danced, and they sang Justin Bieber songs when I needed a distraction. Their care inspired my calling.”

As a representative of the School of Nursing, she embodies the values of compassion, resilience, and advocacy. Her work both in and out of the classroom is driven by lived experience—and a fierce desire to make a difference.

“Being Miss CSU gave me opportunities, yes—but more than that, it gave me a voice,” she said. “A voice to raise awareness, to encourage others, and to show what’s possible after cancer.”

She carries her previous title and her stethoscope with equal pride—ready to make an impact, one patient, one story, and one step at a time.



# COEHP FACULTY APPROVED FOR PROMOTION AND TENURE

Six faculty members from the College of Education & Health Professions were approved for promotion and/or tenure by President Stuart Rayfield in recognition of their commitment to and accomplishments in teaching, scholarship, and service. The new appointments began with the 2025-26 academic year.

## Promoted to Senior Lecturer

Jose Perez, M.S., Exercise Science, Department of Kinesiology & Health Sciences

## Promoted to Associate Professor with Tenure

Jessica Banks, Ed.D., Middle Grades and Curriculum & Instruction, Department of Teacher Education, Leadership, & Counseling

Rebecca Toland, Ph.D., Health Science, Department of Kinesiology & Health Sciences

## Promoted to Full Professor

Patricia Anafi, Ph.D., Public Health, Department of Kinesiology & Health Sciences

Basil Conway, Ph.D. Mathematics Education, Department of Teacher Education, Leadership, & Counseling

Michael Dentzau, Ph.D. Science Education, Department of Teacher Education, Leadership, & Counseling

## SUMMER SCRUBS CAMP

By Dr. Cheryl Smith



The Hughston Foundation, Three Rivers AHEC, Columbus Technical College, Columbus State University Nursing and Health Science, Mercer University School of Medicine, and Valley Healthcare System held the ninth annual Scrubs Camp this summer. Scrubs Camp, in existence since 2016, is an intensive summer program that features interactive activities that expose students to health careers at local medical facilities and colleges/universities in Columbus, Georgia.

At this camp, students participate in activities that include the following: suturing, intubation, CPR, labor & delivery simulation, blood pressure/blood sugar check, dental cleaning, vision testing, sobriety test, catheter insertion, ultrasound and more.

The 5-day camp occurred in June and July with over 90 students attending. Faculty and student volunteers from nursing and health science assisted in the clinical experiences in Frank Brown Hall.

Three Rivers Area Health Education Center (AHEC) is a community-driven, non-profit organization that assists our communities in building and sustaining the healthcare workforce to meet their healthcare needs.



## RETIREES & ALUMS

Away from CSU and missing the people and events? We certainly miss you!!

Beginning in the Spring 2026 edition of COEHP Chronicles, the magazine will feature a “Where are they now?” column for retired faculty and staff and a column for alumni.

The success of this depends on you. Please share your news by sending an email to Dr. Ellen Roberts at: [mesg\\_coehp\\_chronicles@columbusstate.edu](mailto:mesg_coehp_chronicles@columbusstate.edu)

Indicate whether you are a retiree or alum, your previous position or graduating year, and any news about you that others might find interesting: location, job or family, travel, hobbies, awards, etc. Let's keep in touch!



ETA SIGMA GAMMA'S 4TH ANNUAL

# Autism Awareness Carnival

COME JOIN US FOR AN AFTERNOON OF EDUCATION & FUN!

**Saturday, April 19th**  
**11am-2pm**  
Frank Brown Hall  
1127 Broadway  
Columbus, Ga 31904

**Free Event!!!**  
Donations are welcomed and appreciated

**SENSORY FRIENDLY GAMES & KID'S ACTIVITIES!**

**REFRESHMENTS WILL BE AVAILABLE FOR PURCHASE!**

**RAFFLE TICKETS AVAILABLE FOR DONATION!**

**Community Partners & CSU Organizations:**

- CSU's Diversity Programs & Services
- Muscogee County Sheriff's Office
- Student Nurses Association
- COEHP Legislative Initiatives
- Easter Seals- West Georgia
- CSU's Center for Accommodation and Access
- Trevioli's Italian Food Truck
- & more to come!!

## An Invitation to Give...

The College of Education and Health Professions extends this invitation to be a part of its exciting work:

- Great programs of study;
- Scholarships for undergraduate and graduate students;
- Centers that provide meaningful experiences to students and to members of the community;
- New initiatives like the Professional Development Lab School; and
- Dreams for things that haven't even been thought of yet.

To accept this invitation to contribute financially to the success of COEHP, please donate at [www.givecampus.com](http://www.givecampus.com) Be sure to select College of Education and Health Professions.

To volunteer your time or talents to COEHP, please email me at [roberts\\_ellen@retirees.columbusstate.edu](mailto:roberts_ellen@retirees.columbusstate.edu) and indicate your interest in:

Helping with COEHP Chronicles

Volunteering one or more hours a week at the Professional Development Lab School (Dimon Elementary Magnet Academy)

Assisting with special events held by departments or centers

Other area of interest

# RIDING FOR NURSING EDUCATION

Dr. Cheryl Smith  
Dr. Aimee Vael



The Miracle Riders announced their partnership with Columbus State University's School of Nursing in November 2020 and set out on their first ride in 2021. The riders have committed to raising \$1 million over time to benefit the pediatric nursing program.

The Miracle Riders are a group of motorcyclists who began in Columbus, Georgia in 2009, with the mission to support children's healthcare and well-being. They are led by Scott Ressmeyer, who originally launched the initiative with a solo ride through the 48 contiguous states to celebrate his 50th birthday and raise funds for the Children's Hospital at Midtown Medical Center. After

meeting their initial goal, the riders broadened their fundraising efforts to include other local services for children, including the Columbus State University School of Nursing and their pediatric nursing program. Since the inaugural ride in 2009, Ressmeyer and the riders have raised more than \$2.3 million for services for children. The riders pay all their own expenses for each ride, which collectively has totaled more than \$750,000.

The riders adopted Columbus State's nursing program as their charity of choice beginning with its 2021 ride. Since the inception of the partnership, the Miracle Riders have completed four rides, the most recent ending in May 2025. To date, a total of \$827,950 has been raised. The group's first ride to benefit Columbus State departed in 2021 to fund life-like mannequins, technology, and other enhancements for a new pediatric simulation lab. Funds raised supported enhancements to the pediatric simulation lab. This included purchasing three new interactive pediatric HAL® simulators and all components to enable life-like movements, facial expressions, and responses. It also included renovations of the simulation lab to accommodate the new equipment. Enhancements included the addition of a colorful, child-centered mural. Nursing students are able to receive practical lab experience in diagnostics and treatment using lifelike simulators, which resemble actual pediatric patients.





Funds raised in 2022 and 2023 provided similar technology and enhancements for the school's mother-baby simulation lab. A decision was made to dedicate the new birthing simulation lab in honor of Dr. Cecil F. Whitaker Jr., a longtime area obstetrician and gynecologist, in honor of his long-standing service to Columbus and contributions to ensuring the quality of area healthcare. The lab provides enhanced training opportunities for all Columbus State nursing students in caring for women laboring and delivering and their newborns. Students train on mother-baby simulation mannequins with lifelike movements, facial expressions, and responses.

The 2024 and 2025 rides provided funding for the construction of the new NICU simulation lab. The Miracle Riders' planned NICU simulation lab will be the region's first university-based one. Like the two previous ones funded by the Miracle Riders, the newest sim lab will provide nursing students with practical diagnostic and treatment experience on interactive HAL® simulators. The robotic mannequins feature lifelike patient movements, facial expressions, and responses—from bleeding to delivering a baby. Dr. David Levine of Neonatology Associates of Columbus and a long-time Miracle Ride supporter has provided guidance throughout the planning and development process.

“If we can train nurses here [at Columbus State University] in a simulation lab with robotics, they will be more comfortable the first time they are in a ‘real-life’ NICU caring for a live baby,” said Ride for Miracles founder and organizer Scott Ressmeyer. “These nursing students will use what they’ve learned with [robotic simulators] when caring for real people; if we can give them that confidence, they’ll provide better care to those mothers and their children.”

The details about the next Ride for Miracles are still to be determined. For more information about the Miracle Riders or to contribute to this year's fundraising effort, visit [rideformiracles.com](http://rideformiracles.com).



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