

Graduate Impact Series



Vanessa Ellis

8th Grade History Teacher
Veterans Memorial Middle School

**Muscogee County School District
2022 Teacher of the Year**

Bachelor of Arts - History (2011)
Master of Education - Secondary History Education (2019)

"I teach Georgia history now, and I'm able to incorporate Columbus history as well, so my professors at CSU truly did set me up for success in the teaching profession." [Read her story here](#)



"I once heard someone say, 'the Creator didn't give you another day in your life because you need it; he gave it because someone else out there needs you.'"

Dwayne White, MS, LPC, NCC, CCMHC

Master of Public Administration, Criminal Justice Track (2013)

Master of Science, Clinical Mental Health Counseling (2016)

"Well, I certainly do credit my not-so-enviable upbringing and experiences at CSU as the main catalyst for the drive I have felt, for decades, to provide help for persons our society too often neglects and marginalizes." [Read his story here](#)



"Making an Impact Through Leadership Development"

Alexis Knox

Student Development Coordinator
Student Leadership & Service - Columbus State University
Bachelor of Science - Sociology 2016
Master of Science - Organizational Leadership 2018

"Being part of CSU's graduate program made me realize how I wanted to make an impact on others through leadership development. " [Read Alexis Knox's story](#)



"I teach...to change my students' lives."

Dr. Stefan Lawrence

Assistant Principal, Aaron Cohn Middle School
2016 MCSD Teacher of the Year
2019 Georgia Teacher of the Year Finalist
Master of Education 2012

"The graduate program in the College of Education afforded me the rare opportunity to build on my scholarly knowledge while working to build my abilities as a practitioner. CSU worked with me and understood my schedule." [Read Dr. Lawrence's story](#)



"A desire to assist others so they can be their best."

Dr. Debra Wales

Counseling Program Manager for the US Army
Doctorate of Education Curriculum & Leadership 2015

"The doctorate program at CSU allowed me to complete my research of studying Veterans as they leave the military and transition into higher education." [Read Dr. Wales' story](#)



"Helping the community through a sense of servant leadership."

Julio A. Portillo

Executive Director

Midtown, Inc.

Master of Public Administration 2007

"Columbus State University was instrumental in providing me with the necessary tools to enter the workforce." [Read Julio Portillo's story](#)



"Turning adversity into a driving force."

Dr. Eleanor Thompson

Maritime Transportation Policy
United States Coast Guard
Master of Public Administration 1997

"Columbus State's diverse faculty brought practical, real-world experience, as well as theoretical academic application. It was about learning; learning how to work hard, work smart, add to your breadth, and depth of knowledge, and to research and write." [Read Dr. Thompson's story](#)