

THE

COLUMN

ATHENS STATE
UNIVERSITY

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WINTER 2024



**NEW BEGINNINGS:
AN ATHENS STATE STORY**

OUR VISION

Athens State University will be the premier destination for transfer students seeking the highest quality education and cutting-edge delivery at the most affordable cost. As the upper division university in Alabama, building on a tradition that began in 1822, Athens State University will be the catalyst for positive change in the lives of its students.

OUR MISSION

The University advances the best interests of its students and the State of Alabama through teaching, service, research, and other creative activities to empower students to make valuable contributions in their professional, civic, educational, and economic endeavors. Through innovative communication and course delivery for high-quality undergraduate and select graduate programs, Athens State University provides a supporting environment for each student, demonstrating the importance of the diverse and interdependent nature of our state and society. Athens State University changes the face of Alabama by changing the lives of its students.

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Athens State: A Catalyst for Positive Change

Dear alumni and friends of Athens State University:

As we enter into a new year, I am filled with a sense of gratitude and excitement! I invite you to reflect on the many accomplishments that were part of 2023 for Athens State. We saw an increase in our overall enrollment with our graduate programs leading the way in growth – and many of our new academic programs were incredibly successful in bringing in new students and in providing pathways to new careers! As we reflect on the many accomplishments of the past year, I want to thank you for your support of Athens State. Your generous contributions, both in terms of time and resources, have enabled us to foster an environment of academic excellence, innovation, and more. You have supported student scholarships and provided the means for our faculty and staff to participate in professional development which only helps improve all that we do.

The dawn of a new year brings with it a sense of renewal and the promise of many possibilities. This is a time to reaffirm our commitment to the values that define Athens State and to set our sights on new horizons. Our Vision Statement says that “Athens State University will be the catalyst for positive change in the lives of its students.” And, with your ideas, support, and ongoing encouragement, we will continue to reach toward this vision.

I am excited to share with you several new academic programs that enhance the diversity and richness of our academic offerings. These new initiatives will prepare our students for the challenges of the future – equipping them with the skills and knowledge they will need to thrive in a rapidly evolving global landscape. Starting this Spring semester, we have a new Bachelors degree in Marketing and Analytics that will provide students what they need to enter into a career in digital marketing, marketing analytics, and marketing management. We have also opened a Master of Fine Arts in Integrative Design that will allow graduate students to focus on media/Digital Arts, Painting/Drawing, or Ceramics. We are already seeing growth in these new programs and we can't wait to see the impact that they will have on our students.

Athens State has pioneered an approach to recruiting and supporting our adult students. We have created the Adult Learner Services Office (ALSO) that celebrates adult learning. We know that it can take courage for many of our students to balance their work, family, and other responsibilities with completing a degree. We are so proud of our many adult students who are making a difference for themselves, their families, and their communities. At ALSO, we provide a nationally-recognized way of providing college credit for learning that has been done outside the classroom through work, training, the military, and other certification programs. Our staff can provide an individualized assessment of prior learning to see what might be aligned with the skills and outcomes of one of our academic courses. I'm very proud to see Athens State lead in this important area!

As this new year progresses, I invite each of you to actively engage with us at Athens State. Whether that is through mentorship, participating in events, or even just sending in a suggestion or an idea, your involvement is invaluable. Together we can shape the future of our institution and empower the next generation of leaders, thinkers, and change-makers. Together we are the catalyst for positive change!

Catherine M. Wehlburg, Ph.D.
Interim President



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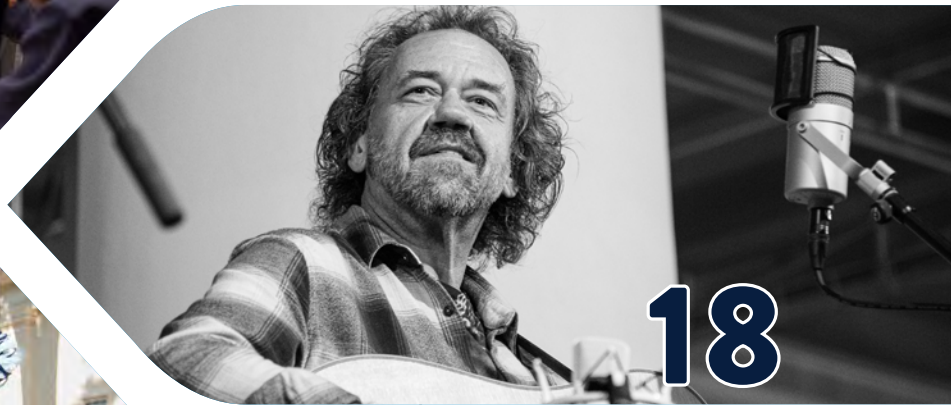


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Advertisements are included in this issue of "The Column" to help offset the expense of printing and distribution. For information about advertising in future issues, please contact Brandy Conway at brandy.conway@athens.edu.



STAFF EMERITA: CATHY BRETT

Athens State University is pleased to announce that Cathy Brett has been awarded Staff Emerita status. Cathy served as a staff member at Athens State for 30 years in various roles including Programmer/Analyst and Coordinator for Institutional Research. She earned her associate degree from Calhoun Community College and her bachelor's degree from Athens College. During her time at Athens State, Cathy collaborated with and assisted all departments at the University through her work in the Office of Institutional Research and Assessment, served on the Staff Senate and worked with her peers from across the University, and worked tirelessly coordinating vendor booths for the Tennessee Valley Old Time Fiddlers Convention for many years. Cathy is a valued citizen of the Athens State University community and her dedicated efforts contributed to the quality and reputation of Athens State University and its students and will be beneficial for years to come.



LILLY LEDBETTER RECEIVES PRESIDENT'S MEDAL

Equal pay advocate Lilly Ledbetter was awarded Athens State University's President's Medal during the University's Summer Commencement ceremony. The President's Medal is the highest honor approved by Athens State University and is awarded to individuals who have distinguished themselves in one of the following areas:

- Outstanding scholarly activity in the arts and sciences, education, business, letters, or theology;
- Outstanding service to humanity, their community, church, country or educational Institution;
- Outstanding vision, success, and achievement in their chosen profession; or

- Outstanding leadership, dedication and generosity in support of Athens State University.

"Lilly Ledbetter is being honored with the Athens State University President's Medal in recognition of her relentless advocacy and transformative contributions towards establishing fair pay standards across the nation," said Interim President Dr. Catherine Wehlburg. "She is a role model for us all."

Ms. Ledbetter has dedicated the last 25 years to fighting for equal pay for women. She was hired by Goodyear in 1979 as a supervisor, and after working there for 19 years, received an anonymous note revealing she was making thousands less per year than men in her position. Only as she neared retirement did she learn she was being



paid significantly less than male colleagues with similar seniority and experience. This letter led her to file a sex discrimination case against Goodyear, which eventually resulted in legislation known as the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act of 2009. Since then, Ledbetter has received national acclaim for her work in gender discrimination and pay equity, raising awareness of the issue and taking a stand for women across the country.

Ms. Ledbetter also delivered the commencement speech to the graduates, saying, "Justice is worth standing up for. It's worth fighting for. As you go forward, never forget your beginnings. Always remember where you came from, because your history is your strength. It will help you." ■



COLLEGE COLORS DAY On August 24, Governor Kay Ivey delivered a proclamation to officially recognize September 1, 2023 as the day to celebrate Alabama's public universities with College Colors Day. Athens State University alumni and fans joined faculty, staff, and students in wearing their college colors to work and school and used the hashtags #CollegeColorsDay and #BlueForTheBear! when sharing pictures on social media.



ENROLLMENT INCREASES FOR FALL 2023 SEMESTER, SURPASSES PRE-PANDEMIC FIGURES

With a total of 2,955 students enrolled for the Fall 2023 semester, Athens State's headcount is up 2.1% compared to the Fall 2022 semester. Credit hour production is also up for both undergraduate and graduate courses for an average of 2.2% year-over-year.

With the increase, enrollment

numbers have officially returned to and surpassed where they were in 2019 before the COVID-19 pandemic when 2,945 students were enrolled. Up until the pandemic began in 2020, projections for enrollment were positive, with steady growth expected. The University is now in a position to see additional enrollment growth in the coming years due to an increased focus

on targeted marketing efforts, establishing Learning Partnerships within the North Alabama region, and growing the school's number of degree and certificate programs.

In 2023 alone, Athens State has created Learning Partnerships with dozens of local organizations, bringing the total number of partnerships to over 30. These partnerships have helped drive enrollment by allowing the employees of the affiliated organizations, as well their parents, spouses, and children, access to exclusive benefits including a 10% tuition discount on all classes, waived application fee, and complimentary evaluation of previously earned educational credits and training/professional certifications for consideration of transfer credit. With new partners including the Decatur-Morgan County Chamber of Commerce, Athens-Limestone County Chamber of Commerce, local county commissions, and Amazon, thousands of local residents will have the opportunity to take advantage of these benefits and continue their education at Athens State.

Athens State's growing number of graduate programs has also contributed to the enrollment increase. The University has increased its number of graduate programs in recent years to 13, including its newest programs, Master of Fine Arts in Integrative Design (MFA) and Master of

Education in Training and Development.

"The increase in enrollment at Athens State comes as no surprise because of our unwavering commitment to student success and our dedication to providing accessible, flexible, and affordable higher education," stated Dr. Catherine Wehlburg, Interim President. "We want to ensure that every individual has the opportunity to achieve the academic and economic goals that a college degree can provide."

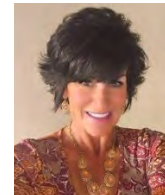
"We are all excited to see these continued positive gains in enrollment and retention of Athens State students," stated Dr. Lee Vartanian, Interim Provost & Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs. "This is a reflection of the hard work of our committed staff, the quality courses our faculty provide, and the enduring value our degrees confer." ■

SEVEN NEW FACULTY MEMBERS JOIN ATHENS STATE DURING FALL SEMESTER

Seven new faculty members have joined the University this fall. Athens State is pleased to welcome the following instructors:



Dr. Joseph Chandler
Associate Professor of Psychology



Dr. MaryEllen Dennis
Instructor of Healthcare Management



Mr. Blake Hargett
Instructor of Early Childhood Education



Dr. Nicole Henderson
Assistant Professor of Special Education



Dr. Lourdes Smith
Assistant Professor of Elementary Education



Dr. Ashley Virgin
Assistant Professor of Special Education



Dr. Michele Wallace
Assistant Professor of Elementary Education



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**“ATHENS STATE TEACH”
LAUNCHES TO PREPARE
NEXT GENERATION OF
STEM TEACHERS**

The College of Education and College of Arts and Sciences have collaborated to launch Athens State TEACH, based on the widely-recognized UTeach Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) teacher preparation program. This new program is designed to prepare more STEM teachers to meet the

STEM teacher shortage in Alabama. Athens State TEACH will make it easier for students majoring in STEM fields to obtain their teaching certification by providing rigorous coursework and experiences supplemented by scholarships to students, academic support, and additional support through program faculty and staff. The program

has established partnerships with Wallace State Community College, Calhoun Community College, and Northwest-Shoals Community College to offer STEM students the opportunity to try out teaching as freshman and sophomores.

The University kicked off the program with an event that featured various speakers and explored the impact the program will have on the next generation of STEM educators.

"We are proud to build on our historically excellent secondary education programs as we partner with the UTeach Institute to offer a certification path for STEM majors," said Dr. Patricia Glaze, Athens State TEACH Co-Director and Associate Professor of Mathematics. "Athens State TEACH will encourage students who are working on a STEM degree to "try out" teaching. We will also offer the Athens State TEACH introductory courses at several community colleges, strengthening our partnerships with them and reaching students earlier in their coursework. Our new condensed education minor leads to secondary teaching certification, which offers more options for our graduates."

UTeach is a widely-recognized STEM teacher preparation model, and Athens State TEACH will become one of 55 institutions in 23 states to implement the program. This program was made possible through a grant from the Alabama

Legislature via a partnership between the Alabama Commission on Higher Education, the Alabama STEM Council, and the UTeach Institute. ■

RIBBON CUTTING HELD FOR NEW CENTER OF EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION DIVERSITY

Athens State University recently celebrated the ribbon cutting of its new Center of Excellence in Education Diversity (CEED). CEED will house the University's Men of Kennis program.

"The Men of Kennis program is increasing the number of men of color enrolling and graduating

from the College of Education who prepare quality educators for today's classroom," said CEED Director and Men of Kennis Program Coordinator, Dr. Darlene Turner-White. "Research clearly states all students benefit from having a diverse educator for a diverse population of students. The Center of Excellence in Education Diversity (CEED) provides wraparound support to the Men of Kennis and other students to promote growth and development academically and personally. The center is a designated place of resources and where it is demonstrated COE is culturally responsive and sustaining pedagogy and best practices, especially when preparing men of color educators."



"The Men of Kennis program is profoundly impactful and is personally a program I'm fully invested in," said Jaylen Wiggins, Program Support Specialist for CEED. "As a man of color, throughout my childhood I was never fortunate enough to have a man of color as an educator. The underrepresentation of men of color as educators is not only something which was prevalent throughout my childhood but is still a common occurrence. Through the Men of Kennis program, we will be providing children with needed exposure to men of color as educators, which has been shown to increase confidence and comfortability while decreasing needed disciplinary actions." Athens State's Men of Kennis program was created in 2020 to

improve the pathway for students of color to become teachers in Alabama school districts. Data surrounding teaching and the diversity of teacher candidates on a national level shows that male teachers of color are underrepresented in the workforce. These findings hold true in the North Alabama region, which spurred Athens State University's College of Education to develop the Men of Kennis program to help increase the number of diverse teacher candidates and fill the local community's need for African American and Hispanic male teachers.

For more information about Men of Kennis, please visit athens.edu/mok. ■

administering a Prior Learning Assessment to discover what prior knowledge and training can be translated to college credit.

"It takes courage to balance finishing your degree with the demands of work and family life," said Dr. Catherine Wehlburg, Athens State University's Interim President. "Choosing to complete a college education is a monumental step for working adults and we want to do all we can to assist them through our Adult Learner Services Office."

"We want to help adult learners reach their academic and professional goals as quickly as possible," said Felicia Mucci, Director of ALSO. "That is why it is so important to honor knowledge and training that may have been obtained outside of the classroom."

For more information about ALSO, please visit athens.edu/also. ■

ADULT LEARNER SERVICES OFFICE (ALSO) UNVEILED

The University recently held a reception to introduce its rebranded Adult Degree Program (ADP) office, now the Adult Learner Services Office (ALSO). ALSO is designed to assist working adults finish their degree by applying their experience and knowledge as college credit.

The mission of ALSO is to serve the adult working student who has completed some college coursework without obtaining a college degree. This is done by



NEW BEGINNINGS: AN ATHENS STATE STORY

April 30, 2022 marked commencement ceremony milestones for Athens State students who had been hard at work completing their degrees. Ross Leonard was scheduled to cross the stage at 9 a.m.



ROSS LEONARD, '22 Bachelor of Science in Computer Science with a minor in Digital Forensics and Mathematics

Early on the morning of April 30, 2022, Leonard and his wife, Jessica, were eagerly expecting the day ahead of them to be full of graduation celebrations. Clothes were ironed, cake was ordered, and his cap and gown were hanging at the front door. However, another milestone of life was on its way.

Jessica was pregnant and they were expecting their first baby to arrive any day. To their surprise, Jessica went into labor and instead of heading to Carter Gymnasium, the couple grabbed their bags and headed to the hospital.

"We were so excited to welcome our baby into the world," shared Leonard. "April 30, 2022 is a day that holds meaning to me in more ways than one."

Ross and Jessica welcomed Raya Cole Leonard to the world at 5:11 a.m. She was a healthy and happy baby girl. They were elated; and amidst the excitement, Leonard almost forgot about his commencement ceremony altogether.

Athens State did not forget about Ross Leonard. The University took the celebration to him when faculty and staff learned of his exciting news and absence from commencement. Dr. Catherine Wehlburg, who was serving as Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs at the time, along with other University administrators made a special



trip to the hospital to present Leonard with his diploma and celebrate his graduation.

"We couldn't believe the school would come to the hospital," commented Leonard. "Everything came full circle the day Raya was born."

Leonard had been working toward degree completion for nearly a decade and finished in the Spring of 2022. He obtained a Bachelor of Science in Computer Science with a minor in Digital Forensics and Mathematics. He was working full-time while pursuing his degree from Athens State.

"We understand that our students are balancing many responsibilities in their lives," said Dr. Catherine Wehlburg, interim president at Athens State University. "Ross is an example of why the mission of Athens State is so important and why we go to great lengths to help our

students complete their degrees. We are very proud of him and look forward to future successes for him and his family!"

Though Leonard was working full-time while in school, completing his degree was a necessary step in his career field to be eligible for promotions. With a diploma and cutting-edge experience in his repertoire, Ross was able to secure a prosperous future for his family.

Leonard described his occupation in computer science as "endless." There are endless problems to solve, endless endeavors to pursue, and endless strategies to implement. He says that Athens State prepared him with the "knowledge and mindset to face any problem and figure out how to solve it." The computer science degree concentrations at Athens State provide graduates a strong foundation in programming, business analysis, problem-solving, and software engineering with

practical experience in contemporary computer laboratories.

"Athens State opened doors for me in my career and personal life," Leonard said. "It gave me the tools to effectively fulfill the duties of my job at the time and improve the skills I already had."

Leonard is a native of Athens, Alabama, and said attending Athens State was a "no brainer." He shared that it just made sense to choose the school that was in his hometown, has a great reputation, and is ABET accredited.

One professor that was instrumental during Leonard's time at Athens State was Dr. Brady Rimes. Leonard shared that the knowledge,

experience, and attention to detail that Dr. Rimes instilled in students was key in developing him into the employee and person that he is today. Leonard was already working in the computer science field and said it was an "ace up his sleeve" to be able to ask any of his professors about the problems he was facing at work.

Today, Raya Leonard is two years old and has the opportunity to watch her dad fulfill his dream of working in the technology field. Leonard holds the Analyst - Business Management III position at Blue Origin. He works each day to conduct analyses from data collection which informs strategies for Blue Origin business partners. He also collaborates with other departments in Blue Origin to model outcomes of implementing certain business strategies. His insight helps lead the company to make informed business decisions through his keen understanding of cause-and-effect relationships in business strategy. This work is

important to Leonard because he has the opportunity to contribute to the success of not only his department, but the whole company.

Ross Leonard was successful at Athens State, and we know he will continue to see a bright road ahead in his career, with his wife and daughter by his side. He commented that the selfless and thoughtful gesture of the University bringing commencement to him at the hospital is what sets Athens State apart from other institutions. At Athens State, we champion our students from enrollment through graduation, no matter where that may be. ■

Computer Science Degrees at Athens State: For many, Computer Science is an ideal pathway to a successful career. At Athens State, there are three ways to get there: Bachelor's Degree in Computer Science with Concentrations in Software and Systems, Cybersecurity, or Intelligent Systems. In our region and in Alabama computing jobs are in high demand. Since 2017, Huntsville has had a 306% tech job growth - and is projected to continue this growth over the next few years. To meet this demand, Athens State is preparing students through top-tier internship experiences, access to student resources like the Mathematical, Computer, and Natural Sciences Learning Lab and Center for Cybersecurity Education, and opportunities to connect with peers at professional conferences. Our graduates are prepared for roles such as web developer, information security analyst, software developer, IT project manager, Database Administrator, and many others.





2023
ATHENIAN
GIVING DAY

**THANK YOU FOR
YOUR SUPPORT!**

Athens State University hosted its second annual Giving Day on August 1st and raised **\$79,802 to support student programs and campus projects, including a \$25,000 matching gift** by the Tennessee Valley Old Time Fiddlers Convention. This surpassed the University's goal of raising \$59,000 during the event.

"Supporting Athens State University and its students is our main focus - the event's success showed that we can do great things when we unite to achieve a single goal," said Chelsea Green, Donor Relations Officer. "None of this would be possible without the generosity of our community of donors. Thank you to everyone who participated in this year's Athenian Giving Day."

Learn more about all our areas for giving at athens.edu/give.

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LEARNING PARTNERSHIP NEWS



Athens State University is pleased to announce learning partnerships with twelve additional North Alabama organizations. These learning partnerships are designed to assist the employees of these organizations and their immediate family members in achieving their educational goals in career appropriate disciplines through accessible online and traditional classroom settings and an affordable, low-cost tuition structure.

Benefits of learning partnerships include a 10% tuition discount on all classes, waived application fee, and complimentary evaluation of previously earned educational credits and training/professional certifications/portfolio for consideration of transfer credit. These benefits extend to the parents, spouse, and children of the learning partner employee/member as well.

New Learning Partners include:

- **Systems Automotive Interiors Alabama (SAIA)**, located in Athens, Alabama, serves as a supplier to Mazda Toyota Manufacturing, USA and provides assembly and sequencing for the seats for all Toyota Corolla passenger vehicles produced in the United States.
- **Commemorative Air Force (CAF) Huntsville Chapter** is Athens State's first non-profit learning partner. They are dedicated to the acquisition, restoration, and preservation of WWII aircraft flown by all U.S. military services to honor American military aviation through flight, exhibition, education, and remembrance. The partnership will also benefit Athens State's aviation program students by allowing them access to a real plane.



Photos from the Madison County and Decatur-Morgan County signings, respectively.

- **The Limestone County Commission** is led by Chairman Collin Daly and oversees many areas such as the Limestone County Sherriff's Office, Probate Office, Revenue Office, and Council on Aging.
- **WellStone** is North Alabama's largest and most comprehensive behavioral healthcare provider. They are a non-profit community organization that operates offices in Huntsville and Cullman and treat over 13,000 clients per year.
- **Madison County, Alabama** oversees over 30 departments for the Huntsville area including Public Works, Waste Control & Recycling, Water, and Animal Control. A full list of departments can be found here: www.madisoncountyal.gov/departments/department-listing.

The benefits of the Learning Partnership are open to all employees of these departments and their families.

- **Leadership Greater Huntsville** is a nonprofit whose mission is to identify, educate, inspire, and connect leaders to serve the communities of Huntsville, Madison and Madison County, and the surrounding regions of Alabama.
- **Hartselle Utilities** oversees the electric, natural gas, water, wastewater, garbage, and recycling for the City of Hartselle.
- **Faithway Alliance**, located in Tanner, Alabama, supplies products to feed and farm stores in 49 states.

- **Nucor Steel** is a manufacturer of steel sheet products located in Trinity, Alabama, and one of 300 facilities in the Nucor Corporation family of businesses.

- **Decatur-Morgan County Chamber of Commerce**
- **Athens-Limestone County Chamber of Commerce**
- **Fort Payne Chamber of Commerce**
- **Mountain Lakes Chamber of Commerce**

These organizations join a list of other corporate partners that can be found at: athens.edu/learningpartners



TENNESSEE VALLEY OLD TIME

Fiddlers

CONVENTION

Athens State University welcomed old time music lovers of all ages to campus from October 4-7, 2023 for the 56th Annual Tennessee Valley Old Time Fiddlers Convention. The 2023 Fiddlers Convention's star-studded concert line-up included Clearview Bluegrass, Appalachian Roadshow, The Grascals, and The Dan Tyminski Band.



The Athens State University Alumni Association hosted its inaugural **Fiddlers 5K** and Kids Fun Run.



Monte Gaylord from Nowata, Oklahoma was named the 2023 **"Tennessee Valley Fiddle Champion."** As the top fiddler, Gaylord not only won the title of Alabama State Fiddle Champion but also the Convention's top prize of \$2,000. Katrina Nicolayeff from Meridian, Idaho, who was the 2022 Fiddle Champion, finished runner-up.



2024 CONCERT SERIES:

- 1.25.24 | Rob Ickes & Trey Hensley
- 3.7.24 | Tina Adair
- 5.7.24 | East Nash Grass
- 7.23.24 | Chris Jones & The Night Drivers
- 9.12.24 | Frank Solivan & Dirty Kitchen

SEEING STUDENTS SUCCEED: MEET STACEY GALLOS

Meet Stacey Gallos, a recent graduate from the College of Education. Gallos obtained her Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Education and accepted a full-time kindergarten teaching position with Franklin County Schools in July of 2023.

"I am officially a kindergarten teacher as we speak," Gallos commented during her spotlight interview.

The joy of earning her first bachelor's degree was infectious as Gallos shared her Athens State story. However, being a student and pursuing her dreams was not something she was too familiar with. Gallos recalled always struggling in school. Despite her struggles as a student, she had always dreamt of becoming a teacher but never pursued a bachelor's degree. Flashforward about eighteen years when Gallos sent her own

daughter, Cambridge, to college and encouraged her to pursue a career that inspired her.

"Then she (Cambridge) gave me my own advice and challenged me to pursue my dream of teaching," stated Gallos.

Gallos enrolled at Northwest Shoals Community College in 2018 to earn her associate degree and with the help of mentors and advisors, she transferred to Athens State University in 2020 to work toward her bachelor's degree. She shared that the credit transfer process was

amazing. Her advisors ensured she received credit for relevant coursework and saved her almost a full semester of classes. She was also awarded the Empowerment Scholarship for transfer students.

"This is something I did not think was attainable," said Gallos. "Athens state holds students like family and walked me through the whole process with ease."

Through genuine enthusiasm and hands-on activities, the professors at Athens State brought teaching to life and made school fun. Gallos





Photos courtesy of Derick McCormick

shared that teaching philosophies have changed since her childhood and she is excited to enter the classroom to positively impact her students this school year. Early childhood education and a child's teacher set the foundation for our young people to love learning and to love themselves.

"The classroom can be the first time a child receives validation outside of the family unit, or at all," said Gallos. "Sometimes the hug, wink, or reassurance is all they get."

Gallos shared that when she made a cold call to the Athens State

Admissions office, she knew she was at the beginning of her journey. Rather than being stuck and holding herself back, she ran forward and graduated at the top of her class from Athens State. Today, Gallos is confident, excited to teach, and knows that she can help others, which is exactly what our young people need in their kindergarten teacher.

About the College of Education: The mission of the College of Education (COE) at Athens State University is to prepare teacher candidates to become reflective practitioners who are

knowledgeable and collaborative professionals. The COE provides quality programs that meet the educational needs of ever-changing student populations. In accordance with our mission, continual assessment-based improvements are being made. Our goal is to provide rigorous yet flexible programs for students that encourage wider skillsets with multiple credentials. Learn more about the COE at athens.edu/academics/education. ■

CLASS NOTES

JUL - DEC 2023

Current Students

- Lisa Markey (Occupational Health and Safety) was chosen by The National Safety Council to receive a Women in Safety Scholarship.

Class of 2023

- Brent Gonzalez started new position as Admissions & Enrollment Counselor at Northwest-Shoals Community College.
- Samantha Hood recently began teaching Pre-K at Nelson Elementary School.

Class of 2022

- Nicholas Johnson recently started a position as an Accounts Examiner with State of Alabama Department of Examiners of Public Accounts.
- Rachel Muir recently began teaching special education for grades K-8 at Hollywood Elementary.
- Keri Porter recently began teaching second grade at Stevenson Elementary.
- Dakus Sankey Jr. recently began a new position as a Career Coach at Hope Inspired Ministries of Lowndes County.
- Levi Seibert recently started a new job as Cyber Engineer Intern at Dynetics.
- Tiffany Hannah Staton recently began teaching special education for grades 4-6 at Woodville High School.

Class of 2021

- Dylan Miller has been named the Head Varsity Wrestling Coach at Sparkman High School.
- Shelby Reese (Class of 2021) and Dylan Reese (Class of 2019) were recently interviewed by Tubefilter about their "Millionaire" status on TikTok.

Class of 2020

- Mollie Smith, Class of 2020 & 2022, has been elected President of the Gadsden Lions Club.
- Dr. Kate Graham is now the owner of P4 Physical Therapy in Decatur, Alabama.

Class of 2019

- Jordan Nicole "J.N." Eagles recently published Open the Casket and was featured in an interview with Hazel's Book Tours.
- Matthew Ogle recently began teaching first grade at North Sand Mountain High School.
- Joe Johnson was recently featured in an article by Business Alabama.

Class of 2016

- Derreck Hanson recently released his new book, "These Seas We Travel."
- Jody Wright recently began teaching second grade at Caldwell Elementary School.

Class of 2015

- Dawn Williams recently began teaching math, reading, and social studies to fourth graders at Stevenson Elementary.
- Vickie Horne, Class of 2015 & 2019, recently started a new position as Senior Instructional Systems Designer at Cybermedia Technologies, LLC.

Class of 2014

- Leissa Hill was recently named the Vice President of Finance and Operations & CFO for the Decatur-Morgan County Chamber of Commerce.
- Essence Nesbit was included in the Huntsville/Madison County Chamber's list of Movers & Shakers for July 2023.

Class of 2013

- Anna Hall was recently named the new varsity head softball coach at Hartselle High School.
- Skyler Jones was recently named the Pastor of a new United Methodist congregation in Oneonta, Alabama.

Class of 2012

- Jake Herrera has been named the Principal of Athens Intermediate School.
- Erica Ogle has been named the 2023 Staff Member of the Year at Rainbow Elementary School.
- Karrin Ridley has been named Alumna of the Year by Northeast Alabama Community College.

Class of 2011

- Ashley Hargrove is currently filming a SAG movie, and has filmed a few scenes in Athens, including at Athens State. She has worked with Joe Komara, Ava Connolly, Lena Sledge, Luke Sutton, and Wynn Reichert on the film. The movie will have a few local theater premieres and will also be available to stream.
- Adam Keller recently started a new position as Northeast Alabama Organizer for Alabama Arise, a nonprofit coalition dedicated to fighting poverty.

- Maggie Keller has received her National Board Certification as a high school English teacher.

Class of 2010

- Anna Smith recently began teaching kindergarten at Hollywood Elementary.

Class of 2009

- Brian Ellis was recently named the Principal of Danville High School.
- Bob Thompson has been named the Area President of Lawrence, Limestone, and Morgan Counties for Bank Independent.

Class of 2008

- Lee Francis was recently named Assistant Principal at Elkmont High School.
- Elizabeth Watwood was recently named the new principal of Hanceville Middle School.

Class of 2006

- Jamie Reeves has been included in Business Alabama's list of Movers & Shapers in Limestone and Morgan Counties.

Class of 2005

- Meleighsa McLaughlin was recently chosen to be the Alabama Education Association's UniServ Director for District 3, which entails advocating for AEA members at Calhoun Community College, Madison City Schools, and Madison County Schools.

Class of 2004

- Cheryl Campbell has been named Teacher of the Year at Mill Creek Elementary School.

Class of 2003

- Josh Miller was recently featured in a spotlight article by the University of Montevallo.

Class of 2002

- Wesley Hester has been named the Alabaster City Schools Assistant Superintendent for Administration.

Class of 2001

- Sharon Carter was recently featured in an article by The News Courier.
- Holly Foshee has created a new scholarship at Calhoun Community College for students with autism.
- Robert "Chad" Laxton was recently featured in an article in The Chattanooga.
- Greg Taylor has been named the Softball Coach at Pike County High School.

Class of 2000

- Dr. Robert Welch was recently awarded Administrator of the Year for Head Start for the State of Iowa and Region VII (Missouri, Iowa, Nebraska, Kansas).

Class of 1999

- Lori J. Cordell Meikle created an automated solution and led a team of developers to build a portal for an Office of Management and Budget Requirement for monitoring of Internal Controls. The Army adopted this solution and turned it into an Department of the Army Wide Enterprise solution that went live in August across the entire Army for utilization.

Class of 1996

- Mike Izzo has been promoted to the rank of Brigadier General in the Alabama National Guard.

Class of 1995

- Carol Gullatt has been named the Senior Pastor of Abundant Grace in Albertville, Alabama.
- Denise Piskorz recently began teaching Pre-K at Nelson Elementary School.
- Avis Williams was recently added to Reconcile New Orleans' Board of Directors.

Class of 1993

- Kandye Jones has been named the Principal at Piney Chapel Elementary.

Class of 1992

- Claudia Bucher has been named the Director of Development for the Salvation Army of Huntsville.
- Jimmy Hodges has been included in Business Alabama's list of Movers & Shapers in Limestone and Morgan

Class of 1991

- Beth Patton has been included in Business Alabama's list of Movers & Shapers in Limestone and Morgan Counties.

Class of 1988

- Karen Clem has been appointed to the Athens City Schools Board of Education for District 2.

Class of 1980

- Tere Richardson has been included in Business Alabama's list of Movers & Shapers in Limestone and Morgan Counties.

Class of 1976

- George Cavender was inducted into the Alabama Sports Officials Hall of Fame on August 5, 2023.

Class of 1974

- Dwight Cooley was recently featured in an article from Redstone Rocket.

Other Members of the University Community

- Catherine Wehlburg, Interim President, has been included in Business Alabama's list of Movers & Shapers in Limestone and Morgan Counties.

Let your fellow Athens State alumni see what you've been up to! Submit your alumni updates at athens.edu/alumni.





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In September of 2023, we published a Facebook post to highlight our students that are also parents. This led to a beautiful and organic chain of our alumni sharing their own photos. Thank you for sharing your life with us and allowing us to join you on the road to a brighter future for your families.