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SUMMER 2025

THE WALL THAT HEALS



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The Wall That Heals

Coming To Athens November 6-9, 2025

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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A NOTE FROM *Dr. Catherine M. Wehlburg*

Dear Alumni and Friends of Athens State University:

As we enter the warmer summer months, I am reminded of the growth that our Athens State University community is embracing. This time of year offers not only an opportunity for relaxation and rejuvenation, but also some quiet moments to reflect on the remarkable achievements and progress we have made together.

This summer, we are excited to announce several new initiatives aimed at fostering engagement and enhancing the student experience. Our commitment to academic excellence remains at the forefront of our mission, and we are proud to introduce new degree programs that align with industry demands and emerging fields. For example, our new Bachelors of Applied Management is targeted specifically at AAS students from our community college partners. These new programs are designed not only to equip our students with the necessary skills for their future careers but also to ensure they remain competitive in an ever-evolving job market.

In addition to academic advancements, we are investing in our campus facilities to create a more inviting and innovative environment. Renovations are underway in several key areas, including Brown Hall, our student center, and new construction of our Nazaretian Alumni House and Welcome Center. These facilities will provide enhanced resources and spaces for collaboration. We believe that a vibrant campus environment is essential for fostering community and encouraging student engagement.

As we reflect on our history, we cannot overlook the resilience that Athens State University has demonstrated throughout its over 200-year journey. From its beginnings to where we are today, our university has weathered challenges and emerged stronger each time. We are building our new strategic plan, Onward Ever, which will focus on four main areas - and we're calling these four areas "the columns of our future." These focus on the student experiences of our transfer students and of our adult learners. We're also identifying how we can continue to have innovative teaching and learning for all of our students and the ways that we continue to engage our community in what we do. These four columns have a strong foundation that supports them - and that foundation includes you.

As you enjoy your summer, I encourage you to stay engaged with Athens State University. Follow us on social media, participate in alumni events, or simply reach out to share your updates and achievements. Your stories inspire us and highlight the incredible impact our university has had on so many lives.

Thank you for your continued support and commitment to Athens State University. Together, we are shaping the future and ensuring that our institution remains a source of pride and excellence for generations to come. I wish you a wonderful summer filled with joy, relaxation, and meaningful connections. Onward ever!

Catherine M. Wehlburg, Ph.D.
President, Athens State University

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ATHENS STATE NAMED A "2024 GREAT COLLEGE TO WORK FOR"

Athens State University is one of the best colleges in the nation to work for, according to the Great Colleges to Work For® program. This honor puts Athens State in elite company.

The results, released in a special insert of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, are based on a survey of 216 colleges and universities. In all, 75 of those institutions achieved "Great College to Work For" recognition for specific best practices and policies. Results are reported for small, medium, and large institutions, with Athens State included among the small universities with less than 3,000 students.

Athens State won honors in three categories this year:

- Job Satisfaction & Support
- Compensation & Benefits
- Shared Governance

"I'm thrilled to see Athens State University recognized as a "great college" to work for – this is a reflection of our dedication, community spirit, and a commitment to fostering an inspiring environment for all of our faculty and staff," said Dr. Catherine Wehlburg, Athens State University President. "I am very proud to be part of such a dynamic and supportive university!"

The Great Colleges to Work For® program is one of the largest and most respected workplace-recognition programs in the country. For more information and to view all current and previous recognized institutions, visit the Great Colleges program website at GreatCollegesProgram.com and GreatCollegesList.com. ModernThink, a strategic human capital consulting firm, administered the survey and analyzed the results. ■

ATHENS STATE WINS BBB TORCH AWARD FOR ETHICS

The University has also been honored by the Better Business Bureau (BBB) of North Alabama as the winner of the 2024 Torch Award for Ethics in the Large Business category. The Torch Awards honor local companies for their commitment to ethical, trustworthy, and transparent business practices.

There are three Torch Award for Ethics categories: Small Business, Mid-Size Business, and Large Business. The winners for each category are listed below.

- Small Business:** Integration, LLC
- Mid-Size Business:** Current Electrical and Generator Services
- Large Business:** Athens State University

"Athens State University is honored to receive the BBB Torch Award for Ethics, a recognition that reflects our unwavering commitment to integrity, transparency, and excellence," said Dr. Catherine Wehlburg, President of Athens State University. "This award celebrates not just our institution, but also the dedication of our faculty, staff, and students to uphold the highest ethical standards in everything we do. We are grateful to the BBB of North Alabama for their leadership and vision for advancing marketplace trust in North Alabama." ■

WALLACE STATE AND ATHENS STATE CREATE TUITION SAVINGS PATHWAY FOR STUDENTS TO EARN A BACHELOR'S DEGREE

Wallace State Community College and Athens State University have joined forces to create a tuition savings pathway that gives students the opportunity to receive a tuition discount at both institutions as they earn their undergraduate degree.

Wallace State recently launched the Powerful Partnerships program, which creates mutually beneficial relationships between Wallace State and area businesses, offering companies enhanced access to the college's resources while helping equip students with the skills needed to thrive in today's job market. Organizations that partner with the program will receive benefits for their employees and immediate families that include a 10% tuition discount on up to 6 credit hours for degree or certificate seeking students and ProSkills workforce training per semester.

Membership in the Powerful Partnerships program also gives employees and their families access to Athens State's Learning Partnership program upon their transfer to the University. This includes a 10% tuition discount on all classes at Athens State, 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.

"Our partnership with Athens State University through the reciprocal Learning and Powerful Partnerships initiative reflects our commitment to breaking down barriers to higher education and empowering students and employees to achieve their academic and career aspirations," said Suzanne Harbin, Vice President for Advancement and Innovation at Wallace State. "These collaborations deliver meaningful tuition savings for families and employers while fostering a culture of lifelong learning across North Alabama."

"As an upper-division institution that only offers junior and senior level courses, the ability to work collaboratively with Wallace State through their Powerful Partnerships program will provide a four-year pathway for employees and their families of both Athens State Learning Partners as well as those of Wallace State," said Dr. Keith Ferguson, Vice President for University Advancement at Athens State. "In order to meet the significant demands of employers across the state, partnerships such as this one allows both institutions to bridge the educational gaps necessary to get Alabamians trained and credentialed workers employed in their field of study."

For more information about Wallace State's Powerful Partnerships program, please contact Bethany Campbell at Bethany.Campbell@wallacestate.edu or 256-352-8372. For more information about Athens State's Learning Partnership program, please contact Brandy Conway at Brandy.Conway@athens.edu or 256-233-8190. ■

ATHENS STATE AND CALHOUN COMMUNITY COLLEGE CREATE PATHWAY FOR EDUCATION STUDENTS

Athens State University and Calhoun Community College are collaborating through an articulation agreement, or Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), to provide a seamless transfer pathway for teacher candidates participating in apprenticeship programs and pursuing a degree in Early Childhood Education. This partnership will enable smoother transitions between the institutions and ensures teacher candidates gain practical experience while pursuing their degrees.

As part of the MOU, Athens State will assure that graduates of Calhoun's Associate in Science General Studies with a Concentration in Child Development program will be accepted into its BSED Technical Education: Early Instructor (non-certification) program. This

apprenticeship program offers hands-on experiences, fostering practical skills in classroom management, lesson planning, and child development.

“This is an excellent opportunity for future teachers to gain valuable experience through an immersive approach that bridges theory and practice,” said Dr. Johnnie Lundin, Professor, Elementary Generalist and Assistant Dean. “It enhances student preparedness, boosts confidence, and helps develop more qualified educators capable of meeting the needs of young learners.”

“This apprenticeship program supports our teacher candidates who are pursuing the BSED Tech Ed: Early Instructor degree, allowing them a more seamless transfer from Calhoun Community College to complete their degree at Athens State,” said Dr. Alyson Gill, Athens State Provost & Vice President for Academic Affairs and Student Services. “This is a natural and needed sequence, and I am deeply appreciative for the work of Dr. Lundin and her colleagues in building a pathway that will make that journey even simpler for students who are pursuing this degree.” ■

ATHENS STATE AWARDED \$400,000 U.S. NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION EPIIC GRANT

The University has been awarded a \$400,000 grant from the U.S. National Science Foundation (NSF). The Enabling Partnerships to Increase Innovation Capacity (EPIIC) program provides institutions with training and networking support to develop the capacity and institutional knowledge needed to help build more inclusive ecosystems and enable participation in regional innovation ecosystems, potentially connecting to NSF Engines.

With the grant funds, Athens State will be collaborating with Southern Utah University and Georgia College & State University to implement the Fostering Unity and Teamwork for Rural Excellence (FUTURE) initiative. FUTURE aims to increase institutional capacity and participation in innovation partnerships through three key goals:

- Developing centralized knowledge, expertise, and a transparent repository of partnerships and resources to leverage institutional capacity to build sustainable partnerships.
- Building faculty capacity through training, incentives, and policies to enable innovative partnerships.
- Strengthening new and existing industry relationships through student showcases, industry-

faculty integration opportunities, and enhancing advisory boards.

Each of the three universities will receive a \$400,000 award paid out over the next three years.

“The FUTURE initiative marks an exciting time of growth and collaboration for our institution,” said Dr. Katie Holm, Associate Professor of Career & Technical Education. “By centralizing our resources and building strong industry partnerships, we’re not just enhancing our faculty’s ability to innovate—we’re positioning ourselves as a key contributor to regional and national economic development. Collaborating with our partner universities amplifies our impact, helping us create meaningful connections between academia and industry. Through FUTURE, we’re paving the way for lasting innovation that benefits our students, faculty, and the communities we serve.”

The EPIIC program has awarded nearly \$19 million to 48 awardees at U.S. institutions of higher education, including teams from historically Black colleges and universities, minority-serving institutions (MSIs), primarily undergraduate institutions, and community and technical colleges.

For more information about EPIIC, please visit www.nsf.gov. ■

ATHENS STATE AWARDED \$300,000 INNOVATION IN CAREER SERVICES GRANT FROM STRADA

Strada Education Foundation recently announced the recipients of the Innovation in Career Services grant program, which supports institutions in their efforts to scale innovative guidance and career services. Athens State University was chosen as one of eight universities nationwide to receive this grant.

Strada, in partnership with the American Association of State Colleges and Universities and the Association of Public and Land-Grant Universities, awarded up to \$300,000 to the selected institutions to help them design, implement, and evaluate innovative approaches to career services that are aligned with the principles for education-to-career guidance. Athens State received the full \$300,000 award which will be coled through Academic Affairs and Student Services.

“In proposing an innovative career development program that is embedded in several programs across the University, we are recognizing the need to place greater emphasis on moving our students along their academic paths while at the same time preparing them for the workforce,” said Dr. Alyson Gill, Athens State University Provost & Vice President

for Academic Affairs and Student Services. “We are known for our personalized approach to education here at Athens State, and our students value the relationships that they have with our faculty – many of whom maintain direct ties to local industry. Seven of our faculty will be piloting this program beginning this fall including Jing Chen, Letitia Bergantz, Diann Hammon, Maria Steele, Janet Willisson, Tina Camba, and Jessica Spowart.”

With the grant funds, Athens State will develop a transformational career development program, “Athens Aspire,” which will be piloted for students in Nursing, Computer Science & Information Technology, Graphic Design, Instructional Design, Human Resources Management, Management of Cybersecurity Operations, and Accounting programs. These programs were selected because of their direct ties to in-demand regional career paths. While these seven programs will lead the grant initiatives, all students will benefit.

“Preparing students to enter or advance in the job market is what Athens State does,” said Sallie McMullin, Athens State University Associate Vice President of Enrollment Management and Student Services. “We are known for our highly marketable degrees, our industry connections, and our career focus in required courses. This grant reinforces our commitment to our role in providing

the workforce needed in North Alabama and beyond.”

Athens Aspire will provide targeted support to aid in mentoring, networking, and building marketable career skills, as well as embed career development in specific courses, capitalize on faculty-industry relationships, award skills-based certificates (micro-credentials) in courses, and leverage experiential learning opportunities that will lead to successful employment. ■



It all adds up for Danville-Neel:

Math interventionist helps boost school's state report card grade

Article and photos courtesy of Wes Tomlinson and Jeronimo Nisa at *The Decatur Daily*

The teaching staff at Danville-Neel Elementary knew they had a lot of work to do when they heard they received a C on the state report card two school years ago.

Not only did they improve, but they scored 17 points higher last school year — marking the most growth of any school in the Morgan County Schools district — and are listed among the top 25 improved schools in Alabama for the 2023-2024 school year. In math, they saw the greatest improvement of any school in the state, resulting in them being

recognized by Gov. Kay Ivey in her State of the State address this month.

Principal Tara Morrow said they could not have achieved such success without the assistance of dedicated teachers like Math Interventionist McKenzie Henderson.

"She was a huge part of that," Morrow said. "She is the unofficial math coach for this school, and she is phenomenal."

Henderson, 42, grew up in Hartselle and graduated from Hartselle

High School in 2001, where she was a gymnast and played on the first state championship softball team at the school her junior year. She attended Wallace State Community College for two years before transferring to Athens State University to earn her bachelor's degree. She then earned her master's degree at the University of West Alabama.

INSPIRED TO TEACH

But even before she graduated high school, Henderson knew what her destiny was just from watching

some of her family members. "My mom was a teacher, and I spent my summers and every opportunity I could going to her school," Henderson said. "I was always around it. Just different people in my family were teachers, but my mom was the inspiration for me to become a teacher."

Henderson said her mother, Mitzi Peek, began her career teaching at Decatur City Schools but finished her career teaching the last 10 years at F.E. Burluson Elementary School in Hartselle.

Although her talents in math instruction were vital in increasing Danville-Neel's math proficiency last school year, Henderson said math was not her favorite subject while she was a student.

"I would probably say I was more of an English person; I liked to write," Henderson said. "My first teaching job was teaching the talented and gifted program here and then I transferred to West Morgan Elementary to teach sixth grade math when I was 22 years old. I actually loved it and had really great administration there and great teachers to work with that helped me. It really wasn't until I transferred back to Danville-Neel four years later and I was in third grade that I figured out what I really liked. I really liked the third grade curriculum and the (Alabama Math, Science, and Technology Initiative)."

In her 20 years of teaching, Henderson said her favorite thing about the education field is the relationships educators develop between their students and

their families. She said being the math interventionist for grades kindergarten through fourth has allowed her to stay in touch with many families throughout the years.

One such example is a former student who had to repeat the third grade twice.

"Another teacher had him, but he came to me his second year," Henderson said. "Just the growth he showed from the beginning of the year to the end of the year, knowing how hard it was for him his first year of third grade. I guess that kid stands out because I built such a great relationship with him; I knew anything I would give him, he was going to give me 110% on."

Henderson said the student later struggled in fifth grade and his family remembered her dedication to his learning, and so they contacted her to tutor him the rest of the school year.

"Once they are mine, they're kind of always mine and for that parent and that kid to come back and ask specifically for me to help him again," Henderson said. "That's why that kid sticks out."

ROUTE TO IMPROVEMENT

During the 2022-23 school year, Danville-Neel Elementary received a 77 on the state report card and both Henderson and Morrow said it was a new low for the school.

Morrow said her school had consistently maintained a B average before that school year and said the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted learning for three years and the

result of the disruptions was eventually a C on the report card.

"It was a wake-up call for us," Morrow said.

Henderson said not being in school hurt foundational math building skills for young students and there was "no consistency" during this time as several math teachers had come and gone at Danville-Neel during the pandemic years.

Following Henderson's suggestion, teachers at the school began teaming up and teaching classrooms together at least once a week, ensuring no student was left behind and every question was answered.

"We had it to where a teacher taught all the math for the fourth grade and so we changed it to where two people partnered up," Morrow said. "I think that was huge and McKenzie coached those teachers because neither one of them had taught just (strictly) math."

With an improved grade of 94 on the state report card, both Morrow and Henderson agreed that Danville-Neel is now back on track.

Henderson lives on a farm in Danville with her husband, Kirk, and their two daughters: Callie, a senior at Danville High, and Kinley, a freshman at the same school. ■



The Wall That Heals

Coming To Athens November 6-9, 2025

The Wall That Heals, a three-quarter scale replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial along with a mobile Education Center, is coming to Athens, Alabama on November 6-9, 2025 at Beasley Field on the campus of Athens State University and will be open 24 hours a day and free to the public. The Wall That Heals honors the more than three million Americans who served in the U.S. Armed forces in the Vietnam War, and it bears the names of the 58,281 men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice in Vietnam.

"Athens State University is grateful to have been chosen as one of 31 sites for the 2025 The Wall That Heals Tour," said Dr. Keith Ferguson, Vice President for University Advancement. "Through a partnership with the City of Athens, the Limestone County Commission, the Limestone County Legislative Delegation, and the Alabama Veterans Museum, we are able to make this a reality for all of the Tennessee Valley and beyond. We look forward to working with the VVMF as we create an experience that honors all of our service members."

"The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund is pleased to bring The Wall That Heals mobile exhibit to Athens to allow local veterans and their family members a chance to experience The Wall," said Jim Knotts, president and CEO of VVMF. "Hosting The Wall That Heals provides an opportunity to honor and remember all those who served and sacrificed in the Vietnam War and educate visitors on the continuing impact of the Vietnam War on America."

The Wall That Heals is transported from community to community in a 53-foot trailer. When parked, the trailer opens with exhibits built into its sides, allowing it to serve as a mobile Education Center telling the story of the Vietnam War, The Wall and the divisive era in American history.

The three-quarter scale Wall replica is 375 feet in length and stands 7.5 feet high at its tallest point. Visitors will experience The Wall rising above them as they walk towards the apex, a key feature of the design of The Wall in D.C. Visitors are able to do name rubbings of individual service

member's names on The Wall. The mobile Education Center exhibit includes: digital photo displays of "Hometown Heroes" - service members whose names are on The Wall that list their home of record within the area of a visit; digital photo displays of Vietnam veterans from the local area honored through VVMF's In Memory program which honors veterans who returned home from Vietnam and later died; video displays that teach about the history and impact of The Wall; educational exhibits told through items representative of those left at The Wall in D.C.; a replica of the In Memory plaque; a map of Vietnam and a chronological overview of the Vietnam War. The exhibits tell the story of the Vietnam War, The Wall and the era surrounding the conflict, and are designed to put American experiences in Vietnam in a historical and cultural context.

USAA has returned as presenting sponsor for the national tour for the 11th year. Over the past decade, they have traveled to nearly 300 communities with VVMF. This year, VVMF also is pleased to announce a new sponsor for the 2025 season,



Wipfli LLP. Headquartered in Milwaukee, Wipfli is an advisory and accounting firm with more than 3,300 associates who deliver digital, people, strategy, risk, financial and outsourcing solutions to nearly 56,000 clients.

Through a partnership with the Truckload Carriers Association (TCA), the trucking industry, and Blue Beacon, the exhibit is able to travel across the country. Athens State is currently in the process of soliciting local sponsorships to offset costs of the exhibit and will release a list as commitments are confirmed.

Since its debut in 1996, the exhibit has been on display in nearly 800 U.S. communities in addition



students, and ensure the reflective atmosphere of The Wall. More information can be found at: www.thewallthathealsathens.org. ■

About VVMF

The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF) is the nonprofit organization that built the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (The Wall) in Washington, D.C. in 1982. VVMF continues to lead the way in paying tribute to our nation's Vietnam veterans and their families. VVMF's mission is to honor and preserve the legacy of service in America and educate all generations about the impact of the Vietnam War and era through programs, ceremonies and education materials. To learn more about VVMF, visit www.vvmf.org or call 202-393-0090.

Honors Program Provides Community for Students



Launched in Fall 2022, the Athens State University Honors Program has grown steadily, with 14 students now part of the close-knit academic community. Designed for transfer students entering their junior year, the program offers a unique experience tailored to the needs of high-achieving scholars looking to deepen their knowledge, develop professionally, and contribute to their fields through impactful research and service.

"The program is thesis-based, which is different from most honors programs that are focused on general education courses or honors-specific classes," explained Dr. Shannon Pittman, Associate Professor of Biology and Honors Program Co-Director. "Our students come to us as juniors, already immersed in their majors. They're ready to become experts, so we

built a program that allows them to take a deep dive into their field."

Students are paired early with a faculty mentor in their discipline and complete a personalized thesis or major project across three semesters.



ATHENS STATE UNIVERSITY HONORS PROGRAM

"It could be a research paper, a creative endeavor, or a hands-on project- whatever best aligns with

their goals and field," Pittman added. "The goal is to build something meaningful that helps them take the next step- whether that's graduate school or launching their career."

The program also emphasizes professional growth, community service, and interdisciplinary learning through cohort activities, seminars, and workshops. According to Dr. Vanessa Miller-Curtis, Associate Professor of Psychology and Honors Program Co-Director, this structure provides not only academic rigor but also essential support.

"The honors community is incredibly important," Miller-Curtis noted. "It's a group of like-minded individuals who encourage each other, especially during demanding times. Students come back even after graduation to support others

during thesis defense. That kind of community is rare and powerful."

Lael Anderson, a 2024 graduate and Honors Program alumna, exemplifies the program's impact. A Biology major with a minor in Computer Science, Anderson completed a thesis on the behavioral adaptations of frogs in unstable habitats, highlighting the ecological implications of climate change.

"Aside from giving me the opportunity to do a research thesis, I also got to make great friends

who were dedicated students working on interesting research," Anderson shared.

With its interdisciplinary cohorts, mentorship model, and growing legacy of success, the Athens State University Honors Program continues to provide a transformative experience for students ready to challenge themselves and support one another along the way.

HONORS PROGRAM GRADUATES

- Evan Marth** (Summer 2023)
Major: Biology - Ecology and Organismal Option
Minor: Mathematics
- Shellie Christopher** (Spring 2024)
Major: Psychology
- Austin Riddle** (Spring 2024)
Major: Biology Education (Lic. and Cert. 6-12)
Minor: Education
- Chloe Lael Anderson** (Spring 2024)
Major: Biology - Ecology and Organismal Option
Minor: Computer Science
- Daniel Selsvik** (Summer 2024)
Major: Psychology
- Caitlin Stanley** (Fall 2024)
Major: Biology
Minor: Chemistry
- Julie Hardison** (Fall 2024)
Major: Health (6-12) & Physical Education (P-12)
Minor: Health Fitness
- Hannah Case** (Fall 2024)
Major: Psychology
Minor: Behavioral Science



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SAVE THE DATE: AUGUST 5, 2025

ATHENS.EDU/GIVING-DAY



How this mom of 2 + child services worker is now pursuing her dream of being an attorney

Article and photos courtesy of Elizabeth Hobbs with Huntsville Blast

April will soon pursue her law degree after putting her dreams on the back burner for 17 years to focus on supporting her family.

She started her Criminal Justice degree 17 years ago while also working and being a mom but made the difficult decision to press pause on her college education to prioritize her daughters.

Since then, April has led an admirable career in child services in Albertville, helping investigate child abuse cases and providing resources to families in need.

April found her passion in child services and desired to deepen her impact by pursuing a law degree. Thus, the idea of finishing her degree came knocking.

"I always put myself on the back burner as a mom, and a lot of moms do that," shares April. "I was always thinking of the bigger picture—once my kids graduate, I'll take care of me last. So once my oldest moved out, I realized it's time for me to do what is best for me right now. I can have something better for them, and for myself."

From child services to family law: the road to finishing her degree

April has spent her career in child welfare at Marshall County Department of Human Resources, with ten years in Child Protective Services and seven in the Child Support Unit.

"Throughout my career, I worked with families on reunification of children, investigations with ongoing foster care and now I'm helping with child support," she explains. "I've always been intrigued with investigations, and working in child welfare has opened up my desire to become an attorney."

April consulted with several attorneys in her network before landing on Criminal Justice as the right path. When she heard about Athens State's affordable and flexible Criminal Justice program, she was ready to take the next step.



Making the most of what Athens State has to offer

April has been taking classes online from her home in Albertville but has still felt very supported.

"Every professor I've had so far at Athens State has been very accommodating," says April. "One of my favorite professors I had last semester, Mr. Jeff Purcell, worked in law enforcement and met with me during office hours every week. They make themselves very available, even though we're online."

Being a remote student hasn't stopped April from being involved on campus and building a strong network. She serves as the President of both the Criminal Justice Student Association and the Pre-Law Society at Athens State. She travels to campus at least once a month for various events and still feels quite connected.



How April is learning from Athens State's new CASELab

CASELab: Crime Analysis, Simulation and Experimentation Laboratory

The CASELab opened in 2024 and is a house-turned-learning lab right next to Athens State's campus. The space serves students studying Homeland and Corporate Security, Criminal Justice and Child Advocacy.

The CASELab replicates real-world scenarios, giving students opportunities to conduct crime scene reenactments, academic research and mock case simulations.

CASELab rooms train students for:

- Active shooter scenarios
- Case management
- Cyber criminology
- Crime scene and forensic investigations
- Crime scene documentation, photography, measurements + evidence collection techniques
- Crisis prevention
- Drug identification

- Fingerprinting analysis
- Evidence collection
- Home visits
- Initial and critical responses

The University also hosts local first responders and teachers for continuing education opportunities.

"One of the rooms in the CASELab is set up for child welfare workers or child advocacy centers," she said. "We can go in and see what is in plain sight in a potential case, because you can't go into somebody's home and just start opening closet doors or dresser drawers looking for stuff. We are training to observe what is in plain sight without a search warrant, which is critical in our field."

The rooms rotate with new staging and situations, so April and fellow students can prepare for a variety of cases. April explains training in the CASELab will prepare her for a career in the sheriff's department, the police department or even the State Bureau of Investigations. ■



ATHENS STATE TEACH PROGRAM CELEBRATES GRADUATION OF FIRST COHORT

The Athens State TEACH program is celebrating a significant milestone as the first cohort of teacher candidates prepares to graduate in the Spring of 2025. This dedicated group of eight students, who have been instrumental in the development and growth of the program, have completed their internships at local schools. Their dedication to education and STEM fields will soon culminate in the awarding of bachelor's degrees, setting the stage for their careers as secondary education teachers.

Of the eight students in this pioneering cohort, five will graduate with a Bachelor of Science (BS) in Mathematics with a minor in Secondary Education, while three will earn a BS in Biology with a minor in Secondary Education. These students joined Athens State TEACH in its inaugural year, spanning from Fall 2023 to Spring 2024, and have played a crucial role in shaping the program as it continues to expand and evolve.

Their journey has been marked by a strong commitment to their STEM disciplines and their passion for teaching. As the first students to engage in the program, they've become knowledgeable in their content area and developed the skills needed to educate

and inspire future generations of learners. We appreciate the enthusiasm and strong work ethic they have shown during their time with us.

The Athens State TEACH program is one of seven TEACH programs across the state and offers a unique pathway for students seeking a STEM degree and the qualifications to become a secondary (grades 6-12) teacher. These graduates are well-equipped to pursue careers both within their STEM disciplines and as educators, allowing them to make a lasting impact on both the scientific and educational communities.

A distinguishing feature of the Athens State TEACH program is the opportunity for teacher candidates to begin their teaching journeys early. Through the Inquiry-Based Teaching and Lesson Design course, students gain hands-on experience in local schools. These early field experiences help students develop essential teaching skills and foster a deep understanding of how to engage students in the learning process. It's an opportunity for them to see firsthand the challenges and rewards of teaching in a real classroom environment, all while continuing their academic studies in their chosen STEM field.

The program is designed to provide comprehensive support to its participants, offering recruitment and retention scholarships, intensive field experiences, and personalized mentorship from Master Teachers who guide the candidates every step of the way. We will also offer induction support during their first year of teaching.

As the first cohort of the Athens State TEACH program prepares to graduate, their impact on the program and their communities is already being felt. The hands-on experience, mentorship, and support they've received have equipped them to be successful in both their STEM careers and as future educators. With a commitment to making a positive impact, these graduates will not only shape the future of science and math education but will also inspire future generations to pursue STEM careers and become lifelong learners.

Athens State University is proud to celebrate the achievements of this inaugural cohort and looks forward to continuing to grow and expand the TEACH program, helping more students reach their educational and professional goals. ■



BRING ATHENS STATE PRIDE TO YOUR SCHOOL

On February 19, 2025, the Office of Alumni Affairs visited with Athens State alumni at Athens Intermediate School to connect and show support. The teachers were overjoyed and came prepared to show their Athens State pride!

Athens State teachers graduate as prepared practitioners and are making a difference throughout the state of Alabama.

The Office of Alumni Affairs would love to visit other schools with an Athens State alumni presence. Email alumni@athens.edu to set up your school's visit!



TRANSFER DAY

Transfer Day was held at Athens State on March 20 for newly admitted and prospective students. The browsing fair of academic programs and student organizations provided an opportunity for individuals to learn more about the student experience at Athens State from an academic and community perspective. The evening also included scholarship awards in the form of bookstore credit, a \$100 scholarship, and a \$1,000 scholarship. Students enjoyed dinner, touring campus, learning more about the University, and registering for classes with our Student Success Coaches. Fall 2025 is around the corner, and these students are set-up for success at Athens State.





HERE COMES THE SUN!

Take a walk on the Bear Track Trail



A ribbon cutting ceremony was held on September 24, 2024 for Athens State's new Bear Track Trail. The half-mile walking trail starts at the Pryor Street crosswalk between the Classroom Building and Sanders Hall, and loops around campus. Trail markers featuring Athens State's mascot, Hebrew, lead walkers along the path.

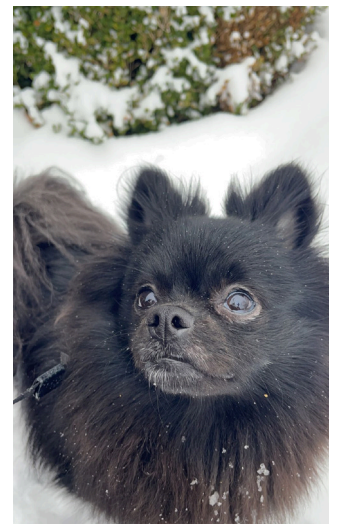
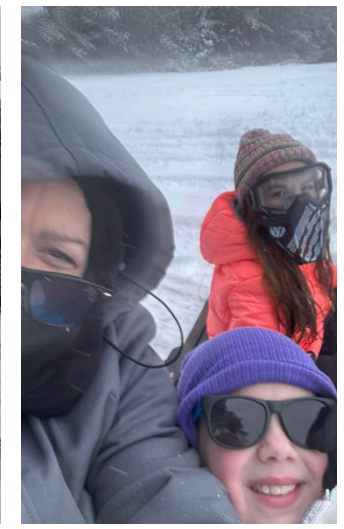
Another half-mile walking trail is currently being planned for the north side of campus. Once completed, the proximity of the two trails will coordinate to give walkers the option to walk a full mile. Bear Track Trail is open to the public.

"Today, as we open this walking trail, we celebrate not just a path through our beautiful campus, but a pathway to health and wellness for our entire community," said Dr. Catherine Wehlburg, Athens State University President. "This trail invites us all to step outside, connect with nature, and prioritize our well-being. It stands as a testament to our commitment to fostering a vibrant, healthy environment for every student, faculty member, staff member, and visitor. Let us walk together towards a brighter, healthier future! Onward ever!"



Remember when it wasn't so warm outside? We do too! Enjoy these photos shared through social media from the winter wonderland that blew through Alabama in January 2025.

Stay connected with the Athens State community all year long—follow us across all platforms! Scan the code to explore our Social Media Directory, your guide to Athens State University social media accounts.



CLASS NOTES

NOV '24 - APR '25

Class of 2024

- Perla Crump was named FOX54's Top Teacher of the Week in December 2024.
- Taylor Jordan has started a new job as an elementary teacher at Woodville High School.
- Andy Robertson has been named the Dean of Workforce Development at Gadsden State Community College.

Class of 2022

- Spencer Bell has become the first full-time pastor at Hartselle's Mt. Zion Baptist Church since 1853.

Class of 2021

- Jeremy Cates recently completed the first year of his PharmD program at Samford University.

Class of 2018

- Caitlyn Blankenship has been named Huntsville City School's Teacher of the Year.

Class of 2016

- Heather Lindsay Adams recently started a new position as the Academic Programs Administrator at Auburn University.
- Shelby Middleton was promoted to Senior Grants Accountant with Baldwin County Commission.
- Matt Vandiver recently joined First Southern State Bank as a Loan Officer.

Class of 2015

- Chris Allen has been honored as one of 22 Rising Stars of Banking 2024.

- Greg Dawkins has qualified as a candidate for the Escambia County School Board District 2 seat.

Class of 2011

- Ashley Hargrove's film "Marriage Bites" is currently in post production, and scheduled to be released in select theaters in November 2025. She is also currently voicing Chippy and Hammie in the videogame Afk Journey and 3 characters in the game Lost Lands: X.
- Adam Keller has been promoted to Worker Power Campaign Director at Alabama Arise, a statewide anti-poverty coalition.
- Maggie Thomas Keller recently received her Masters degree in Instructional Leadership from University of North Alabama.

Class of 2006

- Adrienne Day has been named one of The 10 Most Influential Women in Tech, 2024 by Entrepreneurial Outlook.

Class of 2004

- Dr. Kerry Donaldson was selected as "District 8 High School Principal of the Year" by Council of Leaders for Alabama Schools. He serves as the principal at James Clemens High School.

Class of 2003

- Lionel Holquin, Class of 2003 & 2006, has been hired as Instructor of Computer Science and Information Technology at Athens State University.

Class of 2002

- Jamie Hill was selected as "District 8 Principal of the Year" by Council of Leaders for Alabama Schools. He serves as the principal at Discovery Middle School.

Class of 2001

- Douglas McCullough has joined Freedom Real Estate & Capital as Director of Brokerage Services.
- Linda Woods recently won the Alabama State Poetry Society Otis Dees Award.

Class of 1998

- Misti Potter has been named the new Executive Director of the Singing River Trail.

Class of 1997

- Marlon Morris was named Volunteer/Good Deeds Person of the Year by The Decatur Daily.

Class of 1996

- Melanie Donahoo has been inducted into the Alabama High School Sports Hall of Fame.

Class of 1994

- Donald L. Phillips recently authored and published "Kicking and Screaming Toward Peace: One Man's Journey to Sobriety and Serenity" from Goosedown Books.

Class of 1993

- Kenneth Lones has been promoted to Vice President, Corporate Administration at Torch Technologies.
- Leteria Moses Waters recently celebrated her 30-year work anniversary with Synovus Bank - Vice President - Retail Market Manager - Huntsville, Alabama.

Class of 1992

- Tim Lockard joined EDM in January as Chief Operating Officer.

Class of 1991

- Jennifer Burgreen has been named one of Giles County Schools' 2024-2025 Teachers of the Year.
- Kelley Dixon has been named one of Giles County Schools' 2024-2025 Teachers of the Year.

Class of 1990

- Patrick Harding has been hired as the head boys' basketball coach at Whitesburg Christian Academy.

Class of 1989

- Jimmy Bright has released two new books, "Silly Millie" and "Jane and the Trumpet Train."

Class of 1988

- Molly Pepper recently retired from Athens State University.

Class of 1980

- James Stewart, Class of 1980 & 1982, is now the Lead Education Specialist for the Our Chance Grant under the Tennessee Alliance for Economic Mobility umbrella, a \$25,000,000 grant from the Tennessee General Assembly to help needy Tennesseans bridge economic cliffs.

IN MEMORARIUM

- **Dr. James Chasteen**, former President of Athens College, passed away on December 10, 2024.
- **Anthony Franklin "Tony" Smith**, current President of the Athens State University Alumni Association, passed away after a brief illness on January 8, 2025.
- **Dr. Mildred "Milly" Witt Caudle**, retired Professor of History and former chair of the History Department at Athens State University, passed away on February 11, 2025.

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

SAVE THE DATE!

ATHENS STATE UNIVERSITY HOMECOMING

JULY 25, 2025

50-Year Club Brunch will be held the following day, July 26th following the summer commencement ceremony.



ATHENS STATE ALUMNI FIDDLERS 5K & FUN RUN

SEPTEMBER 27, 2025
Athens State University Campus



TENNESSEE VALLEY OLD TIME FIDDLERS CONVENTION

OCTOBER 1 - 4, 2025
Lineup includes Joe Mullins & The Radio Ramblers, Pitney Meyer, Jimmy Fortune, and Rhonda Vincent & The Rage

Visit: TVOTFC.org



2024-2025 FIDDLERS CONCERT SERIES (CONT.)

**THE KODY
NORRIS SHOW**
JULY 24



**THE
SELDOM SCENE**
SEPTEMBER 4



To stay up to date on all upcoming events, visit athens.edu/events.



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DINGO